Red Insight: Socio-Tonal Battles of Dmitri Shostakovich

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Abstract: While any research on Dmitri Shostakovich (1906–75) discusses *either* the tonal/modal properties of his music *or* the composer's civic position and Stalin's criticism against him, this article intends to discuss *both* these topics: the chronology of the accusations and criticism, and the corresponding features of Shostakovich's musical language influenced by each of these attacks. The classification of the stylistic features of Shostakovich's music addresses the composer's style as it had developed by the 1940s, characterized by its unique relationships between modality and tonality, as well as the use of twelve-tone techniques from the mid-1960s on. The writing style, which sometimes embraces the irony typical of the composer himself throughout his works, from the earliest to the latest, is a way of avoiding the insensitive or, vice versa, the pathetic manner of narration. It reflects, rather, the artistic method of research, which conveys the characteristics of the studied material into the writing style.

Keywords: Shostakovich, modality, tonality, *Alexandrian pentachord*, Stalin's criticism.

> *A distinctive feature of Shostakovich's music is not the double-lowered Phrygian mode, but the seal of a genius from the first to the last note. Beethoven in strength, Bach in depth, and second to none in a fusion of originality and tradition. Twice in life, the composer was publicly beaten down by the "fourth estate." And they did it right: one has to create working conditions for the artist so that he feels responsibility to history and does not relax.*[1]

Introduction

On a frosty, sunny day in late November 1948, the composer Dmitri Shostakovich was walking along Bolshaya Nikitskaya Street toward the Moscow Conservatory, where he was teaching composition for the sixth consecutive year. Entering the lobby, he momentarily glimpsed his name on the notice board. He took off his glasses, which were fogged up from the cold, to wipe them. When he put his glasses on again, and narrowly squinted his eyes to see what was written in a small font, he was dumbfounded—the notice on the board read: "Shostakovich D.D. is no longer a professor in the composition class due to a mismatch of professorship qualifications...."[2] This little known fact in the

[1] Alexander Rosenblatt, *A Bird's-eye History of Music: Notes of a Hermit Harpsichordist.* Unpublished manuscript, c. 1998.

[2] According to the memory of M. Rostropovich, then a student of Shostakovich in the instrumentation class. Retrieved from https://www.culture.ru/persons/8322/dmitrii-shostakovich, accessed 25 November 2019. Hereafter, translations of Russian sources are mine, unless otherwise specified—A.R.

composer's life has only recently been made public. An additional fact that has become known only today is that Shostakovich never returned to teaching at the Moscow Conservatory until the end of his days. Yet, why was this leading Soviet composer, author of the famous Seventh (Leningrad) Symphony, fired shortly after the end of World War II?

The literature on Shostakovich in general—and relevant to this study in particular—is divided clearly into three disjoint groups: 1) analysis of the tonal (or modal) properties of his music;[3] 2) discussions of the civil stance of the composer and persecution against him by the authorities;[4] and 3) his personal life and hobbies.[5] Below, I shall try to combine the first two of the above aspects, offering a chronology of the accusations and criticism, and the corresponding properties of the composer's musical language, which was directly affected by each of these events, accompanied by a brief description of a specific phenomenon (explained in terms of music theory) with a corresponding musical example.

The style of this article sometimes goes into the irony or even the grotesque—an artistic device used by the composer himself[6] from his early works (such as "The Octet of Janitors" from the opera *Nose*, 1927) to the later ones (such as "Five Romances" to texts taken from the satirical magazine *Crocodile*, 1965). The chosen tone should in no way be taken as disrespect for the great composer or for his homeland, of which he was a true citizen (and remained so during difficult times for the country and for himself, when humor and self-irony helped him to cope with the situation). The irony, therefore, is a means of avoiding the insensitive or, conversely, pathetic manner of storytelling and it represents, rather, a research method that brings the characteristics of the material under study into the writing style used.

