philharmonia orchestra

SignumClassics

PHILHARMONIA ORCHESTRA

SIGCD132

CHRISTOPH VON DOHNÁNYI

BRAHMS

SYMPHONY No.2 & SYMPHONY No.4

SIGCD133

SIR CHARLES MACKERRAS

SCHUBERT

SYMPHONY No.9

www.signumrecords.com

www.philharmonia.co.uk

Available through record stores and at www.signumrecords.com For more information call +44 (0) 20 8997 4000

signum CLASSICS

V. Ashkenazy

VLADIMIR ASHKENAZY

SHOSTAKOVICH

FESTIVE OVERTURE
SYMPHONY No.5

philharmonia orchestra

SHOSTAKOVICH

FESTIVE OVERTURE • SYMPHONY No.5

Dmitri Shostakovich (1906-1975)

1	Festive Overture	5.50
	Symphony No.5	
2	Moderato	14.59
3	Allegretto	5.28
4	Largo	13.31
5	Allegro non troppo	10.22
	Total timings	50.13

PHILHARMONIA ORCHESTRA
VLADIMIR ASHKENAZY CONDUCTOR

www.signumrecords.com

Shostakovich
Festive Overture & Symphony No.5

Nobody in the Soviet Union was immune to Stalin's Great Purge in the years immediately preceding the Second World War. Neither the poorest citizen-comrade nor the highest ranking party officials could escape Stalin's clunking fist as he sought to consolidate power by 'cleansing' the Communist Party, and the country at large, of so-called dissidents, undesirable anti-revolutionaries and other 'enemies of the people'. Ethnic minorities were deported, peasants and professionals and party apparatchiks too far to the left or too far to the right were imprisoned and killed on the flimsiest of evidence or the cruel expedient of the forced confession. Many hundreds of thousands were killed and millions more consigned to labour camps. The arts were under intense scrutiny for any perceived modernism and a good many writers, artists and composers paid dearly in the process. One of the major buzzwords of the time was 'formalism', which was essentially a charge against a work that was not considered to appeal directly to the masses. On this matter, Shostakovich was adjudged to have failed his country and comrades by producing works lacking in Socialist Realism – a serious breach of the party line.

As a 27-year-old, in 1934, Shostakovich had a runaway, worldwide success with his opera, *Lady Macbeth of the Mtsensk District*, which was regarded as a high-water mark in Soviet opera and was praised by the authorities as, 'the result of the general success of socialist construction'. In 1936, with the arts now under centralized control under the All-Union Committee on Artistic Affairs, the tide was turning against any composers with 'formalist' tendencies. Stalin attended a performance of *Lady Macbeth* in January of that year and was offended by the forthrightness of the subject

matter and Shostakovich's advanced musical language. Two days later, the now notorious *Pravda* editorial appeared describing *Lady Macbeth* under the headline 'Muddle instead of Music' as a 'discordant, confused stream of sounds...the music cracks, grunts and growls'. A few days later, his ballet, *The Limpid Stream,* which was in the repertory of the Bolshoi Ballet at the time, fared no better under the banner, 'Balletic Falsehood'. Although now seen as preposterous and philistine, at the time these were unprecedented articles. *Pravda,* the official organ of Soviet Communism, disapproved in language verging upon the violent; the 'cheap clowning' of *Lady Macbeth* being chillingly described as 'a game of clever ingenuity that may end very badly.' The party had spoken - this music was not to be imitated and the works in question disappeared from the repertory forthwith.

Although the ramifications of the editorials were not immediately clear, the aftershocks rippled rapidly through Soviet culture. With Stalin gearing up for the first of the infamous Moscow show trials later in the year, and the Great Purge hot on their heels, everyone had to watch their step. Shostakovich had been working on his colossal, modernist Fourth Symphony for some time, but it no longer suited the mood of the times and he was forced to withdraw it during rehearsals, in December 1936. Neither the Fourth Symphony nor *Lady Macbeth* would be heard again for some 25 years. The golden boy of Soviet music had become a degenerate corrupter.

