

ness. The music also has a tendency to stop and start in places. Overall, though the work is not one of Shostakovich's greatest, it is one of the finest first symphonies ever written and has remained in the standard repertory.

Shostakovich extracted this suite from his unsuccessful 1930 so-called athletic ballet, *The Age of Gold*, about the adventures of a Soviet soccer team abroad. The suite's four unnamed movements last a mere 16 or 17 minutes. The opening movement, "Introduction," derives from the work's overture. It is vigorous and colorful, sassy and sarcastic, auguring the music in the composer's 1936 *Symphony No. 5*. After a playful, mischievous opening, a parade of themes and light moods ensues, with numerous tempo shifts, the whole sounding episodic in its generally comic character. The ensuing *Adagio*, fully half the entire length of the suite, begins with a lovely, if slightly sour theme on soprano saxophone, representing a cabaret singer in the ballet. The middle section turns darkly intense, but the outer panels are dreamy and nocturnal. The ensuing *Polka*, satirizing League of Nations politicians, is humorous if a bit overdone, and the concluding rambunctious "Dance," whose music is associated with the soccer team in the ballet, clearly exhibits the influence of Stravinsky's *Petrushka*.



First symphonies are generally unsuccessful, or at least questionably successful as compositions. The Brahms First and the Prokofiev "Classical" Symphony are exceptions, not least because in the former instance the composer completed the work when he was 42, and in the latter because the pastiche nature of the piece reflected Prokofiev's youthful inclination toward surprises and stimulated his natural ability to write memorable melodies. Shostakovich's First Symphony is light in mood, like Prokofiev's, but is written in a thoroughly modern, if conservative vein.

Shostakovich was 19 when he completed the piece, which he used as his graduation exercise for the Leningrad Conservatory. While he was working on it, he considered calling it "Symphony -- Grottesque." It was premiered on May 12, 1926, to an overwhelmingly enthusiastic reception. The symphony quickly caught on throughout the world, as Bruno Walter, Leopold Stokowski, and other noted conductors championed it. By the age of 21 Shostakovich was something of a celebrity, even mentioned in the company of the two Russian giants living abroad, Prokofiev and Stravinsky.

The symphony already shows characteristics of Shostakovich's mature style, especially in its sense -- burgeoning though it was -- of irony and satire, as evidenced in the mischievous second movement. Both the first and second subjects of the first movement are rather typical of the mature composer as well; their

character would be out of place in the later symphonies, though not in the ballets and film scores to come.

The work is cast in four movements, with the second lasting about five minutes and the other three having a duration of around eight to ten minutes each. The first movement begins with an introductory theme played by muted trumpet and answered by the bassoon. The main theme is march-like and serious, while the second subject is lyrical and has an air of nonchalance and grace. There is much color in the orchestration when the themes are developed. Overall the melodies in this movement, light though they are, are as memorable as any Shostakovich would write.

As mentioned above, the second movement is satirical and a fine example of the composer's precocity. While it is colorful and imaginative, again featuring brilliant orchestration, it also divulges the influence of Prokofiev. It is no mere imitation, though. The third movement (Lento) begins with an oboe solo and leads to a threatening theme from the brass, after which a Largo brings calm but at the price of gloom. This movement also brings hints of the composer's later tragic style.

The finale is connected to the third movement by a drum roll. The finale (Allegro molto) clearly comes across as episodic, switching from fast to slow and from triple forte to triple piano, and moving from melancholy moods to irony and even playful-

Shostakovich Symphony No. 1

The Age Of Gold Ballet Suite

Jean Martinon The London Symphony Orchestra

Symphony No.1, Op.10

1. Allegretto - Allegro non troppo 8:49

2. Allegro 4:48

3. Lento 8:47

4. Lento - Allegro molto 9:19

The Age of Gold - Ballet Suite, Op.22a

5. Introduction (Allegro non troppo) 3:58

6. Adagio 8:46

7. Polka (Allegretto) 2:04

8. Dance (Allegro) 2:17

Recorded by RCA/Decca Producer: James Walker Engineer: Alan Reeve
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