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[3] First of all, works by Russian music theorists Alexander Dolzhansky, Leo Mazel, and others summarized in Ellon D. Carpenter, "Russian Theorists on Modality in Shostakovich's Music." In *Shostakovich Studies*, ed. David Fanning, Chapter 4 (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press), pp. 76–112.

[4] These are, for example, the book of memories by the composer's children: *Шостакович в воспоминаниях сына Максима, дочери Галины и протоиерея Михаила Ардова*, Москва: Захаров, 2003 (*Shostakovich in the Memories of the Son Maxim, daughter Galina, and Archpriest Mikhail Ardov*. Moscow: Zakharov, 2003), and Julian Barnes, *The Noise of Time* (London: Jonathan Cape, 2016), a book, however, which uses a method that "mixes fiction and biography, memory and myth," as Orlando Figes defines it in his review of this book (https://www.nybooks.com/articles/2016/05/26/julian-barnes-shostakovich-courage/).

[5] The most noticeable here certainly are Solomon Volkov, *Testimony: The Memoirs of Dmitri Shostakovich* (New York: Harper and Row, 1979), despite a certain unreliability and ambiguity of this source, which turns the polemic about its legitimacy into the fourth of the above groups; and Sofiya Khentova, *Amazing Shostakovich* (София Хентова, *Удивительный Шостакович*) (St. Petersburg: Variant, 1993). While these two authors present quite different aspects of the Soviet/Russian palette of Shostakovich's biographers, the Western side is presented in Laurel E. Fay, *Shostakovich: A Life* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000), which is perhaps the most substantial monograph written to this day on the life of the composer.

[6] For the range of irony-related artistic techniques in Shostakovich's works see Esti Sheinberg, *Irony, Satire, Parody, and the Grotesque in the Music of Shostakovich: A Theory of Musical Incongruities* (London: Routledge, 2000).

The Landmarks of Criticism

Authorities love tonal music—that is, music in familiar scales, with a clear hierarchy of chords and single sounds. This makes them feel calm: as long as the composers write tonal music, the authorities have nothing to worry about. Yet, "when modes of music change, the fundamental laws of the state always change with them," Plato said.[7] Indeed, all revolutions in history were accompanied, if not preceded, by "musical revolutions." The two Russian revolutions of the early twentieth century were no exception, and their peaks and flares erupted from the Russian music of the epoch, first and foremost that of Scriabin.

Figure 1 Shostakovich in Leningrad, 28 June 1925. Credit: *Dmitri Shostakovich: Pages of His Life in Photographs* / Olga Dombrovskaya[8]

Born in St. Petersburg in 1906, Dmitri Shostakovich absorbed the musical style of the era on the eve of the October Revolution (1917), and during the years of the subsequent civil war (1918–21). Studying piano and composition at the conservatory in his hometown (then renamed Petrograd), where he was admitted in 1919 at the age of 13, Shostakovich sought his own musical style from his first steps as a composer, unlike the styles of Scriabin or the new Russian classics—Stravinsky and Prokofiev. His First Symphony, Op. 10 (1925), which was a graduate work, had a lucky fate from the very beginning—it was noticed by Bruno Walter and Leopold Stokowski, who introduced it to European and American audiences. "Those who mistook his First Symphony for youthful, carefree and cheerful were mistaken," noted Leo Arnshtam, the Soviet film director and screenwriter. "It is filled with such human drama that it's even strange to imagine that a 19-year-old boy lived such a life."[9] Shostakovich (see Figure 1) became a household name in a fairly short time, being promoted by one of the Soviet leaders of that period, Mikhail Tukhachevsky, with whom the composer had become close.

[7] Plato, *The Republic*, trans. Benjamin Jowett (New York: Cosimo [1894], 2008), p. 93.
[8] All images in the article are reproduced in accordance with the *Code of Best Practices in Fair Use in the Visual Arts* by the College Art Association of America, Inc., © 2019.
[9] https://www.culture.ru/persons/8322/dmitrii-shostakovich, accessed 2 January 2020.

