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István Kertész (August 28, 1929 – April 16, 1973) was an internationally acclaimed Hungarian orchestral and operatic conductor who, throughout his brief but distinguished career led many of the world's great orchestras, including the Cleveland, Chicago, Philadelphia, New York, Los Angeles, Pittsburgh, Detroit, San Francisco and Minnesota Orchestras in the United States, as well as the London Symphony, Vienna Philharmonic, Berlin Philharmonic, Royal Concertgebouw Orchestra, Israel Philharmonic, and L'Orchestre de la Suisse Romande. His orchestral repertoire numbered over 450 works from all periods, and was matched by a repertoire of some sixty operas ranging from Mozart, Verdi, Puccini and Wagner to the more contemporary Prokofiev, Bartók, Britten, Kodály, Poulenc and Janáček. Kertész was part of a rich musical tradition that produced fellow Hungarian conductors, János Ferencsik, Eugene Ormandy, George Szell, János Füst, and Sir Georg Solti.

On April 16, 1973, while on a concert tour, Kertész drowned while swimming off the coast of Israel at Herzliya.[4] He had been recording what would become a legendary version of Brahms' Variations on a Theme by Haydn, as well as the complete Brahms symphonies. After his untimely death, and in tribute to him, the Vienna Philharmonic finished recording the Haydn Variations.

Kertész was survived by his wife, operatic soprano Edith Kertész-Gabry, his children, Gabor, Peter, and Kathrin, his mother, Margit Muresian Kertész Halmos, and his sister, a graphic artist, Vera Kertész.



Shostakovich Symphony No.5

István Kertész conducts the
L'Orchestre de la Suisse Romande

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After his fall from favour in 1936 over the opera *Lady Macbeth of the Mtsensk District* and the ballet *The Limpid Stream*, Shostakovich was under pressure to simplify his music and adapt it to classical models, heroic classicism being a prime characteristic of socialist realism. An adequate portrayal of socialist realism in music meant a monumental approach and an exalted rhetoric based on optimism. Shostakovich's music was considered too complex, technically, to fall under the strictures of socialist realism. *Lady Macbeth* had been derided in *Pravda* as "a farrago of chaotic, nonsensical sounds." At the meeting of the Composers' Union weeks after the *Pravda* article, Lev Knipper, Boris Asafyev and Ivan Dzerzhinsky suggested that the composer should be helped to "straighten himself out." Essentially a non-person in an era of unprecedented state terrorism, Shostakovich appeared to have no choice but to comply.

Shostakovich sought the aid of Marshal Mikhail Tukhachevsky, one of the highest-ranking officers in the Red Army and since 1925 a patron of the composer. However, the marshal himself became a victim, convicted on a trumped-up charge of treason and shot. Many of Shostakovich's friends and relatives were arrested and disappeared, and for a year the composer feared the same would happen to him. He completed his Fourth Symphony in April but withdrew the work the following year while it was in rehearsal.

This was the situation Shostakovich faced in April 1937. If he were to do anything but yield to Party pressure, it would have to be subtle, as all eyes would be on him and whatever composition he wrote. His form of musical satire had been denounced and would not be tolerated so blatantly again. Falling back on venting his tragic side cautiously whilst otherwise toeing the line of socialist realism would amount to self-betrayal. He had to somehow turn the simplicity demanded by the authorities into a virtue, mocking it whilst in the process of turning it into great art.

One work, written 37 years earlier, had achieved this basic paradox—Mahler's Fourth Symphony. Mahler began his Fourth in a mode of apparently childish simplicity, at which initial audiences scoffed. However, Mahler's development subsequently indicated to listeners that the first impression was deceptive. Shostakovich referred to this opening passage from Mahler in his own symphony. Mahler's Fourth starts with 24 F-sharps tapped in consort with sleighbells; the vaulting canon theme which comprises the first four bars of Shostakovich's Fifth descends to a motto rhythm of three repeated As on the violins. These As

would become much more important later in the symphony.

Four months after he withdrew his Fourth Symphony, he began writing his Fifth. This work, he hoped, would mark his political rehabilitation, at least outwardly coming up to party expectations. It could pass for an example of the heroic classicism demanded by official policy. He showed the first movement to Tikhon Khrennikov, Aram Khachaturian, and Vissarian Shebalin in May, and the first two movements were performed in June for Nikolai Zhilyaev and Grigoriy Frid. In October, he and Nikita Bogoslovsky performed a four-handed piano arrangement, after which Yevgeniy Mravinsky and Shostakovich began preparing for the orchestral premiere. Shostakovich slimmed down his musical style considerably from the superabundance of the Fourth, with less orchestral color and a smaller breadth of scope. With this scaling down also came a refinement of his pithiness and a deepening of ambiguity. More importantly, Shostakovich found a language through which he could speak with power and eloquence over the following three decades. Paul Bekker, in describing Mahler's works, called this power *gesellschaftsbildende Kraft*, literally "community-moulding power." It is the power to weld an audience together, uplifting and moving them in a single emotion-controlled wave, sweeping aside all intellectual reservations.

The Symphony quotes Shostakovich's song *Vozrozhdenije* (Op. 46 No. 1, composed in 1936–37), most notably in the last movement, which uses a poem by Alexander Pushkin (find text and a translation here) that deals with the matter of rebirth. This song is by some considered to be a vital clue to the interpretation and understanding of the whole symphony. In addition, commentators have noted that Shostakovich incorporated a motif from the "Habanera" from Bizet's *Carmen* into the first movement, a reference to Shostakovich's earlier infatuation with a woman who refused his offer of marriage, and subsequently moved to Spain and married a man named Roman Carmen.



SHOSTAKOVICH SYMPHONY NO. 5

István Kertész conducts Orchestre de la Suisse Romande

- 1. Moderato**
- 2. Allegretto**
- 3. Largo**
- 4. Allegro non troppo**

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