Just seven months after the mothballing of the Fourth Symphony, Shostakovich introduced his Fifth as the 'creative reply of a Soviet artist to justified criticism' – a shocking, awkward phrase which turns sour in the mouths of many commentators. These were dangerous, suspicion-soaked times in which friends and protectors of the composer were arrested and even summarily tried and executed. The composer's own description of the symphony displays a similar awkwardness:

> *The theme of my Fifth Symphony is the making of a man. I saw man with all his experiences in the centre of the composition, which is lyrical in form from beginning to end. In the finale, the tragically tense impulses of the earlier movements are resolved in optimism and joy of living.*

Few works have created such disagreement among writers and critics as this offspring of a marriage between music and politics. It has spawned a plethora of interpretations of the composer's intentions and given rise to disparate warring factions among musicologists. Was Shostakovich deliberately cocking an encoded snook at his critics? Was he privately lampooning the Communist Party? Was the work a conscious decision to re-align with the symphonic mainstream? Did Shostakovich intentionally adopt the role of a holy fool in his engagement with the Soviet authorities? Is there a 'menace-theme' in the symphony that spells out, musically, in two notes, 'Sta - lin'? Revisionist and counter-revisionist theories abound and will doubtless continue as more information from this dark time comes to light. One thing is for certain: whether the symphony represents Shostakovich cow-towing to totalitarianism or not, its position as one of the 20th Century's most popular and successful symphonic works is beyond any doubt.

The public première of the work, on 21 November 1937, was naturally an extraordinarily tense occasion for the composer and his audience. His influence, commissions and, hence, income had all declined rapidly during the previous 18 months and many assumed his career depended on a successful outcome. The young, then unknown, Evgeny Mravinsky conducted the Leningrad Philharmonic in the Symphony No.5 in D minor Op.47 and brought the house down. The triumph was immediate and the applause tumultuously greeted Shostakovich's rehabilitation as a truly great Soviet artist. Even the critics were eventually effusive in their praise, affirming that the young composer was coming back into the party fold: 'A work of such philosophical depth and emotional force could only be created here in the USSR'. Following the excitement occasioned by works such as the First Symphony and *Lady Macbeth,* composers abroad were rather muted in their praise for the work. In the climate of thrusting, modernist Western Europe of the time, the symphony seemed a step backwards to some, although audiences soon embraced the work wholeheartedly. More importantly, in the USSR, it had saved Shostakovich's career, at very least, and for the present, the golden boy was shining once again.

After a second period of fresh charges of 'formalism' in 1948, Shostakovich was again cast into the wilderness until a relaxation of the artistic manacles followed the death of Stalin in 1953. By late 1954, Shostakovich's yo-yoing career was back in the ascendant after being awarded the title of People's Artist of the USSR and elected an honorary member of the Swedish Royal Academy of Music. The *Festive Overture Op.96* was written during these less harrowing days and reflects a lighter side of Shostakovich's musical personality. The overture was written in record breaking time in response to a last-minute request from the Bolshoi Theatre which required a celebratory piece for the 37th Anniversary of the 1917 October Revolution. Dashed off in just three days, and seemingly based on Glinka's *Ruslan and Ludmilla Overture*, this is a little rip-roaring, fire-cracker which barely draws a breath from beginning to end. Its utterly upbeat nature and lack of any solemn ideological baggage has assured that a work written to commemorate the Bolshevik Revolution now enjoys outings at fireworks spectaculars the world over.

BIOGRAPHIES

VLADIMIR ASHKENAZY

In the years since Vladimir Ashkenazy first came to prominence on the world stage in the 1955 Chopin Competition in Warsaw he has built an extraordinary career, not only as one of the most renowned and revered pianists of our times, but as an artist whose creative life encompasses a vast range of activities and continues to offer inspiration to music-lovers across the world. Conducting has formed the largest part of his activities for the past 20 years, and he has held the positions of Chief Conductor of the Czech Philharmonic (1998 to 2003), Music Director of NHK Symphony Orchestra in Tokyo (2004 to 2007) and Principal Conductor and Artistic Advisor to the Sydney

Symphony Orchestra (from January 2009), the latter including a number of exciting projects including composer festivals and international touring activities.

