HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

1945 was an important year for Dmitri Shostakovich. He was expected to produce a ninth symphony that could be compared to the great ninths of the past, including those by Schubert, Bruckner, Mahler, and Beethoven in particular. Shostakovich in part added to the expectations that were placed upon him by the public and the Soviet party by suggesting his symphony should be a great celebration in honor and support of the Soviet Union during the war with Nazi Germany. When it was announced that the Soviet Union won the war, Shostakovich took a break from working on the Ninth Symphony. When it came time for the premiere, he presented a seemingly light, playful, short symphony for a small orchestra, a symphony which did not meet the Soviet Party's expectations.

Though his Ninth Symphony is categorized as the last of the war symphonies, much of the scholarship addressing this symphony labels the Ninth as a peculiarly Haydn-esque, joke-like reaction to the Communist Party's expectation of a victory symphony. The musicologist David Gow goes so far as to say Shostakovich was just "not up to composing an epic symphony."[1]

It is the purpose of this document to show that Shostakovich's Ninth Symphony is deeply encoded with symbolic meaning far beyond the majority of what previous scholarship has shown. Through thorough analysis of the score and documents relating to both Shostakovich scholarship and scholarship of the socio-political environment of Stalinist Soviet Union between 1936 and 1945, I hope to reveal a deeper understanding and interpretation of the piece.

Shostakovich's Ninth Symphony in E-flat major, Op. 70 was premiered in St. Petersburg on November 3,1945, by Yevgeny Mravinsky and the Leningrad Philharmonic Orchestra. Along with many of his other works the Ninth Symphony was banned within a few years after its 1945

[1] David Gow, "Shostakovich's 'War' Symphonies," *The Musical Times* 105 (1964): 191.

premiere. This was Shostakovich's second denunciation, after the initial 1936 denunciation through an article criticizing him for his opera *Lady Macbeth of the Mtsensk District*.

The infamous article used very specific and carefully chosen terms and connotations for both positive and negative musical attributes of Shostakovich's opera. This attack provided the base for a canon of terms that was used repeatedly in published musical criticisms throughout the next several decades. One of the criticisms of both *Lady Macbeth* and the Ninth Symphony was of Shostakovich's unwillingness to represent the doctrine of Socialist Realism.

The term Socialist Realism was first introduced in Maxim Gorky's 1933 article "On Socialist Realism".[2] In 1936 Andrei Zhdanov was appointed as the secretary of the Central Committee of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union. After his appointment he immediately began censoring Russian writers, and soon created what we refer to as the Zhdanov Doctrine, a document that required Soviet artists to exhibit the idealized picture of what many Soviet citizens believed to be the ultimately positive teleological nature of Communism.

Pravda served as the official newspaper of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union during all of Shostakovich's adult life. The paper was focused on indoctrinating its readership on Communist ideas and programs, while offering critical articles on cultural and scientific topics. The most widely distributed and topically general newspaper of the bulk of the 20th century, *Pravda* reached most literate Soviet citizens and served as the best way to stay informed on current events.

The official definition of Soviet Realism was published in *Pravda* on May 6, 1934, as it was described in the statutes of the then newly established Union of Soviet Writers:

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[2] Nicholas Cooke and Anthony Pople, *The Cambridge History of Twentieth-Century Music* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004) 288.

> Socialist Realism, the basic method of Soviet artistic literature and literary criticism, demands truthfulness from the artist and a historically concrete portrayal of reality in its revolutionary development. Under these conditions, truthfulness and historical concreteness of artistic portrayal ought to be combined with the task of the ideological remaking and education of the working people in the spirit of socialism.[3]

Zhdanov's concept of Socialist Realism was a picture of Communist life that was joyful and full of purpose. If suffering or hardships were portrayed they were used as a means to an end. Soviet art, then, should represent death and sacrifice as heroic, necessary means to build the Soviet empire.

