

NAXOS

SHOSTAKOVICH

Symphony No. 4

**Royal Liverpool
Philharmonic
Orchestra**

Vasily Petrenko



Dmitry Shostakovich (1906-1975)

Symphony No. 4

The fifteen symphonies of Dmitry Shostakovich presently stand at the very centre of the orchestral repertoire: together with those of Mahler, they can fairly be said to represent 'modern' music as it appears to the non-specialist concertgoer. Yet unlike any comparable symphonic cycle since that of Beethoven, these works do not progress in a way that might have endowed their career-spanning inclusivity with a logical evolution which carries them from aspiration to fulfilment.

Of the symphonies, the *First* is a graduation work that quickly accorded the teenage composer national acclaim and then international prominence. The *Second* and *Third* both represent the 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 thereafter. The *Fifth* clarifies that boundary through paradoxically making it even more equivocal; a process that the *Sixth* continues by subverting the 'private/public' relationship still further. The *Seventh* is an unequivocal reaction to civil conflict and social collapse that finds its conceptual equivalent in the *Eighth*, and which in turn finds its opposite in the *Ninth*. The *Tenth* effectively marks the genre's culmination as the outlet for an abstract programme. The *Eleventh* initiates a period in which Russian concerns were to assume dominance, its historical acuity being diluted by the relative impersonality of the *Twelfth* and then intensified by the undeniable explicitness of the *Thirteenth*. The *Fourteenth* stands outside the symphonic genre as regards its form though emphatically not in terms of content, while the *Fifteenth* marks a belated re-engagement with an abstract approach to symphonic thinking such as might or might not have been continued.

The six-year period between the *Third* and *Fourth Symphonies* (the second longest between any in the composer's canon) saw Shostakovich focussing on music for the theatre, with several innovative scores for films – notably those for Grigory Kozintsev's and Leonid

Trauberg's *Alone* [Naxos 8.570316] and Lev Arsham's *The Girlfriends* – as well as incidental music for Adrian Pyotrovsky's *Rule, Britannia!* [both on 8.572138] and Nikolay Akimov's controversial production of *Hamlet*. There were also full-length ballet collaborations – with Alexander Ivanovsky on *The Golden Age* [8.570217-18], Viktor Smirnov on *The Bolt* [Suite on 8.555949] and Fyodor Lopukhov on *The Limpid Stream*. Extracts from numerous of these scores were freely transferred, certain pieces – not least the *First Jazz Suite* [8.555949] – becoming 'hits' in their own right. A more serious side was evident in the *Six Romances on Japanese Poems* and, above all, *Lady Macbeth of the Mtsensk District* – the opera after Nikolay Leskov that saw success in Leningrad and Moscow, and acclaim in Cleveland and London, before the infamous *Pravda* article that decided both its fate and that of Shostakovich's future career. He had already re-engaged with abstract composition – composing the *24 Preludes* for piano [8.555781] and the *First Piano Concerto* [8.553126] in 1933, then a *Cello Sonata* [8.557231 or 8.557722] in 1934, during which year he also began a new symphony.

Shostakovich had long intended to consolidate the promise of his *First Symphony* [8.572396] with a more inclusive statement than either of its successors, though deciding how to do so was no easy task. His first attempt in the autumn of 1934 got no further than the seven-minute fragment of a first movement, whose brooding slow introduction for solo woodwind and strings followed by an energetic tutti (partially reused in the completed work's finale) suggests Myaskovsky as a viable mentor, but Shostakovich may have felt this approach insufficiently forward-looking. By April 1935 he was speaking of the new symphony as embodying his artistic 'credo', though the first evidence was *Five Fragments* for chamber orchestra [8.557812] written at a single session on 9th June (and which remained unheard for nearly three decades), whose striking sonorities and textures anticipate what was to come. Work began in earnest on

13th September, with the first movement complete in all essentials by early December and its successor at the turn of January 1936. In spite of the condemnatory *Pravda* article 'Muddle Instead of Music' on the 28th of that month, Shostakovich outwardly recovered quickly from the attendant fall-out – finishing the finale's short score on 26th April and its orchestration by 20th May. Word had already spread of the work's epic scale and emotional scope, with Otto Klemperer responding to the composer's playing extracts on 31st May by pledging to perform it in South America the following season. The première itself was entrusted to Fritz Stiedry and the Leningrad Philharmonic, and scheduled for 11th December. That morning, however, brought an official announcement that the composer had withdrawn the work as it was now incompatible with his current creative concerns.