Until the mid-1930s, the creative atmosphere of Soviet music was both innovative and daring. This was the decade when Shostakovich experimented a lot with trendy atonality, ironized in the genres of opera and ballet, and closely communicated and worked together with such outstanding personalities as the poet Vladimir Mayakovsky and theater director Vsevolod Meyerhold. The collapse came about in 1936, when Stalin attended a performance of Shostakovich's opera *Lady Macbeth of the Mtsensk District*. The next day, *Pravda*, the central organ of the Soviet press, published an unsigned editorial "Muddle Instead of Music," which was the first blow to be publicly delivered to the young composer by Stalin's criticism. Soviet artists and intellectuals were shocked; some of them thought it was merely an oversight on Stalin's part that such an article had been published. Several people even wrote letters to Stalin in an attempt to protect the composer, including the writer Maxim Gorky:

> Shostakovich, a young man, about 25 years old, is undeniably talented, but very self-confident and very nervous. The article in *Pravda* hit him like a brick on the head, the guy is completely depressed. [...] "Muddle," but why? In what and how is this expressed? Here critics must give a technical assessment of Shostakovich's music. But the article of *Pravda*, instead, allowed a flock of mediocre people, halturists, in every possible way to poison Shostakovich. [...] The attitude expressed by *Pravda* cannot be called "careful" in any way, and he deserves a careful attitude as the most gifted of all modern Soviet musicians.[10]

The article led Shostakovich to remove the Fourth Symphony from rehearsals and, for the first time in his life, he thought about changing his musical language. The Fifth Symphony, written shortly afterwards, was perceived as "tonal music" in the full sense of the word. Shostakovich was aware of the position in which he found himself—many of his acquaintances, with whom he worked or just talked, disappeared into the dungeons of the Stalinist secret police (NKVD). Maxim Shostakovich, the composer's son, states that once, after Shostakovich had visited Tukhachevsky, he was summoned to the Leningrad Directorate of the NKVD and asked to recall if Tukhachevsky had discussed the plan for the murder of Stalin with his guests. Shostakovich denied any knowledge, and was called in the next day to continue the interrogation. He was miraculously saved by the fact that the investigator himself was arrested the next morning.[11] Tukhachevsky and Meyerhold were executed in 1937 and 1940, respectively.

Jazz Suite, written in simple tonal language, also dates from this period. Since the autograph of this cycle is considered lost, one of its parts, the so-called *Waltz No. 2*, is still the subject of debate—whether it was written in 1938 as part of this suite or later, in 1956, as background music for the film "First Echelon," where it is heard for the first time. Regardless of when this particular piece was written, the period of Shostakovich's "red insight" lasted until the end of the 1950s, more than a decade after the second wave of Stalin's criticism of the composer—namely the 1948 Decree of the Central Committee

[10] M. Gorky, "Two Letters to Stalin," *Literaturnaya Gazeta*, 10 March 1993 (in Russian).
[11] Ardov, *Shostakovich in the Memories*, 59.

of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union (CPSU) "On the opera *The Great Friendship* by Vano Muradeli," in which the leading Soviet composers Shostakovich and Prokofiev were declared "formalists." Shostakovich, who was very productive during the World War II years, and who had seemingly regained the favor of the authorities and gradually moved back to the elements of musical language characteristic of his early style, accepted the criticism and honestly tried to comprehend it publicly:

> No matter how hard it is for me to hear the condemnation of my music, and even more so the condemnation of it by the Central Committee, I know that the party is right, that the party wishes me good and that I have to look for and find concrete creative ways that would lead me to Soviet realistic art. I understand that this is not an easy path for me, that it's not so easy for me to start writing in a new way. [...] But I can't help but look for these new ways, because I am a Soviet artist, I was brought up in a Soviet country, I have to seek and want to find a way to the heart of the people.[12]

Soon after the Decree, Shostakovich was dismissed from the Leningrad and Moscow Conservatories.

