

## Dmitry Shostakovich (1906-1975)

### Symphony No. 6 · Symphony No. 12 'The Year 1917'

The symphonies of Dmitry Shostakovich now stand at the centre of the repertoire; along with those of Mahler, they represent 'modern' music to non-specialist concert-goers. Yet unlike any comparable cycle since that of Beethoven, they do not have a progression such as might have endowed their career-spanning inclusiveness with a logical evolution from aspiration to fulfilment.

Of the symphonies, the *First* is a graduation work that accorded the teenage composer international prominence. The *Second* and *Third* represent a reckless accommodation between modernist means and revolutionary ends, while the *Fourth* stakes out the boundary between the individual and society that was to remain a focal-point. The *Fifth* then clarifies that boundary by paradoxically making it more equivocal, a process that the *Sixth* continues by subverting the relationship still further. The *Seventh* is a reaction to civil conflict and social collapse that finds its equivalent in the *Eighth*, which in turn finds its opposite in the *Ninth*. The *Tenth* then marks the genre's culmination as an outlet for an abstract programme. The *Eleventh* initiates a period in which Russian concerns were foremost, its historical acuity diluted by the impersonality of the *Twelfth* but intensified by the explicitness of the *Thirteenth*. The *Fourteenth* stands outside the genre as regards its form though not its content, while the *Fifteenth* marks a belated re-engagement with an abstract symphonism which might or might not have been continued.

The two-and-a-quarter years between the *Fifth* and *Sixth Symphonies* were occupied mainly by film scores, notably that for Grigoriy Kozintsev and Leonid Trauberg's *Vyborg District* which was the final instalment of the acclaimed *Maxim* trilogy as well as for Fridrikh Ermler's two-part ideological epic *The Great Citizen*. This period also gave rise to the *Suite for Theatre Orchestra* [8.555949], once known as the *Second Jazz Suite*, though the piano score of that long-missing piece resurfaced a decade ago and has since

and the work now boasts a substantial discography from a variety of conductors.

The *Sixth Symphony* is scored for woodwind in threes (though with four clarinets), four horns, three each of trumpets and trombones, timpani, percussion (three players), celesta, harp and strings. A substantial and intense *Largo* finds contrast with an often aggressive *Allegro* and a seemingly skittish *Presto* which together amount to less than half of the total playing time.

The first movement is one of Shostakovich's most powerful. It begins with a sombre motif on lower strings and woodwind, its initial four notes germinal to the work as a whole, which is succeeded by a passionate motif on strings with timpani, the trill on whose fourth note is of especial significance. These motifs combine in a sustained paragraph which eases into a brooding dialogue between upper and lower strings. Woodwind re-enter for a searching polyphony that, in its turn, makes way for the motifs now heard ruminatively on piccolo with harp and strings. This intensifies towards a climax where the motifs are sounded balefully on brass against descending strings and thundering timpani. Tension subsides to leave the trill as a hushed backdrop against which cor anglais, then muted trumpets and flutes muse over a new idea which is also defined by its initial four notes. Strings enter as the music moves to a heartfelt climax, after which the trills resume while clarinets, oboes then strings continue with the most recent idea, the violins rising to the top of their compass as gong and lower woodwind are heard from the depths. Flutes sound forlornly, continuing in an improvisatory manner (latterly with strings) before their trills are magically taken up by celesta and strings. Horns suffuse the texture with warmth as the initial motifs fuse into an eloquent theme on strings that is itself cut short by pensive woodwind, before a regretful recall of the cor anglais motif on violins over doleful timpani chords.

The second movement opens in complete contrast with a capering theme on woodwind and pizzicato strings. This becomes more animated as the strings impetuously trade gestures, then a sardonic idea on

bassoons effects an aggressive outburst with brass and percussion to the fore. A more ingratiating theme briefly alluded to earlier now joins with the capering theme for a brief passage of respite before a vamping idea on lower woodwind and strings draws in the whole orchestra in music of contrapuntal dexterity that leads to an explosive climax over charging percussion. Timpani then return to the capering theme as before, which now alternates with the ingratiating theme as woodwind and strings wind down in a mood of anxious calm.