Alongside these positions, Ashkenazy has had a longstanding relationship with the Philharmonia Orchestra of which he was appointed Conductor Laureate in 2000. In addition to his performances with the orchestra in London and around the UK each season, he has toured with them worldwide and developed landmark projects such as 'Prokofiev and Shostakovich Under Stalin' in 2003 (a project which he also took to Cologne, New York, Vienna and Moscow) and 'Rachmaninoff Revisited' in 2002 at the Lincoln Center, New York.

Ashkenazy also holds the positions of Music Director of the European Union Youth Orchestra, with whom he tours each year, and Conductor Laureate of the Iceland Symphony Orchestra. He maintains strong links with a number of other major orchestras with whom he has built special relationships over the years, including the Cleveland Orchestra (of whom he was formerly Principal Guest Conductor), San Francisco Symphony and Deutsches Symphonie Orchester Berlin (Chief Conductor and Music Director 1988-96), as well as making guest appearances with many other major orchestras around the world. While conducting takes up a significant portion of his time each season, Ashkenazy continues to devote himself to the piano, continuing to build his extraordinarily comprehensive recording catalogue with releases such as the 1999 Grammy award-winning Shostakovich *Preludes and Fugues*, Rautavaara's *Piano Concerto No.3* (a work which he commissioned), Rachmaninov Transcriptions, and recordings of that most challenging and enriching of works, Bach's *Wohltemperierte Klavier* and Beethoven's *Diabelli Variations*.

Beyond his hectic and fulfilling performing schedule, Ashkenazy has been involved in some fascinating TV projects, often inspired by his passionate drive to ensure that serious music continues to have a platform in the mainstream media and is made available to as broad an audience as possible. Many will remember his programmes with the outstanding director

Christopher Nupen, including in 1979 *Music After Mao*, filmed in Shanghai, and the extraordinary *Ashkenazy in Moscow* programmes which marked his first visit in 1989 to the country of his birth since leaving the USSR in the 1960s. More recently he has developed educational programmes with NHK TV including the 1999 *Superteachers* working with inner-city London school children, and in 2003-4 a documentary based around his 'Prokofiev and Shostakovich Under Stalin' project.

philharmonia orchestra

The Philharmonia Orchestra is one of the world's great orchestras. Acknowledged as the UK's foremost musical pioneer, with an extraordinary recording legacy, the Philharmonia leads the field for its quality of playing, and for its innovative approach to audience development, residencies, music education and the use of new technologies in reaching a global audience. Together with its relationships with the world's most sought-after artists, most importantly its Principal Conductor and Artistic Advisor Esa-Pekka Salonen, the Philharmonia Orchestra is at the heart of British musical life. Today, the Philharmonia has the greatest claim of any orchestra to be the UK's National Orchestra. It is committed to presenting the same quality, live music-making in venues throughout the country as it brings to London and the great concert halls of the world. Every year the Orchestra performs more than 200 concerts, as well as presenting chamber performances by the Soloists of the Philharmonia Orchestra, and recording scores for films, CDs and computer games. Since 1995 the Orchestra's work has been underpinned by its much admired UK Residency Programme, which began with the launch of its residencies at the Bedford Corn Exchange and London's Southbank

Centre, and now also includes De Montfort Hall in Leicester, the Anvil in Basingstoke and a series of partnerships across Kent and the Thames Gateway, based in Canterbury. The Orchestra's international extensive touring schedule each season involves appearances at the finest concert halls across Europe, the USA and Asia.