Zhdanov's explanation sets out to instill these ideas as a "basic method," demanding "truthfulness from the artist and a historically concrete portrayal of reality."[4] This definition also dictates that these historically accurate truths be filtered through "ideological remaking… in the spirit of socialism."[5] Suffering was allowed to surface neither as a personal nor as a negative experience. It was tolerated if and when displayed as a necessary and honorable means to a victorious and justified end of a Communist Utopian state. The beginning discussions about Socialist Realist art and its application through soviet politics resulted in "…four basic tenets: orientation towards the people (narodnost), ideological narrative (ideonost), class content (klassnost), and - most important of all - the role of infusing workers with the spirit of communism (partiinost). Put simply, Socialist Realism was 'political art', and aesthetic

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[3] Jeffrey Brooks, *Thank You, Comrade Stalin! Soviet Public Culture from Revolution to Cold War* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2000), 108.

[4] Brooks, *Thank You, Comrade Stalin!, 108*

[5] Ibid.

considerations always took second place to the political message of the painting or sculpture."[6] Because of this, Socialist Realist art was not judged on aesthetics, but rather on the ability of the artist to describe Soviet life in positive, idealistic terms.

Socialist Realism was not simply propaganda, or at least it did not start out that way. The Siberian gulags and twilight kidnappings were negative effects which sprouted from the original system of belief that the Soviet Union could be independent and strong as a unified nation by purging the grotesque trends in contemporary art.[7] The concept of "degenerate art" as a social disease had been discussed in Europe far before the Nazi bannings and burnings of books, art and music. Since at least the 1892 publication of Max Nordau's book *Degeneration*, the theory of society's degradation had been linked to peoples' imitation of art. Nordau went so far as to label the increase of what he called "fashionable society" as a condition of a systemic, social-wide disease.[89] The concept of Socialist Realism in art was to propagate the tenets of the Communist party, to make Soviet citizens view the everyday struggle in terms of what was good for the country. The Socialist Realist aesthetic was a means to portray history as a teleological march toward Communist triumph.

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[6] "Socialist Realism," Crawford College of Art and Design, accessed October 17, http://www.visual-arts-cork.com/history-of-art/socialist-realism.htm.

[7] "Soviet Writers Congress," accessed October 19, https://www.marxists.org/subject/art/lit_crit/sovietwritercongress/.

[8] Stephen Downes, *Music and Decadence in European Modernism* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010), 279.

[9] Max Nordau, *Entartung*, trans. George Mosse (Lincoln: Nebraska University Press, 1968).

PROBLEMS WITH SOCIALIST REALISM IN MUSIC

A conference on Soviet symphonism and the problems with Socialist Realism in the arts was held the year before the *Pravda* article attacking 'Lady Macbeth' was published.[10] The term 'symphonism' was most usually used when describing ambitious and serious works that engaged with life's great psychological processes and philosophical questions. Though the method of Socialist Realism was just beginning to be applied to literary criticism, the tools to officially critique music through the political lens of the Soviet Party had not yet been developed. "The aesthetic problem of the relationship between truth and art was of paramount importance for the theorists and practitioners of the Socialist-Realist method, and it was a, if not the, big issue steering the discussions at the 1934 Writers' Conference."[11]

The attempt to fasten the Socialist Realist method to music was at first met with a sense of ridicule, possibly because of the way keynote speaker Aleksandr Ostretsov tried to define musical Socialist Realism to the Composer's Union in February of 1935. Musicologist Pauline Fairclough discusses how the "perceived vagueness" of Socialist Realism "was recognized as a possible advantage."[12] Because the Soviet Party had difficulty pinning down exactly what they considered unacceptable features in Soviet music, they turned to the 'Lady Macbeth' article for guidance. The list of vocabulary and concepts that defined "some acceptable and unacceptable

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[10] "Soviet Writers Congress," accessed October 19, https://www.marxists.org/subject/art/lit_crit/sovietwritercongress/.

[11] Sarah Elizabeth Pickle, "The Form of Learning is the Learning of Forms: Models of Socialist Aesthetic Education in Gorky, Hacks, and Müller" (PhD diss., Cornell University, 2014), 10.