Heeding the Call of the Party

A year after the second wave of criticism, Shostakovich was prompted to go to a Peace Conference in the United States. For the composer, this was an unusually difficult task: he had to officially represent Soviet cultural policy while, in fact, being its victim. The composer tried to refuse to go on the trip under the pretext of poor health, and also directly explained to Stalin, who called him on the phone, that he would not go to represent a country where his music was not performed.[13] Most sources claim that Stalin's order that Shostakovich's music should not be played was then rescinded, as Stalin had promised the composer, and Shostakovich went to America as part of the Soviet delegation.

The widely publicized performances of his Seventh ("Leningrad") symphony in 1942–43 made Shostakovich much more than a composer in the eyes of the Americans—he was almost a folk hero. Moreover, the American public, knowing of Shostakovich's recent troubles and the 1948 resolutions, was expressing solidarity and support for the composer, in light of which—and considering that it was then a peak in the Cold War—Shostakovich had to be extremely cautious in any utterance. The composer's admission of his failure to adhere to official Soviet musical policy was a reported element of his long speech, as Klefstad states.[14] However, a much more serious issue is widely discussed in this context:

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[12] *First All-Union Congress of Soviet Composers*, Verbatim report. M., 1948, 343 (in Russian).
[13] According to the memory of T. Khrennikov, then chairman of the Union of Composers of the USSR (https://www.pravda.ru/culture/197940-xrennikov/, accessed 13 March 2020) and some other sources.
[14] Terry Klefstad, "Shostakovich and the Peace Conference," *Music and Politics*, 6/2 (2012): 18.

> At the end of Shostakovich's lengthy speech, Nicolas Nabokov[15] gave a tangible expression of these sentiments; he rose to his feet and asked Shostakovich two questions: 1) Was he in agreement with the recent "bilious" attacks in the Soviet press on Paul Hindemith, Arnold Schoenberg, and Igor Stravinsky? and 2) How can free cultural exchange exist when the USSR disallowed the performance of virtually all modern Western repertoire? In his memoir, Nabokov wrote that he asked these questions in order to expose Shostakovich's inability to respond freely. […] Nabokov, as an emigré, had a personal interest in exposing the lack of freedom for Soviet citizens. […] Shostakovich responded to these provocative questions in a predictable manner: that he agreed with the criticism of modern composers, and that the best works of the West would always find a place in the Soviet repertoire.[16]

In the photo below (see Figure 2), the composer is most likely captured right after this episode.

Figure 2 Shostakovich at the Peace Conference, New York, 25 March 1949
Credit: International News Photo

Only a few documents testify to Shostakovich's real attitude to the events that happened to him at that time. The most comprehensive among such sources are the composer's letters to his closest friend Isaak Glikman, published and commented on by the addressee.[17] Yet, reading this source, one should clearly understand that this entire

[15] Nicolas Nabokov, cousin of the writer Vladimir Nabokov, was a Russian-born American composer, known mainly for his efforts to resist the Soviet influence on cultural processes in post-war Western Europe. According to S. Volkov, this activity ended in scandal when it turned out that it was funded by the CIA. In the late 1960s, recognition of ties with the CIA became extremely embarrassing for leading American intellectuals, who had been enthusiastically supporting this activity for many years. For more details see Ivan Tolstoi, "Another Nabokov" (Иван Толстой, «Другой Набоков»), *Radio Svoboda*, 23 April 1998. https://www.svoboda.org/a/29204372.html.

[16] Klefstad, "Shostakovich and the Peace Conference," 19.

