



Dmitri SHOSTAKOVICH

Symphony No. 6 in B min, Op. 54

Dmitri Dmitriyevich (25 September 1906 – 9 August 1975) was a Russian pianist and composer of the Soviet period. He is regarded as one of the major composers of the 20th century. Shostakovich achieved fame in the Soviet Union under the patronage of Soviet chief of staff Mikhail Tukhachevsky, but later had a complex and difficult relationship with the government. Nevertheless, he received accolades and state awards and served in the Supreme Soviet of the RSFSR (1947–1962) and the Supreme Soviet of the Soviet Union (from 1962 until his death).

A polystylist, Shostakovich developed a hybrid voice, combining a variety of different musical techniques into his works. His music is characterized by sharp contrasts, elements of the grotesque, and ambivalent tonality; the composer was also heavily influenced by the neo-classical style pioneered by Igor Stravinsky, and (especially in his symphonies) by the late Romanticism associated with Gustav Mahler. Shostakovich's orchestral works include 15 symphonies and six concerti. His chamber output includes 15 string quartets, a piano quintet, two piano trios, and two pieces for string octet. His solo piano works include two sonatas, an early set of preludes, and a later set of 24 preludes and fugues. Other works include three operas, several song cycles, ballets, and a substantial quantity of film music; especially well known is *The Second Waltz*, Op. 99, music to the film *The First Echelon* (1955–1956), as well as the suites of music composed for *The Gadfly*.

Symphony No. 6 in B minor, Op. 54 was written in 1939, and first performed in Leningrad on 21 November 1939 by the Leningrad Philharmonic Orchestra under Yevgeny Mravinsky. The Sixth Symphony is unusual in structure, beginning with a long and introspective slow movement, followed by two short movements: a scherzo and a "full-blooded and debauched music-hall galop". According to music critic Herbert Glass, the "entire [first] movement is based on the cell of a minor third, with a second theme - which follows without transition - the motif of a diminished seventh, with the trill at its close forming the third major ingredient of the movement - the two themes and the trill combined as a sort of super-theme. The composer lays this out as clearly as if he were teaching a music-appreciation class: do listen for it. Chamber music effects abound with, for instance, piccolo or flute, eerily alone or accompanied by the B-flat clarinets. There are walloping climaxes, too, each of which dies away into the gloom. Note, too, the composer's wonderful spotlighting of the melancholy English horn, a lone figure after the din has evaporated." The third movement galop is the movement Shostakovich himself thought was most successful. Music critic Daniel Hathaway noted that in the third movement, [the] "Snare drums ratcheted up the riot of brutal sound in the Scherzo and references to the William Tell Overture and laughing trombones added a hilarious burlesque quality to the finale."