The third movement does not attempt to bridge the gulf between its predecessors, setting off with a capricious theme on strings whose statements come replete with ironic woodwind comments and separated by equally animated ideas on strings and brass. At length this is succeeded by a lumbering theme on lower woodwind and strings, rising through the orchestra as tension mounts inexorably towards an unexpectedly violent climax. This subsides to leave bassoons then upper woodwind musing uncertainly, before the solo violin brings back the capricious theme and leads to a curtailed reprise. The lumbering theme now takes on a much jollier profile, excitable woodwind and strings leading to its final restatement in a raucous apotheosis.

The two years between the *Eleventh* and *Twelfth Symphonies* yielded a number of pieces, ranging from modest undertakings such as *Two Russian Folksong Adaptations* and the orchestral prelude *Novorossiisk Chimes* to the musical comedy *Moscow, Cheryomushki* and an orchestration of Mussorgsky's unfinished opera *Khovanshchina* that has served as the basis for most subsequent productions. In addition there was the song-cycle *Satires (Pictures of the Past)* to verse by Sasha Chyorny and a score for Leo Arnshtam's Dresden film *Five Days – Five Nights* [the suite is on 8.553299]. They also brought forth the *First Cello Concerto* [8.550813], written for Mstislav Rostropovich and a work ranging from bracing irony to heartfelt eloquence, as well as the *Seventh* and *Eighth String Quartets* [8.550972 and 8.550973], the former dedicated to the memory of Shostakovich's first wife Nina and the shortest as well as most emotionally inscrutable of the cycle, and the

latter seemingly intended as the composer's own requiem and for long the most performed and widely discussed of his contributions to the quartet medium.

The *Twelfth Symphony* again had its origins in a large-scale Lenin commemoration, this time with the intention of marking his ninetieth birthday in April 1960. That month came and went, however, and it was not until October that Shostakovich spoke in a radio broadcast about his new symphony as following on from its predecessor in depicting the events of the October (Bolshevik) Revolution, as well as providing a synopsis of the movements, two of which were apparently complete. Further progress, however, was halted by the composer breaking his leg at his son's wedding and the work seemingly not resumed until the spring of 1961. Progress thereafter went rapidly (though both the 'contents' of individual movements as well as the overall conception seem to have altered appreciably as a result of this hiatus), with completion coming on 22nd August and a piano duet reduction three days later. This latter was given by Mieczysław Weinberg and Boris Tchaikovsky in Moscow on 8th September, while the work itself received a double première on 1st October 1961, in Kuibyshev (Samara) by the local orchestra and Abram Stasevich, and a televised performance (two hours later) from Leningrad by Yevgeny Mravinsky and the Leningrad Philharmonic. Konstantin Ivanov and the USSR Symphony Orchestra gave the Moscow première on 14th October, while Gennady Rozhdestvensky and the Philharmonia undertook the United Kingdom première in Edinburgh on 4th September 1962.

As might be expected, the work was accorded a glowing reception from Soviet officialdom, with Shostakovich (having only recently joined the Communist party) personally invited to the 22nd Party Congress towards the end of October 1961. There the symphony was hailed as a worthy successor to its predecessor, though critical perception of it as being more generalized and impersonal – despite its overtly Russian qualities – indicated a growing conviction that the work was, as Shostakovich had himself confided,

not among his finest. Despite a high-profile launch, it was not awarded a Lenin Prize and performances in the West were notably fewer than with most previous Shostakovich symphonies. Mravinsky and the Leningrad Philharmonic set down the first recording in October 1961, to be followed by Georges Prêtre with the Philharmonia Orchestra in March 1963 and Ogan Duryan with the Leipzig Gewandhaus Orchestra in October 1967, though subsequent recordings are comparatively few and have tended to appear within complete symphonic cycles rather than as stand-alone releases.

The *Twelfth Symphony* (which is dedicated to the memory of Lenin) is scored for woodwind in threes, four horns, three each of trumpets and trombones, tuba, timpani, percussion (four players) and strings. The four movements, playing continuously, chart the Bolshevik struggle in what, paradoxically perhaps, is Shostakovich's closest adherence to the 'classical' symphony.