[12] Pauline Fairclough, "The 'Perestroyka' of Soviet Symphonism: Shostakovich in 1935," *Music & Letters* Vol. 83, No. 2 (May, 2002): 261.

features of Soviet music in the 1930s" range from ambiguous to subjective, and were consequently impossible for a committee of party members to enforce (see Appendix 1). [13]

The intensity of language used in the article attacking Shostakovich and his music clearly express Stalin's and the Party's disdain for what they heard:

- "Here is music turned deliberately inside out in order that nothing will be reminiscent of classical opera, or have anything in common with symphonic music or with simple and popular musical language accessible to all."
- "The power of good music to infect the masses has been sacrificed to a petty-bourgeois, 'formalist' attempt to create originality through cheap clowning. It is a game of clever ingenuity that may end very badly."
- "He ignored the demand of Soviet culture that all coarseness and savagery be abolished from every corner of Soviet life."
- "Our theatres have expended a great deal of energy on giving Shostakovich's opera a thorough presentation… The talented acting deserves gratitude, the wasted efforts - regret."[14]

The newly developing concept of *beskonfliktnost* ("absence of conflict") was an added step to development of the tenets of Socialist Realism. *Beskonfliktnost* embodied the idea that Soviet peoples had evolved so far that conflict could no longer be discussed in terms of good and bad, but rather between good and best. Music that did not adhere to principles of *beskonfliktnost*

[13] Elizabeth Kuhn, *Shostakovich in Dialogue* (Surrey: Ashgate Publishing Limited, 2010), 8.

[14] "Sumbur vmeste muzyki," *Pravda,* January 28, 1936, accessed April 9, 2015, http://soviethistory.msu.edu/1936-2/upheaval-in-the-opera/upheaval-in-the-opera-text/chaos-instead-of-music/.

was treated with great suspicion, and the composers of subversive music could find themselves under attack, resulting in threats, their sudden disappearance, or the banning of their work. Indeed a meeting of critics was held at the Union of Soviet Composers in Moscow in January of 1936, specifically to discuss the recent works of Shostakovich. Some issues raised during the meeting included points addressed in the *Lady Macbeth* article:

"Are these works optimistic or pessimistic? What is the place of tragedy in Soviet works? Does he write beautiful, folk-inflected melodies? Must a fine melody be singable? What is the appropriate place for harmonic dissonance, and dramatic conflict and opposition in Soviet music? Must music be immediately accessible to listeners?"[15]

We see the Party struggling to identify guidelines by which to critique music, asking questions using Stalin's rhetoric incorporating the tenets of Socialist Realism.

[15] Judith Kuhn, *Shostakovich in Dialogue* (Surrey: Ashgate Publishing Limited, 2010), 61.

SHOSTAKOVICH'S COMPOSITIONAL STYLE BEFORE 1937

> You ask if I would have been different without "Party guidance"? Yes, almost certainly. No doubt the line I was pursuing when I wrote the Fourth Symphony would have been stronger and sharper in my work. I would have displayed more brilliance, used more sarcasm, I could have revealed my ideas openly instead of having to resort to camouflage: I would have written more pure music.[16]

The 1936 *Pravda* article criticizing Shostakovich's opera was understood by all, including the composer, to be a direct threat. It caused Shostakovich great mental anguish and he struggled with the inner conflict of deciding whether to conform for the safety of his family, friends and himself, or to continue his artistic endeavor.[17]

Shostakovich was sketching his *Symphony No. 4 in C minor, Opus 43* when the article was published, and had insisted that the premiere continue as scheduled. He eventually canceled the concert during the rehearsals leading up to the December 1936 debut. In response to the Party's public threat and severe criticism, Shostakovich transformed the style in which he composed, and in doing so regained favor with the Party through the composition of his Symphony No. 5 in D minor, Op. 47, which was premiered on November 21, 1937. The Fifth Symphony was immediately placed upon a pedestal by the Soviet party as an exemplary work demonstrating Shostakovich's personal transformation. It was an example to be followed by all other Soviet artists. This work proved to the Party that Shostakovich had undergone an ideological rehabilitation, one that some believed urged him to proclaim the symphony as "a Soviet artist's creative response to justified criticism."[18] This sentence accompanies the title in the score of the symphony, and was originally published as part of an article supposedly written

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[16] Laurel E. Fay, *Shostakovich: A Life* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000), 268.

