



Shostakovich First and Last

Scherzo for Orchestra
in F -Sharp Minor, op. 1

Symphony No. 1
in F - minor, op. 10

**Suite on Verses of
Michelangelo**
op. 145a

Hans Graf, conductor
Texas Music Festival Orchestra

5-CHANNEL HIGH-RESOLUTION IMMERSIVE SURROUND SOUND



audio



NOTES ON THE MUSIC:

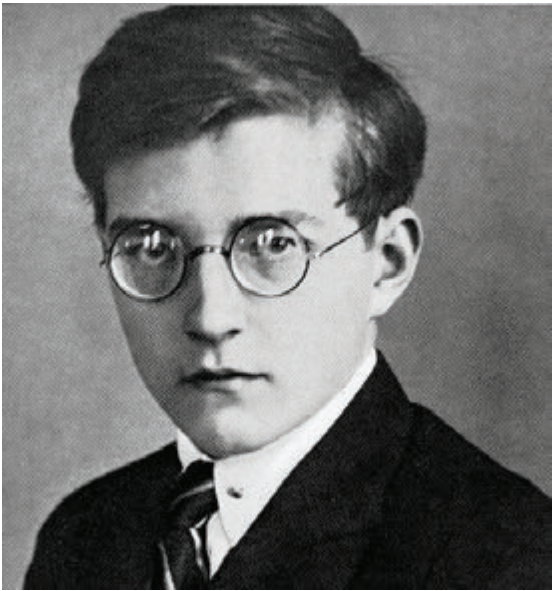
DMITRI SHOSTAKOVICH

Born 25 September 1906, St. Petersburg, Russia

Died 9 August 1975, Moscow, USSR

SCHERZO IN F-SHARP MINOR, op. 1

Shostakovich entered the Petrograd [now St. Petersburg] Conservatory at age 13, four years after he had undertaken preparatory studies in piano and had begun composing little piano pieces. He was assigned to classes in music theory, composition, orchestration, and counterpoint with



Maximilian Steinberg, the son-in-law of Nicholas Rimsky-Korsakov.

The fledgling composer reportedly began work within a few months on this orchestral Scherzo in F-sharp minor. He dedicated the finished composition to Steinberg, who “taught me to love Russian and foreign classical music” Shostakovich wrote, and it became his first published composition. Steinberg admired the Scherzo as the work of “a highly talented student” and it does indeed show a keen grasp of all the principles involved in his classroom studies, as well as the sense of propulsion that moves all imaginative music to its natural climax.

The five-minute piece is scored for a standard mid-to-late 19th century orchestra, comparable to the mature works of Brahms or Tchaikovsky. It begins with an icy little march-like Scherzo, waxing and waning as it works its way through several thematic sections to an abrupt conclusion. Sudden changes in tempo, meter, and tonality bring forth the Trio section, a slower waltzing ballad in the key of D major. It is gently set forth in the strings, followed by woodwinds and horns. But the marching Scherzo theme suddenly creeps back in, gradually stealing the lyrical, bucolic mood and tonality of the Trio music. Once it gains full control of the original minor key and march meter, the final section becomes a hilarious contest between the two themes, with the jazzy waltz theme blasting through periodically in the brass against the march until the music collapses at the very end of the final measure. Shostakovich’s sense of winking mischief often lurked just below the surface of his music, right from the start of his career.

SYMPHONY NO. 1, op. 10

Shostakovich was only 19 years old when he completed his First Symphony early in 1926, and the work astounded his professors and student colleagues at the Petrograd Conservatory with its maturity, its sense of restraint, and its sure, imaginative



grasp of symphonic form.

In his book on the Shostakovich, author Roy Blokker asserts that the symphony was Shostakovich's graduation piece, and there was such strong feeling that it should be performed that the conservatory paid the cost of copying out the instrumental parts. Nicolai Malko, professor at the conservatory and conductor of the Leningrad Philharmonic, included it on the orchestra's final program May 12, and the impoverished, sickly young composer was suddenly a national celebrity.

The First Symphony is not only a remarkable achievement in its own right; in its basic plan and expressive profile, it is also an early model for Shostakovich's most popular symphony, the monumental Fifth Symphony he composed 11 years later. It is set in four movements, with the first movement building steadily from a germinal introduction in a long arch to a dramatic climax, then ending quietly. As in the Fifth Symphony, a sardonic scherzo comes next, followed by a deeply felt slow movement, and a brilliant, many-faceted finale.