The first movement, *Revolutionary Petrograd*, harnesses its depiction of social upheaval to an unusually orthodox (for this composer) handling of sonata form. A solemn introduction on lower strings, joined by full strings and brass, is notable for its initial four notes and four-times repeated climactic motif. Percussion launches the energetic first theme on woodwind, joined by strings then brass as it hastens towards a forceful climax; subsiding to reveal the hymn-like second theme on lower strings which gradually gains in ardour to culminate in its resplendent statement on full orchestra. A tensile development centres on the first theme discussed impulsively by woodwind and strings, brass and percussion then propelling the music to a seething climax where all the themes are climactically juxtaposed. From here the second theme is expressively recalled by strings then woodwind, before the introductory theme forcefully re-emerges on brass. Pizzicato strings and side drum, previously in evidence, persist through a wistful recollection of the initial motif on unison woodwind, before reaching an expectant pause.



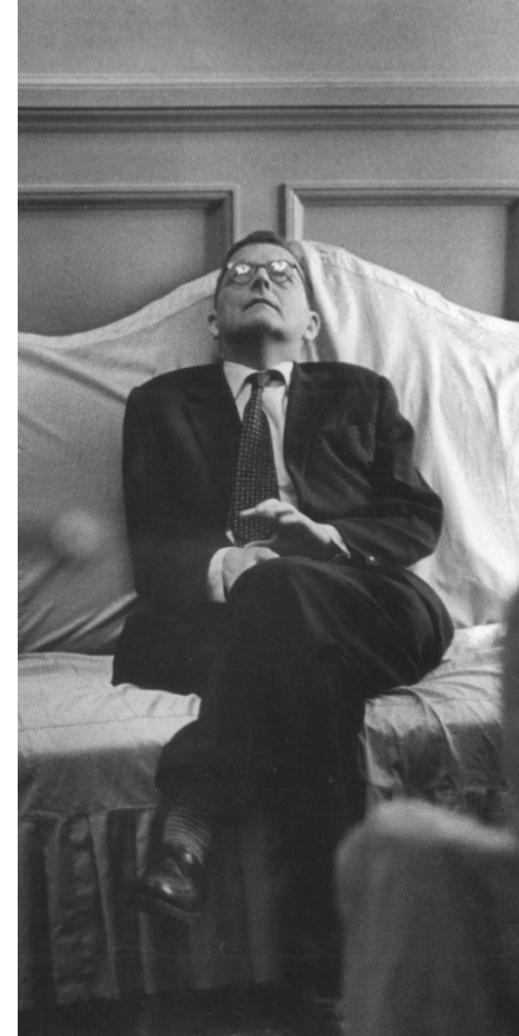
# SHOSTAKOVICH

## Symphony No. 6

## Symphony No. 12 'The Year 1917'

## Royal Liverpool Philharmonic Orchestra

## Vasily Petrenko



### Royal Liverpool Philharmonic Orchestra



Photo: Mark McNulty

The Royal Liverpool Philharmonic Orchestra is Britain's oldest surviving professional symphony orchestra, dating from 1840. Vasily Petrenko was appointed Principal Conductor of the orchestra in September 2006 and in September 2009 became Chief Conductor until 2015. The orchestra gives over sixty concerts each season in Liverpool Philharmonic Hall and in recent seasons world premiere performances have included major works by Sir John Tavener, Karl Jenkins, Michael Nyman and Jennifer Higdon, alongside works by Liverpool-born composers John McCabe, Emily Howard, Mark Simpson and Kenneth Hesketh. The orchestra also tours widely throughout the United Kingdom and has given concerts in the United States, the Far East and throughout Europe. Recent additions to the orchestra's extensive discography include Tchaikovsky's *Manfred Symphony* (2009 *Classic FM/Gramophone* Orchestral Recording of the Year), the world premiere performance of Sir John Tavener's *Requiem*, volumes 1 to 5 of an ongoing Shostakovich cycle, and Rachmaninov's *Symphonic Dances*, *Piano Concertos Nos. 2 and 3*, and *Nos. 1 and 4*. The Royal Liverpool Philharmonic Orchestra and its new music group, Ensemble 10/10 were jointly awarded *Ensemble of the Year* in the 2009 Royal Philharmonic Society Music Awards. Ensemble 10/10 also won the *Concert Series of the Year* category. [www.liverpoolphil.com](http://www.liverpoolphil.com)