[17] *Письма к другу: Письма Д. Д. Шостаковича к И. Д. Гликману.* Сост. и комментарии И. Д. Гликмана. М.: DSCH / СПб.: Композитор, 1993. English version: *Story of a Friendship: The Letters of Dmitry Shostakovich to Isaak Glikman, 1941–1975*, trans. Anthony Philips (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2001).

collection undoubtedly underwent strict censorship by the author himself, since in Stalinist Russia one careless word in your letter could cost you and your addressee life. This is something that Western reviewers sometimes ignore.[18]

The second wave of criticism led Shostakovich to pay special attention as to how he maintained his "decency," that is, in terms of musical notation, how he indicated the key signature and how it matched the final chord of any of his works. This eventually became a symbol of how he was heeding the Party's call to write in a manner perceived by the "folk." The consistent departure from the style that took shape toward the 1940s, after the first wave of criticism, would continue until the early 1960s. Shortly before that, in 1958, Shostakovich again had the opportunity to travel abroad, this time to England, to Oxford University, where he was awarded an Honorary Doctorate.

The British philosopher Isaiah Berlin, who hosted Shostakovich during his stay in Oxford, later shared the impression that the composer had made on him in one of his personal letters:

> [I]t is terrible to see a man of genius victimised by a regime, crushed by it into accepting his fate as something normal, terrified almost of being plunged into some other life, with all powers of indignation, resistance, protest removed like a sting from a bee, thinking that unhappiness is happiness and torture is normal life.[19]

Born in Riga into a Russian-Jewish family, Berlin himself was sensitive to the oppression of the intelligentsia in Soviet Russia. He was brought to England as a twelve-year-old and, it would seem, was completely comfortable there. However, when addressed as an English philosopher, Berlin usually insisted that he wasn't an English philosopher, but would forever be a Russian Jew, as Tamir states.[20] Being one of the brightest minds of post-war Europe, Berlin understood that Russia, not the West, was a natural place for a Russian genius, and he was deeply touched by the fate of the composer, who did not know a word of English and simply loved his native country, no matter what.

Something of his Own

Despite the significant stylistic differences between the works created in different periods, Shostakovich's music can be recognized from the first bar. What, therefore, are the features of the composer's musical language that make him so recognizable? With the exception of a few early studies of Soviet music theorists on "Shostakovich modes" (which reached a peak in the 1960s—primarily the aforementioned Dolzhansky and Mazel), as well as some later studies, dedicated to problems of style and semantics

[18] "For the first time, a significant collection of Shostakovich's letters is available in English, providing a clear window into the personality and the day-to-day life of the composer," writes an American columnist (David Hendricks, "Composer Revealed through Letters," *San Antonio Express-News*, 17 March 2002).
[19] Isaiah Berlin, *Enlightening: Letters 1946–1960*, ed. H. Hardy & J. Holmes (London: Pimlico, 2011), pp. 640–41.
[20] Yael Tamir, "Whose History? What Ideas?." In *Isaiah Berlin – A Celebration*, ed. E. Ullmann-Margalit & A. Margalit (London: Hogarth Press, 1991), p. 146.

(mainly in the 1970s and 1980s—such as articles by Bobrovsky and Aranovsky[21]), no modern study deals with the correlation between the composer's unique modality and the rather traditional concept of tonality with a clear key signature and tonic triad at the end. Tsoi describes this situation in his 2004 PhD thesis.[22] A later article by Nadler on Shostakovich's "autographic chords"[23] does not substantially change the picture.

Discussing a number of essential features of Shostakovich's music below, in terms of terminology, I will follow Carpenter's summary[24] (which Tsoi considers to be the major study dedicated to how Soviet musicologists studied the modal side of Shostakovich's music[25]). Otherwise, I present my own observations, talking about things that have not been described in the available literature, at least from this point of view.

In my view, there are five main characteristics in Shostakovich's music from the 1940s to the early 1960s:

1) The modal basis of the melodic line;
2) The tonal basis of the harmonic texture;
3) Diminished fourth as a modal cell;
4) Pure fifth as a modal frame for six pitches; and
5) Indirect correlation between melody and harmony.