While the work as a whole does not match the heroic scale of the Fifth Symphony, it spans an impressive range of emotions and imposes strong dramatic values upon the long-established structural pillars of symphonic form – two traits that remained characteristic of Shostakovich's talent throughout his career. Much of the music has a light, playful character through the first movement and the middle of the scherzo, but that movement ends with a vengeful restatement of the gentle theme heard in its central trio section. The slow movement turns increasingly from lyrical romantic sentiments to feelings of tragedy, as a trumpet fanfare inserts itself ever more ominously into the last half of the movement. And the whimsical, seemingly episodic finale becomes almost terrifying as the fanfare theme is thundered out by the timpani, summoning Shostakovich's symphonic forces for an awesome coda to the work.

The symphony is scored for piccolo, two flutes, two oboes, two clarinets, two bassoons, four horns, two trumpets, bass trumpet, three trombones, tuba, timpani, triangle, cymbals, side drum, bass drum, piano, and strings.

SUITE ON TEXTS OF MICHELANGELO BUONARROTI, op. 145a

Morality was an important component in the artistic character of Dmitri Shostakovich, who was twice censured and, at times, lived in fear of his life under the Stalinist regime. When he had survived that era, he did not hesitate to decry the persecution and slaughter of humans. The searing moral statements in his later symphonies, song cycles and chamber music were often expressed in dark, very personal terms, exposing the dejected mood of his soul as his life neared its end. Such is mood of many songs among the eight sonnets and three poems by Michelangelo that Shostakovich set to music just a year before his death.



This introspective vocal suite was one of the last three works the ailing, progressively weakened Shostakovich composed, followed only by a shorter cycle of poems by Dostoyevsky and the Sonata for Viola and Piano. He composed them following his release from a hospital in the spring

of 1974, completing the set July 31. The premiere of the vocal-piano version was given by bass Yevgeny Nesterenko and pianist Yevgeny Slenderovich December 23. Then, Shostakovich immediately arranged the songs in the orchestral version heard in this concert recording.

Certain songs – “Truth,” “Anger,” “Dante,” and “To the Exile,” – rail against religious hypocrisy or political oppression, while the final two songs, “Death” and “Immortality,” express the same sense of fatalism, resignation and quiet release that pervaded many of Shostakovich’s last works. Curiously, he included three of Michelangelo’s love poems – “Morning,” “Love” and “Separation,” in the suite, forming a ravishing little cycle of youthful desire, fulfillment, and loss in the midst of the poet’s harsher texts. Speaking to the artistic impulse, poet and composer evoke powerful images



of intense personal struggle in “Creativity,” and the fulfilling joy of contemplating the finished artwork in the succeeding poem, “Night.”

Whether boldly shouted or quietly musing, there is a declamatory character in Shostakovich’s vocal line, bending to the emotion of the moment in Michelangelo’s texts, with only a hint of a musical refrain in the tinkling childlike accompaniment to

the closing text of “Immortality.” And to frame Michelangelo’s thoughts on life, love, artistry, and humanity, Shostakovich prefaces the opening “Truth” with a stern trumpet duet, returning it in altered form for the penultimate song, “Death.”

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The Immanuel and Helen Olshan Texas Music Festival was founded in 1990 to provide young professional musicians with a challenging musical environment in which to develop skills in orchestral, chamber music, and solo performance. The intensive orchestral fellowship program on the University of Houston campus is guided by distinguished artists from the UH Moores and Rice Shepherd School music faculties, along with principals and members of the Houston Symphony, Houston Grand Opera, and Ballet orchestras, and internationally recognized guest artists. The intensive three-week orchestral training program in Houston accepts college, graduate, and young professional players, with 80 talented orchestral musicians selected to participate each year.