### Vasily Petrenko



Photo: Mark McNulty

Vasily Petrenko was appointed Principal Conductor of the Royal Liverpool Philharmonic Orchestra in 2006 and in 2009 became Chief Conductor until 2015. He is also Principal Conductor of the National Youth Orchestra of Great Britain, and in 2013 will become Chief Conductor of the Oslo Philharmonic Orchestra. He was the Classical BRIT Awards Male Artist of the Year 2010 and the *Classic FM/Gramophone* Young Artist of the Year 2007. In 2009 he was awarded Honorary Doctorates by the University of Liverpool and Liverpool Hope University. He now works with many of the world's finest orchestras, and his wide operatic repertoire includes *Macbeth* (Glyndebourne Festival Opera) *Le Villi*, *I due Foscari* and *Boris Godunov* (Netherlands Reisopera), *Pique Dame* (Hamburg State Opera), *Eugene Onegin* (Opéra de Paris, Bastille) and *Parsifal* (Xacobeo Festival, Santiago de Compostela). He has toured with the European Union Youth Orchestra and returned to the BBC Proms for a second time with the Royal Liverpool Philharmonic Orchestra in 2010. Recordings with the Royal Liverpool Philharmonic Orchestra include Tchaikovsky's *Manfred Symphony* (2009 *Classic FM/Gramophone* Orchestral Recording of the Year), an ongoing Shostakovich cycle, and Rachmaninov's *Symphonic Dances* and *Piano Concertos Nos. 2 and 3* and *Nos. 1 and 4*. He was the Classical BRIT Awards Male Artist of the Year 2010 and the *Classic FM/Gramophone* Young Artist of the Year 2007. In 2009 he was awarded Honorary Doctorates by the University of Liverpool and Liverpool Hope University.

The second movement, *Razliv* (the village where Lenin went into hiding prior to his return to Petrograd), opens with a sombre rhythmic idea on lower strings over which horns unwind a brooding, folk-like theme. This is rounded-off by an incantatory brass refrain, the rhythmic idea moves to upper strings and woodwind repeat the refrain with the theme now heard on flutes and clarinets. Violins take up the rhythmic idea as it and the theme are combined in eloquent polyphony. Brass then intone the refrain, with reference to the hymn-like theme from the previous movement, then the central section commences with a theme of real pathos on flutes against calmly undulating strings, with equally poetic responses from the other woodwind. At length the refrain reappears on woodwind, before the rhythmic idea on clarinet and pizzicato strings leads into a baleful restatement of the main theme on trombones against tremolo strings and muted brass. Brass intone the refrain one last time, then elements from the remaining ideas are dissolved via a hushed coda in which pizzicato strings have the final word.

The third movement, *Aurora* (the battleship whose shelling of the Winter Palace in Petrograd set the Bolshevik Revolution in motion), opens with an insistent rhythm on timpani then pizzicato strings which soon emerges as a theme on woodwind and strings. This

subsides into the hymn-like theme on low brass against pulsating strings and glinting woodwind, building toward its blazing orchestral restatement, followed by an energetic recall of the preceding theme on brass and percussion.

The fourth movement, *Dawn of Humanity*, sets off with a noble theme for horns and strings, taken up by woodwind then full orchestra, before portentous brass chords lead into an almost insouciant theme on strings then woodwind. The work's introduction is alluded to as the music grows restless, then the noble theme returns on brass and pizzicato strings on the way to a brief climax. As this dies down the insouciant theme reappears on strings, building to a resolute statement on woodwind and brass that suddenly recalls the noble theme then the first movement's main themes in hectic succession. Three timpani strokes usher in a soulful rendering of the work's introductory theme on strings: the repetition of its climactic motif leads to a lengthy coda in which the hymn-like theme is reiterated over the whole orchestra in a processional somewhere between the triumphal and the bombastic. Whether this apotheosis should be taken at other than face value is for each listener to decide.

Richard Whitehouse