Just what were the events conspiring to seal the work's fate have been much debated but it seems that, having rehearsed the first two movements without much in the way of incident, Stiedry encountered overt antagonism from the musicians during the finale to an extent that Shostakovich, having spoken to the conductor, chose to avoid a potential scandal by literally taking the score with him as he left the building – though it is also likely the orchestra's director Isai Renzin had prevailed upon the composer to withdraw the piece before his hand was forced by 'official' pressure. After this, the symphony was shelved though not forgotten – Shostakovich and Pavel Lamm having already made a reduction for two pianos that was circulated and even lithographed in 1946, after a private performance by the composer and Mieczyslaw Weinberg. The full score had been lost – presumed destroyed – in the siege of Leningrad several years earlier, but was subsequently reconstructed from the orchestral parts by Boris Shalman and its performance mooted at various stages in the post-Stalin era until, in 1961, Kyrill Kondrashin (having seen a piano duet reduction by the composer's amanuensis Lev Atovmian) undertook the task. Despite having spoken on several occasions about revising the work, Shostakovich pointedly chose to leave it just as it was: an all-

encompassing, even reckless yet magnificent statement of artistic intent.

This belated première, by Kondrashin and the Moscow Philharmonic Orchestra in Moscow on 30th December 1961, was followed by the UK première from Gennady Rozhdestvensky and the Philharmonia Orchestra at the Edinburgh Festival on 7th September 1962 (programmed with and greatly preferred to the *Twelfth Symphony*), with the American première by Eugene Ormandy and the Philadelphia Orchestra following in Philadelphia on 15th February 1963. Kondrashin and the Moscow Philharmonic made the first commercial recording between the 3rd and 15th February 1962 at the Large Hall of the Moscow Conservatoire, followed by Ormandy and the Philadelphia in February 1963. Doubtless reflecting its respected though still equivocal standing, there were no further recordings until André Previn and the Chicago Symphony in February 1977, followed by Bernard Haitink and the London Philharmonic in January 1979, then Rozhdestvensky and the USSR Ministry of Culture Symphony Orchestra early during 1986 – by which time the work had all but entered the repertoire and was regarded among the seminal twentieth-century symphonies.

The *Fourth Symphony* is scored for the most extensive forces of any Shostakovich symphony: two piccolos, four flutes, four flutes (one doubling cor anglais), five clarinets, bass clarinet, three bassoons and contra-bassoon, eight horns, four trumpets, three trombones and two tubas, six timpani (two players) and percussion (six players), celesta, two harps and strings (84 desks recommended). The first movement is a complex and unpredictable take on sonata-form design, while its successor deftly elides between scherzo and intermezzo, then the finale integrates four disparate yet audibly related sections in an imaginative process of variation which culminates in one of its composer's most far-reaching apotheoses.

The first movement opens with a shrill fanfare-like motif on woodwind with brass and percussion, thrice repeated, that reappears transformed at the start of each of its successors. Here it heads into a trenchant martial theme for brass over tramping strings, making reference

to the initial motif at its height before it subsides – via echoing horns and animated strings, into the leisurely second theme whose imitative unfolding on strings is countered with ominous responses from woodwind and percussion. Brass now initiates a strenuous interplay drawing on both themes, which reaches a powerful climax before subsiding as before into lower woodwind. A capricious episode for upper woodwind, over a syncopated accompaniment on pizzicato strings and timpani, concludes with a soft woodwind dissonance – from which protesting strings build to a violently dissonant outburst from full orchestra. As this echoes into silence, lower strings underpin the third theme – a sombre melody for bassoon, rounded off by lilting harps, which expands across the strings as it gains in expressive plangency; a curiously ambivalent dialogue for harps, woodwind and muted strings then functioning as the codetta to this extended exposition. Solo horn intoning of the third theme against bird-like woodwind calls initiates the development, building to a waspish confrontation of woodwind and muted trumpets before strings increase the tension into a spiralling ascent on brass and strings – these latter persisting in a heated dialogue that grinds to a deadening halt.