As a child, Hans Graf learned the violin and the piano. He studied at the Musikhochschule in Graz, Austria, and graduated with diplomas in piano and conducting. He also participated in conducting master classes with Franco Ferrara, Sergiu Celibidache and Arvīds Jansons. He received a state scholarship at the Leningrad Conservatory with Arvid Jansons. For the season 1975/1976 Graf was music director of the Iraqi National Symphony Orchestra in Baghdad. After winning the Karl Böhm conductor’s competition in 1979, he made his debut at the Vienna State Opera in 1981 with Stravinsky’s *Petrouchka*. He then worked at major opera houses including Munich, Paris, Florence, Venice and Rome. Since 1995, he has conducted most major American orchestras, including the

Boston Symphony, Cleveland Orchestra, New York Philharmonic and Philadelphia Orchestra. Graf was music director of the Mozarteum Orchestra of Salzburg from 1984 to 1994, where he recorded the complete symphonies and other works by Mozart. From 1994 to 1996, he held the position of music director of the Basque National Orchestra, then from 1995 to 2003, of the Calgary Philharmonic Orchestra and from 1998 to 2004 of the Orchestre National Bordeaux Aquitaine, France, where he was nominated member of the Legion of Honour in 2002.



Hans Graf with Recording Engineer & Producer John Proffitt

Graf first conducted the Houston Symphony in 2000, and became its music director in 2001. He made his Carnegie Hall conducting debut with the Houston Symphony in January 2006. At the conclusion of his Houston tenure in 2013, Graf took the title of Conductor Laureate. He has been an artist-in-residence at the Shepherd School of Music, Rice University. On 2 December 2012 Graf was honoured by the Bruckner Society of America with the Kilenyi Medal of Honor for his performances of the Bruckner's Symphonies 3-4 and 6-9 including the sketches to Finale of the 9th, as well as the Mass No. 2 and the Te Deum.

From 2013 to 2015, Graf was professor for orchestral conducting at Salzburg's Mozarteum University. In 2018, he won a Grammy award for the recording of Alban Berg's *Wozzeck* with Anne Schwanewilms, Roman Trekel and the Houston Symphony. This recording had received an ECHO Klassik award in 2017.

Lately, Graf performed at the summer festivals of Tanglewood, Aspen (both 2017) and Vail (2018). Graf first appeared with the Singapore Symphony Orchestra in 2015, and returned for a further guest engagement in 2018. In July 2019, the Singapore Symphony Orchestra announced the appointment of Hans Graf as its new chief conductor, effective with the 2020-2021 season.

In private life, Graf is known as a wine connoisseur. He and his wife Margarita have a daughter, Anna.

Russian bass Nikolay Didenko graduated from the Moscow Academy of Choral Art in both singing and conducting. He was a soloist of the New Opera in Moscow, and until 2005 was a member of the Houston Grand Opera Studio. Following his training, Didenko had many successes and sang roles including Frère Laurent in *Roméo et Juliette*, Don Geronio in *Il Turco in Italia*, Basilio in *Il Barbiere di Siviglia*, Colline in *La bohème*, Alidoro in *La Cenerentola*, and Oroveso in *Norma* - at houses including Houston Grand Opera, Opera de Paris, Royal Danish Opera, Cologne Opera, Washington Opera, New York City Opera, Bilbao Opera, and Liceu Barcelona.Opera, New York City Opera, Bilbao Opera and Liceu Barcelona.



**The Immanuel & Helen Olshan
Texas Music Festival 2018**

DMITRI SHOSTAKOVICH: FIRST AND LAST

**Texas Music Festival Orchestra, Houston - Hans Graf, conductor
Nikolay Didenko, bass***

1 SCHERZO FOR ORCHESTRA in F-Sharp Minor, op. 1 5:07

SYMPHONY NO. 1 in F-Minor, op. 10

2 Allegretto – Allegro non troppo 8:50

3 Allegro 4:44

4 Lento – Allegro molto – Lento – Allegro molto 17:45

* SUITE ON VERSES OF MICHELANGELO, op. 145a

5 Istina -Truth 3:59

6 Utro - Morning 2:45

7 L'ubov' - Love 3:55

8 Razluka - Separation 2:07

9 Gnev - Anger 1:41

10 Dante; Izgnanniku - To the exile 8:46

11 Tvorchestvo – Creativity; Noch - Night 6:34

12 Smert't - Death 4:01

13 Bessmertie - Immortality 3:59

Recorded in public concert 30 June 2018 in the Moores Opera House, University of Houston

Producer & Recording Engineer: John Gladney Proffitt

General & Artistic Director, Texas Music Festival: Alan Austin

Technical Notes: Master Recording in LPCM 24-bit 192kHz sampling

Microphones used: Georg Neumann (KM-83) & John Peluso (P-83; P-Stereo)

5.0 channel Immersive Surround Sound

2.0 Stereo CD Mixdown: John Proffitt

Blu-ray Audio Mastering: Robert Witrak

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