During its first six decades, the Philharmonia Orchestra has collaborated with most of the great classical artists of the 20th century. Conductors associated with the Orchestra include Furtwängler, Richard Strauss, Toscanini, Cantelli, Karajan and Giulini. Otto Klemperer was the first of many outstanding Principal Conductors, and other great names have included Lorin Maazel (Associate Principal Conductor), Riccardo Muti (Principal Conductor and Music Director) and Giuseppe Sinopoli (Music Director). As well as Esa-Pekka Salonen, current titled conductors are Christoph von Dohnányi (Honorary Conductor for Life), Sir Charles Mackerras (Principal Guest Conductor), Kurt Sanderling (Conductor Emeritus) and Vladimir Ashkenazy (Conductor Laureate). The Philharmonia Orchestra continues to pride itself on its long-term collaborations with the finest musicians of our day, supporting new as well as established artists. This policy extends into the Orchestra itself, where many of the players have solo or chamber music careers as well as their work with the Orchestra. The Philharmonia's Martin Musical Scholarship Fund has for many years supported talented musicians at the start of their careers and a new Orchestral Award, inaugurated in 2005, allows two young players every year to gain performing experience within the Orchestra.

The Orchestra is also recognised for its innovative programming policy, at the heart of which is a commitment to performing and commissioning new works by leading composers, among them the Artistic Director of its Music of Today series, Julian Anderson. Since 1945 the Philharmonia Orchestra has commissioned more than 100 new works from composers including Sir Harrison Birtwistle, Sir Peter Maxwell Davies, Mark-Anthony Turnage and James MacMillan. The Philharmonia Orchestra's joint series with SBC, *Clocks and Clouds: The Music of György Ligeti*, won the Royal Philharmonic Society's Best Concert Series Award in 1997 and *Related Rocks: The Music of Magnus Lindberg*, was nominated for

an RPS Award. Other recent awards for the Orchestra include the RPS Large Ensemble Award and two *Evening Standard* Awards for Outstanding Artistic Achievement and Outstanding Ensemble. In May 2007 PLAY. orchestra, a 'virtual Philharmonia Orchestra' created in partnership with Southbank Centre and Central St Martin's College of Art, won the RPS Education Award.

Throughout its history, the Philharmonia Orchestra has been committed to finding new ways to bring its top quality live performance to audiences worldwide, and to using new technologies to achieve this. Many millions of people since 1945 have enjoyed their first experience of classical music through a Philharmonia recording, and now audiences can engage with the Orchestra through webcasts, podcasts, downloads, computer games and film scores as well as through its unique interactive music education website launched in 2005, The Sound Exchange (www.philharmonia.co.uk/thesoundexchange), which is now visited by almost 2 million people a year. In 2005 the Philharmonia became the first ever classical music organisation to be shortlisted for a BT Digital Music Award, and in the same year the Orchestra presented both the first ever fully interactive webcast and the first podcast by a UK orchestra. In September 2005 computer games with Philharmonia scores were at No.1 and No.2 in the national charts, while the Orchestra's scores for the last two Harry Potter computer games have both been nominated for BAFTA Awards. Recording and live broadcasting both also continue to play a significant part in the Orchestra's activities: since 2003 the Philharmonia has enjoyed a major partnership with Classic FM, as The Classic FM Orchestra on Tour, as well as continuing to broadcast on BBC Radio 3.

Recorded live at Suntory Hall, Tokyo, Japan, 27 July 2001
Produced, engineered and edited by Tomoyoshi Ezaki

Photo credit - Richard Haughton
Design - Richard Slaney (for the Philharmonia Orchestra) and Andrew Giles

www.signumrecords.com **www.philharmonia.co.uk**

© 2008 The copyright in this recording is owned by Philharmonia Orchestra © 2008 The copyright in this CD booklet, notes and design is owned by Signum Records Ltd.

Any unauthorised broadcasting, public performance, copying or re-recording of Signum Compact Discs constitutes an infringement of copyright and will render the infringer liable to an action by law. Licenses for public performances or broadcasting may be obtained from Phonographic Performance Ltd. All rights reserved. No part of this booklet may be reproduced, stored in a retrieval system, or transmitted in any form or by any means, electronic, mechanical, photocopying, recording or otherwise, without prior permission from Signum Records Ltd.

SignumClassics, Signum Records Ltd., Suite 14, 21 Wadsworth Road, Perivale, Middx UB6 7JD, UK. **+44 (0) 20 8997 4000** E-mail: **info@signumrecords.com**