From here (13'30") upper woodwind begin a lively discussion of the first theme which soon takes in elements from the third theme on lower woodwind together with sardonic phrases from brass and percussion. At length this activity alights on a series of nonchalant chords, whereupon violins launch a furious fugato on the first theme that presently involves all of the strings then woodwind and brass in an inexorable build-up to the principal climax: one which draws on the whole orchestra in a seismic unleashing of physical force. Angry brass then unexpectedly waltz-like strings lead away from this climax towards a quietly dissonant woodwind chord that remains sphinx-like until a general pause is reached. From here six crescendoing chords, each more thunderous than the last, build to the heightened return of the initial motif as at the very opening – though now the tramping strings underpin a defiant version of the third theme from trumpets and upper woodwind. This dies down into a more eloquent discussion of that theme on

woodwind, after which bird-like calls on violin presage the latter's taking up the second theme over lower strings and harp. It dies away disconsolately, only for the first theme to emerge on bassoon over a steady accompaniment on bass drum. Cor anglais partners it in the closing stages, while a sudden eruption on this theme from clarinets, muted trumpets and harps denotes the onset of the brief coda. Ejaculatory chords from woodwind and pizzicato strings freeze into an acrid harmony on woodwind and brass, while fragments from the first theme on cor anglais gradually fade out against a softly enveloping gong stroke.

The second movement begins with a rhapsodic theme whose initial four-note motif proves a constant presence. This first theme soon graduates across strings and then woodwind, interspersed by more incisive gestures which provoke a tensile outburst from brass and timpani. The latter's rhythm duly underpins the second theme, a graceful though notably restive melody for violins that takes in flutes and solo horn before building to a further brief outburst again dispersed by brass and timpani before fading out on horns and pizzicato strings. The first theme then re-emerges as a fugal interplay between strings, gaining in textural intricacy and expressive intensity before being stopped short by woodwind, whose lucid dialogue acts as transition into the return of the second theme, now intoned resolutely by horns over a three-note accompaniment from woodwind. Theme and accompaniment move to woodwind and strings before subsiding into the coda – the first theme being heard over a 'walking bass' in lower strings with a mesmeric ostinato pattern on percussion.

The third movement starts with a deadpan theme for bassoon over a funereal tread in double basses. As other woodwind continue this theme, the mood becomes more ironic and animated – with strings at length entering incisively to drive the theme through to a monumental climax on full orchestra. This dies down to reveal a melody of some eloquence on violins over a rhythmic accompaniment on lower strings, before the initial theme returns modified on woodwind and then lower strings over timpani. Oscillating woodwind cries emerge against a

gruff response from double basses, bringing about the second part of the movement: a toccata of unremitting momentum that is confirmed by the animated theme on strings. Its contrapuntal interplay reduces to ceaselessly alternating phrases on woodwind and strings, then to interlocking string ostinatos of almost minimalist cast, before the previous activity resumes and an energetic climax for the whole orchestra ensues – angry gestures being traded as the tension subsides over a propulsive three-note motif on lower brass and strings. There follows what amounts to an extended 'divertissement' in which elements of the themes heard so far are presented as a succession of guises that range from the sardonic to the playful – beginning with a whimsical polka for flutes and piccolos over strings and harp which presently alights on a lilting idea for horn and strings against chirruping woodwind. The mood lightens before hectic strings usher in a galop whose theme is heard on bassoon then xylophone with a brusque response from the strings each time. A folk-like idea on trombone briefly intervenes before the section leads into an artful waltz for woodwind over pizzicato strings, gaining impetus as strings engage in quiet activity that provokes a brief climax then a knockabout response from the trombone. This finally mutates into a pensive theme for woodwind which, after an allusion to the lilting idea heard earlier, moves to violins and violas over a chugging accompaniment on lower strings. The music hesitantly takes on a feeling of inward resolution as activity dies out across strings and an expectant pause ensues.

At which point (20'30") a striding motion on both sets of timpani suddenly explodes into a fusillade that underpins a peroration as overwhelming as it is inexorable. On three occasions an impassioned fanfare from brass is answered by a granitic chorale on horns and strings, with the fourth fanfare bringing a strenuous confrontation between all sections of the orchestra. This heads into the climactic fifth fanfare, whereupon the music literally blows itself apart as a percussive onslaught cancels out what went before and a quietly pulsating motion sets in on bassoons and double basses. The head motif of this movement's initial theme is variously intoned by horn, flute and muted trumpet – marked off by ominous woodwind chords and recollections of the eloquent theme on upper strings – before lower strings sink down in a mood of stoic resignation and violins quietly sustain a chord of acute anguish. Pulsating timpani and a somnolently repeating celesta pattern are duly curtailed to leave just the vast expressive gulf between strings that itself evanesces into silence.