[17] Elizabeth Wilson, *Shostakovich*: *A Life Remembered* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2006), 338.

[18] Dmitri Shostakovich, *Symphony No. 5* (London: Eulenberg, 1966), 4.

by Shostakovich in the newspaper *Vechernyaya Moskva* in 1937.[19] The subtitle itself was enough to serve as a renunciation of his former expressionistic, progressive, formalist, anti-Soviet tendencies. In the article *Making the Collective Man in Russia*, William Henry Chamberlin explains that "…the tendency to replace man, the individual, by collective man, the product of social groups and forces, [was] one of the most important […] currents in Soviet life."[20] We see that the idea of the individual person is gone; Shostakovich becomes "a Soviet artist" instead of an independent, creative individual.

From a modern perspective Shostakovich's Fifth Symphony can be read to be laden with hidden meaning and musically referential gestures that evince suffering, sarcastic assimilation, and a repetitively violent submission to a relentlessly strong and menacing power. Socialist Realism allowed the representation of suffering only as a means to a heroic end, without negative or personally expressed implications. Shostakovich's Fifth Symphony ends heroically, repetitively, victoriously out of a journey through frequently shifting and unstable harmony, unexpected and unresolved dissonances and violent gestures. On the surface this music adheres to the tenets of Socialist Realism, consequently representing the Soviet Union. Shostakovich included a sort of Socialist Realism check-list of acceptable musical features and references: waltzes recalling Tchaikovsky, chant-like passages referencing Orthodoxy, and Russian folk song. Because these elements had such a strong Russian identity, they justified the less Socialist Realist musical features, the aggression and conflict that could potentially raise questions

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[19] Francis Maes, Arnold J. Pomerans and Erica Pomerans, *A History of Russian Music: From Kamarinskaya to Babi Yar* (Berkeley, Los Angeles and London: University of California Press, 2002), 304.

[20] William Henry Chamberlin, *Making the Collective Man in Russia* (Foreign Affairs, 1932), 280.

regarding his music and his loyalty to the Soviet Republic. As long as Shostakovich satisfied the requirements laid out by the Party, he continued to receive praise by the Party as a great Soviet artist.

PLANS FOR THE NINTH

In 1945 Shostakovich was working on a large-scale symphony that was to include a chorus, soloists, and a considerably larger orchestra than the Ninth Symphony he eventually wrote. The composer stated, "Undoubtedly like every Soviet artist, I harbor the tremulous dream of a large-scale work in which the overpowering feelings ruling us today would find expression. I think that the epigraph to all our work in the coming years will be the single word 'Victory.'"[21] Dmitry Rabinovich recalls Shostakovich explaining the original plans for his Ninth Symphony: "I would like to write it for a chorus and solo singers as well as an orchestra…"[22] Rabinovich continues, "Some musicians even had the opportunity to listen to the beginning, powerful, victorious major music in a vigorous tempo."[23] Glikman described the music as "majestic in scale, in pathos, in its breathtaking motion."[24] Shostakovich himself mentioned he was having trouble with the grandiose *tutti* introduction to his Ninth "which was inducing in many the temptation to compare it with Beethoven's Ninth."[25]

In February of 1945 Shostakovich was quoted in the press: "On the threshold of approaching victory, we must honor with reverence the memory of the brave soldiers who have died, and glorify the heroes of our army for eternity."[26] The expectation from both the Russian

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[21] Maes, *A History of Russian Music*, 308.

[22] D. Rabinovich, *Dmitry Shostakovich: Composer* (Moscow: Foreign Language Publishing House, 1959), 96.

[23] Ibid.

[24] Fay, *Shostakovich: A Life,* 146.

[25] Ibid.

[26] Ibid.

people and the Soviet Party was for nothing less than a heroic, grandiose Ninth Symphony exalting Soviet Russian progress, power and ultimately victory over the Nazis.