The modal base of Shostakovich's music, referred to among Soviet musicologists as "Shostakovich modes," was considered as altered scales of diatonic modes. Since certain degrees (including 2) in these scales have been "lowered," the Phrygian mode with its flattened 2 was adopted as a basic scale (for this construct) in which other degrees could then be treated as lowered. Such, for example, is a "twice-lowered Phrygian mode." Beginning, for example, on B, the scale will be B–C–D–E♭–F♯–G–A–B♭ in which E♭ is lowered 4 and B♭ is lowered 8 of the mode. Never appearing in its entirety (as any of these scales), this mode is rather the basic one for part of the melodic patterns in Second Piano Sonata, Op. 61 (1943). A diminished fourth limits both the lower and upper tetrachords of this scale, dividing it into two almost independent cells. The lower tones of each of these two cells are regularly supported by the B minor triad, which in itself indicates quite independent scales for the linear and harmonic layers of the homophonic texture.

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[21] For example, Viktor Bobrovsky, "On Some Features of Shostakovich's Style of the Sixties," *Muzyka i sovremennost*, Vol. 8, M., 1974, pp. 161–201 (Part 1); Vol. 9, M., 1975, pp. 39–77 (Part 2); and Mark Aranovsky, "The Fifteenth Symphony of Shostakovich and Some Questions of Musical Semantics," *Voprosy teorii i estetiki muzyki*, Vol. 15. L., 1977, pp. 55–94 (both in Russian).

[22] Yong-Gil Tsoi, "Features of the Style of D.D. Shostakovich: The Results and Problems of Studying in Soviet and Russian Musicology." Abstract of PhD thesis, Russian Institute of Art History, St. Petersburg 2004 (in Russian). http://cheloveknauka.com/cherty-stilya-d-d-shostakovicha, accessed 26 February 2020.

[23] Svetlana Nadler, "Autographic Chords of D. Shostakovich." *Bulletin of the Adygea State University. Series "Philology and Art Criticism,"* Vol. 4 (Maykop: ASU Publishing House, 2010), pp. 206–10 (in Russian).

[24] Carpenter, "Russian Theorists on Modality."

[25] Tsoi, "Features of the Style of D.D. Shostakovich."

Another construct, which bears the name of its inventor, Alexander Dolzhansky (see Figure 3), is the "Alexandrian pentachord" (Александрийский пентахорд).[26]

