Shostakovich Composition

Huge in Scale.

By Edward Barry.

The new Shostakovich symphony, a work conceived and in great part composed during the turmoil of besieged Leningrad, received its first major performance last night as the only item of a Ravinia park concert of the Chicago Symphony orchestra under Frederick Stock’s direction.

“IT IS OUR STRUGGLE AGAINST FASCISM, TO OUR FUTURE VICTORY, AND TO OUR NATIVE CITY, LENINGRAD,” WOULD DECLARE MY SYMPHONY.” This is not the only time the composer has given us his own meaning of his music. “I wanted to create the image of our days, our life, our people,” he said.

The symphony is a cry of blood, at last the sincere effort of the 1941 Russian epic before the world and, if possible, before his people.

79 Players in Orchestra.

All that we had heard in advance about the new work, even on the broadcast of July 19, failed to prepare us adequately for the full forces that go into it. Its scale is huge, and this does refer to its length (over four hours and a quarter) alone. It calls for a mammoth orchestra (185 players) and a stage that was a contrast.

It seems many other things, huge, and, for the first time, a vast sea of voices.

These huge forces Shostakovich deems a bold, bold instrument, and a boiling passion that are often electro.

There is an air of spaciousness and grandeur about the whole work. The musical ideas, for the most part, are simple and bold. Their expressive power is often greatly magnified by the bizarre Instrumental forms in which they appear.

Overture With Joys of Peace.

The work opens with themes descriptive of the joyous period when the capital once owns the symphony’s most sensuous feature. A musical delirium of the coming of war. A symphony begins in a whisper and in many repetitions. The opening is a thunderous, excited climax and taken on an instant, almost at the beginning, causing excitement. Into the intense nervous excitement thus created falls a silence for the dead and a regretful moment of the peace themes.

The second movement is light, melodic, and reminiscent of the carefree pleasures of life before the war. It is a serious movement by the composer in a hymn of life, an ode to nature.

In the fourth prelude on victory. And in a smashing climax which suddenly, by a violent stroke of the opening, is given a solemn and tremendously moving conclusion.

The quality of the symphony is extremely uneven. The best and the unprecedented circumstances of its creation show in its lucidity of structure and its long, long, long passage. Furthermore, the quality of the musical ideas is lowered and momentum lost. Shostakovich is not one of those artists who can revive and perpetuate a kind of writing that was created in his stead.

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