Following an early performance of the internationally acclaimed *Fifth Symphony*, Shostakovich was heard to remark: "I finished the symphony fortissimo and in the major. ... I wonder what [everyone] would be saying if I had finished it pianissimo and in the minor?". Only 25 years on was it possible to understand the true import of this enigmatic comment.

Richard Whitehouse

Thanks to the Kenneth Stern Trust

Royal Liverpool Philharmonic Orchestra



Photo: Mark McNulty

The award-winning Royal Liverpool Philharmonic Orchestra is the UK's oldest continuing professional symphony orchestra, dating from 1840. The dynamic young Russian, Vasily Petrenko was appointed Principal Conductor of the orchestra in September 2006 and in September 2009 became Chief Conductor. The orchestra gives over sixty concerts each season in Liverpool Philharmonic Hall and tours widely throughout the UK and internationally, most recently touring to China, Switzerland, France, Spain, Germany, Romania and the Czech Republic. In recent seasons world première performances have included major works by Sir Peter Maxwell Davies, Sir John Tavener, Karl Jenkins, Michael Nyman and Jennifer Higdon, alongside works by Liverpool-born composers including John McCabe, Emily Howard, Kenneth Hesketh and Mark Simpson. Recent additions to the Royal Liverpool Philharmonic Orchestra's extensive and critically acclaimed recording catalogue include Tchaikovsky's *Manfred Symphony* (2009 Gramophone Awards Orchestral Recording of the Year), the world première performance of Sir John Tavener's *Requiem*, an ongoing Shostakovich cycle (the recording of *Symphony No. 10* is the 2011 Gramophone Awards Orchestral Recording of the Year); Rachmaninov's *Symphonic Dances*, and *Piano Concertos Nos. 2 and 3* and *Nos. 1 and 4* with Simon Trpčeski; and Rachmaninov's *Symphony No. 2* and *No. 3*. 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. He is also Chief Conductor of the Oslo Philharmonic Orchestra, Principal Guest Conductor of the Mikhailovsky Theatre of his native St Petersburg, and Principal Conductor of the National Youth Orchestra of Great Britain. He was the Classical BRIT Awards Male Artist of the Year 2010 and 2012 and the Classic FM/Gramophone Young Artist of the Year 2007. He is only the second person to have been awarded Honorary Doctorates by both the University of Liverpool and Liverpool Hope University (in 2009), and an Honorary Fellowship of the Liverpool John Moores University (in 2012),

awards which recognise the immense impact he has had on the Royal Liverpool Philharmonic and the city's cultural scene. He now works regularly with many of the world's finest orchestras, including the London Philharmonic, Philharmonia, Russian National, Netherlands Radio Philharmonic, Chicago Symphony, Philadelphia, Czech Philharmonic, Vienna Symphony, Sydney Symphony, Los Angeles Philharmonic and San Francisco Symphony Orchestras, the National Symphony Orchestra Washington, Orchestre de la Suisse Romande, Accademia Nazionale di Santa Cecilia, and the Rundfunk Sinfonieorchester Berlin. His wide operatic repertoire includes *Macbeth* (Glyndebourne Festival Opera), *Parsifal* and *Tosca* (Royal Liverpool Philharmonic), *Le Villi*, *I due Foscari* and *Boris Godunov* (Netherlands Reisopera), *Der fliegende Holländer*, *La Bohème* and *Carmen* (Mikhailovsky Theatre), *Pique Dame* (Hamburg State Opera) and *Eugene Onegin* (Opéra de Paris, Bastille). 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*, *Second and Third Symphonies* and complete *Piano Concertos*.

Completed in 1936 but withdrawn during rehearsal and not performed until 1961, the searing *Fourth Symphony* finds Shostakovich stretching his musical idiom to the limit in the search for a personal means of expression at a time of undoubted personal and professional crisis. The opening movement, a complex and unpredictable take on sonata form that teems with a dazzling profusion of varied motifs, is followed by a short, eerie central movement. The finale opens with a funeral march leading to a climax of seismic physical force that gives way to a bleak and harrowing minor key coda. The Symphony has since become one of the most highly regarded of the composer's large-scale works.



Dmitry
SHOSTAKOVICH
(1906-1975)



**Symphony No. 4 in C minor,
Op. 43 (1935-36)**

64:59

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|--------------------------------------|--------------|
| 1 I. Allegretto poco moderato | 27:20 |
| 2 II. Moderato con moto | 9:25 |
| 3 III. Largo – Allegro | 28:14 |

Royal Liverpool Philharmonic Orchestra
Vasily Petrenko

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