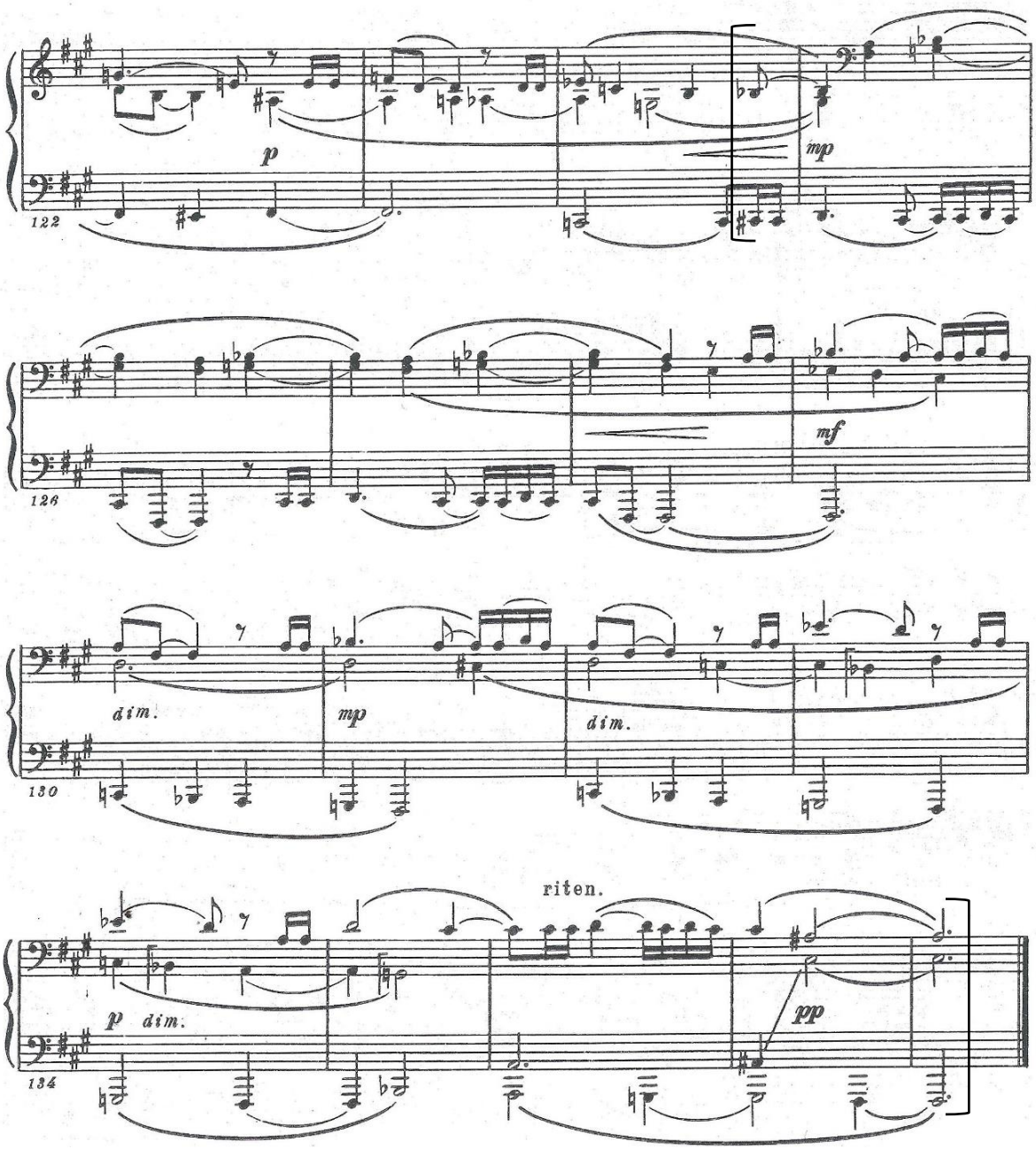
Figure 3 Alexander Dolzhansky, c. 1960
Credit: Vladimir Frumkin

This construct refers to the fifth-compassed scale of six pitches, two of which are alterations of the same degree. Thus, beginning on F♯, with the alterations of 5, one of such scales is F♯–G–A–B♭–C–C♯. It includes a modal cell of diminished fourth (F♯–G–A–B♭), lower tetrachord of G minor, and F sharp minor triad. The most prominent expression of this phenomenon is probably bitonality, when there are simultaneously two minor keys with half-a-tone difference in pitch. As the clearest example of this tonal duality, I suggest the last 14 bars of the Fugue in F sharp minor from Preludes and Fugues, Op. 87 (1950–51)—see Example 1. The feeling of tonality fluctuates between F sharp minor and G minor, and eventually comes to the F sharp major chord, which is a parallel major for both these keys in the system of "Shostakovich modes."[27]

[26] The construct was introduced by Dolzhansky in his last article, "The Alexandrian Pentachord in the Music of D. Shostakovich" (Александрийский пентахорд в музыке Шостаковича), first published in *Dmitri Shostakovich*, ed. L.V. Danilevich, D.V. Zhitomirsky, & G.Sh. Ordzhonikidze (Moscow, 1967), pp. 397–439. This article, although mentioned, is not included in the general discussions of Carpenter's "Russian Theorists on Modality."

[27] Dolzhansky suggests this key relationship in his article "About the Modal Basis of the Compositions of Shostakovich" (О ладовой основе сочинений Шостаковича). The article was first published in *Sovetskaya muzyka* 4 (1947): 64–74. In 1948, the musicologist was fired for his refusal to condemn Shostakovich, who was being heavily criticized at that time. Dolzhansky returned to Leningrad Conservatory in 1954, where he taught until he died in 1966. Mazel, a professor at the Moscow Conservatory, wrote his article "Notes on the Musical Language of Shostakovich" (Заметки о музыкальном языке Шостаковича) in 1944, and was ready to publish it in the late 1940s. However, he withdrew the article from publication after critical attacks were made on the composer. The article was first published twenty years later in *Dmitri Shostakovich*, ed. L.V. Danilevich, D.V. Zhitomirsky, & G.Sh. Ordzhonikidze (Moscow, 1967), pp. 303–59. Dolzhansky, therefore, remained a pioneer among researchers of Shostakovich—A.R.