RECEPTION

All Soviet composers, along with authors, filmmakers and other artists, were required to present their works to a Party board for approval before the works were officially allowed to be brought before the public. Shostakovich had performed his Ninth Symphony for Party officials in a four-hands arrangement with Sviatoslav Richter in early September, less than two months before its November premiere. Approximately two weeks later an article was published in *Trud*, next to *Pravda* the most popular newspaper of the time. The article accused Shostakovich of, "… taking a breather, a creative diversion from those great philosophical-ethical problems that formed the content of his Seventh and Eighth Symphonies…"[27] Still the piece was approved to open the twenty-fifth season of the Leningrad Philharmonic, alongside Tchaikovsky's Symphony No. 5 in E minor, Op. 64.

The Ninth Symphony was well received by the public. The audience lauded the premiere so much that the last three movements were repeated as an encore. Even still it was criticized by the Soviet party. In *Culture and Life*, a culture-oriented Soviet newspaper, Izrail Nestiev describes Shostakovich's latest work as containing "ideological weaknesses [that do] not reflect the true spirit of the Soviet people."[28] He continued to attack the Ninth as a "certain respite, a facile and light incident among the considerable creations of Shostakovich, a temporary

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[27] Fay, *Shostakovich: A Life,* 147.

[28] Izrail Nestiev, "Shostakovich's New Symphony Called Out of Tune With Party Line," *New York Times*, October 1, 1946, accessed July 23, 2014, http://query.nytimes.com/gst/abstract.html?res=9E02E1DE1F38E033A05751C0A9669D946793D6CF.

forgetting of big serious problems for a playful and fanciful trifle… the cynical and evil grotesque, the tone of merciless joking and ridicule… the cold irony of stylization.""[29] Nestiev points out in no uncertain terms that Shostakovich's Ninth is an unacceptable presentation of Socialist Realist art. In a dissertation on Socialist Realism, Sarah Elizabeth Pickle suggests that the worth of Soviet art was "measured by its truthfulness, not its artfulness."[30] The symphony does not satisfy the Socialist Realist agenda, and Nestiev suggests that Shostakovich even mocks the expectations that he would produce a victory symphony.

SHOSTAKOVICH AND JEWISH MUSIC

> "Shostakovich does not merely sympathize with the Jews or pity them. He is not just solicitous or generous. He is not a generalist but a particularist. In his Eighth String Quartet,... he identifies himself as a Jew, and as a Jew who expresses his Jewishness in his music".[31]

The musicologist Joachim Braun has written much to discuss the importance and influence of Jewish musical elements in Shostakovich's music. Braun has created a table of 12 works which he finds best exemplify Shostakovich's use of the Jewish musical idiom, organized by date of composition, year of publication, date of premiere and movement(s) which contain allusions to Jewish music and/or subject matter. His table begins with Shostakovich's edition and orchestration of V. Fleishman's opera *Rothschild's Violin* (composed in 1943), followed by Shostakovich's 1944 Trio for Violin, Cello and Piano, Op. 67. The next entry in Braun's table of

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[29] Ibid.

[30] Pickle, "The Form of Learning is the Learning of Forms," 9.

[31] Timothy Jackson, *Dmitry Shostakovich: The Composer as Jew* (London: Toccata Press, 1998), 599.

Shostakovich's *Compositions with Jewish Subjects and Jewish Compositions with his Participation* is the Concerto for Violin and Orchestra, Op. 77, completed in 1948.[32] Braun goes so far as to categorize Shostakovich's use of Jewish elements into three periods: the first from 1934 to 1944, the second from 1948 to 1952, and the third from 1959 to 1963. The Ninth Symphony is, of course, absent from this list. This symphony is often absent from most discussions of Jewish musical elements in Shostakovich's music, including the thorough and important contributions on the subject by Esti Sheinberg and Judith Kuhn.

