



Stepan Razin being led to execution

Performers

Yevgenia Tselovalnik (soprano),

Artur Eizen, Vitaly Gromadski,

Yevgeny Nesterenko (bass)

Boys' Choir of the Moscow Choral College

Russian State Choral Chapel

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SHOSTAKOVICH

Execution of Stepan Razin

(Cantata For Bass Soloist, Male And
Female Chorus And Orchestra)

Symphony No.9

Kirill Kondrashin

Moscow Philharmonic



The Execution of Stepan Razin, Op. 119 (1964) is a cantata by Dmitri Shostakovich based on the career of the Cossack Stenka Razin. After leading raids against the Tsarist regime, Razin was captured and given amnesty in exchange of an oath of allegiance. He broke his promise, leading an army of several hundred thousand in an attempt to overthrow the government. Captured again, he was executed in 1672. Shostakovich, after having composed the Thirteenth Symphony setting texts by the poet Yevgeny Yevtushenko for bass soloists, male choir, and orchestra in 1962, Shostakovich turned again to Yevtushenko's poetry for his symphonic poem The Execution of Stepan Razin in 1964, also scored for bass soloist and orchestra, but this time with mixed chorus. Taking up where the first movement of the Thirteenth left off, the symphonic poem is huge and muscular, with a deeply heroic and yet profoundly ironic tone. Composed quickly over the summer of 1964 after the ninth and tenth quartets, Shostakovich anticipated troubles with the political censors in the post-Khrushchev era. However, although some critics carped at the work's perceived "naturalism," overall critical response was positive after the December premiere. Although Shostakovich's oeuvre is rich in underappreciated masterpieces, The Execution of Stepan Razin is especially worthy of revival. A powerfully scored and strongly imagined work, the work is Shostakovich at the absolute peak of his powers. Without the constraints of Stalin and the Party and with the righteous fury of the Thirteenth Symphony all behind him, Shostakovich made Yevtushenko's poem his choral-orchestral masterpiece. Although not as wide-ranging as the Thirteenth in its emotional or musical scope, it has a more concentrated and intense passion matched, but not exceeded, even by the first movement of the Thirteenth. Shostakovich never wrote anything else like it. His previous Socialist Realist choral works, like The Song of the Forests, are too obviously ideological in content, but Razin makes a terrific piece when coupled to his ironic Ninth Symphony.

Dmitri Shostakovich: Symphony No. 9 in E-flat major (1945) When Shostakovich began work on his ninth symphony, the weight of tradition the proclaimed nine symphonies of Beethoven, Schubert, Bruckner, Dvořak and Mahler had long since acquired mythic expectations. Moreover, in 1945 this was the composer's first post-war symphony, an occasion made for patriotic celebration. Indeed, its key of E-flat suggested nothing less than Beethoven's Eroica. But, as Timothy Day has observed, "Shostakovich wrote within a single month a work which is Haydn-like in its proportions and Rossini-like in its wit." The premiere took place November 3, 1945, with the

Leningrad Philharmonic Orchestra under Evgeny Mravinsky. To say that Stalin-esque officialdom was taken aback is an understatement. In Solomon Volkov's Testimony: The Memoirs of Dmitri Shostakovich, the composer describes the situation: They wanted a fanfare from me, an ode; they wanted me to write a majestic Ninth Symphony Everyone praised Stalin, and now I was supposed to join in this unholy affair. And they demanded that Shostakovich use quadruple winds, choir, and soloists to hail the leader... I confess that I gave hope to the leader and teacher's dreams. I announced that I was writing an apotheosis When my Ninth was performed, Stalin was incensed. He was deeply offended because there was no chorus, no soloists. And no apotheosis. There wasn't even a paltry dedication. It was just music, which Stalin didn't understand very well, and which was full of dubious content. In spite of all the unacknowledged state-sanctioned intimidation used to bully the most original artists in the Stalin era, Shostakovich had by then attained the highest profile internationally of any Soviet artist. Payback would come eventually, but it was delayed both because of Shostakovich's reputation abroad and because Stalin's plate was full with new international diplomatic relationships to manipulate. Faced with the choice of writing an empty paean to the glory of Stalin or a more honest reflection on the hardships that people were continuing to experience, Shostakovich opted for a third way. He had composed a purely abstract piece of music that was neither one thing nor the other; a pure and perfect, almost Neoclassical work, complete with a standard first movement symphonic repeat for the one and only time in his life. Given that abstract music was something Stalin didn't really understand, it would be hard for him to criticize it either way. Though its playfulness could be seen as nose thumbing by a court jester, its generally upbeat nature could not be attacked for being negative or depressing. Like his Piano Concerto No. 1, composed twelve years earlier, the Symphony No. 9 is rife with Shostakovich's unmistakable fingerprints, not least his penchant for parody and sarcasm. Yet it remains faithful to the classical model. Its first movement follows sonata form, complete with repeat of exposition, but then switches the major triad into minor, introducing a tonal ambiguity that carries through like an undercurrent to the often raucous goings-on otherwise. The elegiac second movement is followed by the last three, which are played without a break. The fourth movement is really an introduction to the finale, with stentorian trombones answered by an impassioned bassoon that at last dissolves into triviality. Timothy Day concludes, "This is music for a hollow victory."

SHOSTAKOVICH

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Symphony No.9

Kirill Kondrashin / Moscow Philharmonic

Transferred from a Angel/Melodyia 4-track tape

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