In the early 1940s Shostakovich taught Veniamin Fleischmann, a composition student at the Moscow Conservatory. Shostakovich also befriended Mieczyslaw Weinberg, a composer for whom Shostakovich arranged to have travel and eventually settle in Moscow. While teaching at the Moscow Conservatory in the early 1940s Shostakovich served on the committee of Moisey Beregovsky, an ethnomusicologist who traveled throughout Eastern Europe recording and notating Jewish folk music. Both Beregovsky and Joachim Braun described several features commonly found in Jewish folk and cantoral music including musicalized speech, incongruity between form and inflection, and the Phrygian and altered Phrygian scale.

It was at the beginning of the 1940s through acquaintances displaced during the Jewish diaspora as a result of the Second World War when Shostakovich was exposed to Jewish music. Beregovsky was defending his dissertation on "Jewish Instrumental Folk Music" in January of 1944, the same year Shostakovich completed his Piano Trio No. 2, Op. 67, and finished his orchestration of Veniamin Fleischmann's opera, *Rothschild's Violin*. Beregovsky's extensive

[32] Joachim Braun, "The Double Meaning of Jewish Elements in Dimitri Shostakovich's Music," *The Musical Quarterly* Vol. 71, No. 1 (1985): 71.

recordings of Jewish folk and klezmer music were well catalogued, and Shostakovich had access to Beregovsky's work.[3334]

Shostakovich's friendship with Mieczysław Weinberg, a composer of Polish-Jewish heritage and son-in-law to Solomon Mikhoels, gave him personal access to and information about Jewish subculture in Russia. Through these channels Shostakovich was privy to an unprecedented and largely unpublicized amount of news and information regarding political plans the Nazis held for the Jews.

The Jewish Anti-Fascist Committee was a large organization of Russian Jews created in 1941. This organization had networks throughout Eastern and Western Europe, even eventually reaching the United States. It was on Stalin's orders that the JAFC was created with the intention of building global support for the Soviet Union against Nazi Germany. Solomon Mikhoels, Weinberg's father-in-law, ran the Moscow State Jewish Theatre and was appointed the head of the JAFC.

Stalin did not foresee the organization and development of a new identity among Soviet Jews, who maintained strong international connections after the war. According to Judith Kuhn, the organization of the Jewish community in the Soviet Union "was of immediate concern to the Soviet government, as was the Committee's inclination to act as a central sounding board for Jewish affairs."[35] The development of the Russian nationalistic brand of anti-Semitism,

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[33] Beregovsky's dissertation, now available as a book translated in English, is a wealth of music for anyone interested in exploring the roots of Jewish folk music in Eastern Europe.

[34] Moshe Beregovski, *Old Jewish Folk Music: The Collection and Writings of Moshe Beregovski*, ed. Mark Slobin (Syracuse, Syracuse University Press, 2000).

[35] Kuhn, *Shostakovich in Dialogue*, 136.

bezrodniy kosmopolit ("rootless cosmopolitanism") began to take shape, gaining ground during the "Great Purge" and eventually culminating in the infamous "Doctors' plot" of 1952. [36]

Several Jewish musical elements became increasingly pervasive in Shostakovich's own compositions in the early 1940s. He especially used the Phrygian and altered Phrygian scale and musicalized speech in both his chamber and orchestral music. [37] The Ninth uses the inflection as a catalyst for change in the narrative schema of the first movement of the work. Shostakovich uses musicalized speech in his Ninth Symphony exclusively as a threnody in the fourth movement, repeating the compositional technique he first employed in his String Quartet No. 2 in A major, op. 68.[38]

[36] The 1952 Doctors' Plot was a significant development in the growing national anti-Semitism of Soviet Russia, essentially a witch hunt against any and all Jews working in any prominent fields including medicine, government, academia and the arts. Two excellent books on the subject are Yakov Rapoport's *Doctors' Plot of 1953* and Jonathan Brent and Vladimir Naumov's *Stain's Last Crime: The Doctors' Plot*.

[37] Altered Phrygian refers to the Phrygian scale with a raised third scale degree resulting in an augmented second between the second and third scale degrees. In Jewish music this is referred to as the *freygish* scale.

[38] The term "musicalized speech" taken from Braun's "Shostakovich's Song Cycle *From Jewish Folk Poetry".*