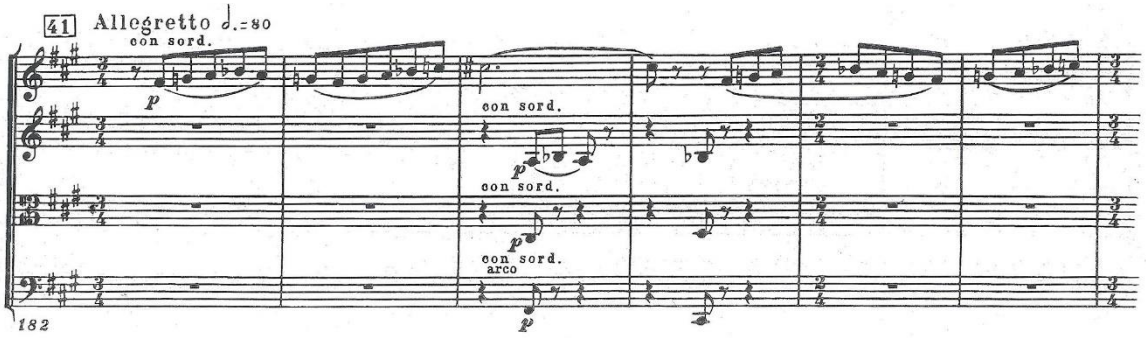
Example 1 Fugue in F sharp minor (Op. 87, No. 8), bars 125–38



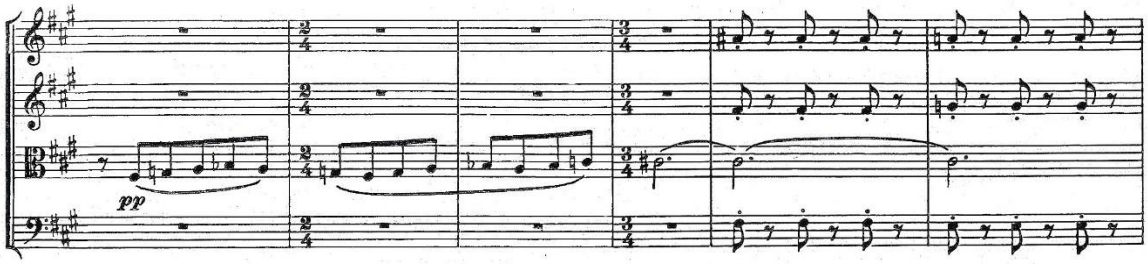
Another related phenomenon is a "gap" in correlation between tonal harmony and modal melody, which, specifically, allows the composer to place such a melody in either major or minor tonal context *without changes* in its scale. This, for example, is how the second theme of the finale of Seventh Quartet, Op. 108 (1960) is cadenced for the first and second time, namely in F sharp minor and F sharp major, respectively (see Examples 2a, b):

Example 2 Seventh Quartet, Op. 108, third movement

a) rehearsal number 41



b) rehearsal number 52



I found that such "changelings" or, more precisely, subtle major–minor games appear also in other works of Shostakovich, namely:

Piano Sonata No. 2, 3rd movement—bars 2–10 *vs* bars 414–35;
Trio No. 2, 4th movement—rehearsal numbers 71 *vs* 86;
Symphony No. 9, 2nd movement—rehearsal numbers 35 *vs* 42;
Quartet No. 11 – 2nd movement, rehearsal number 7 *vs* 7th movement, rehearsal number 44;
Piano Concerto No. 2, 1st movement—rehearsal numbers 6 *vs* 18.

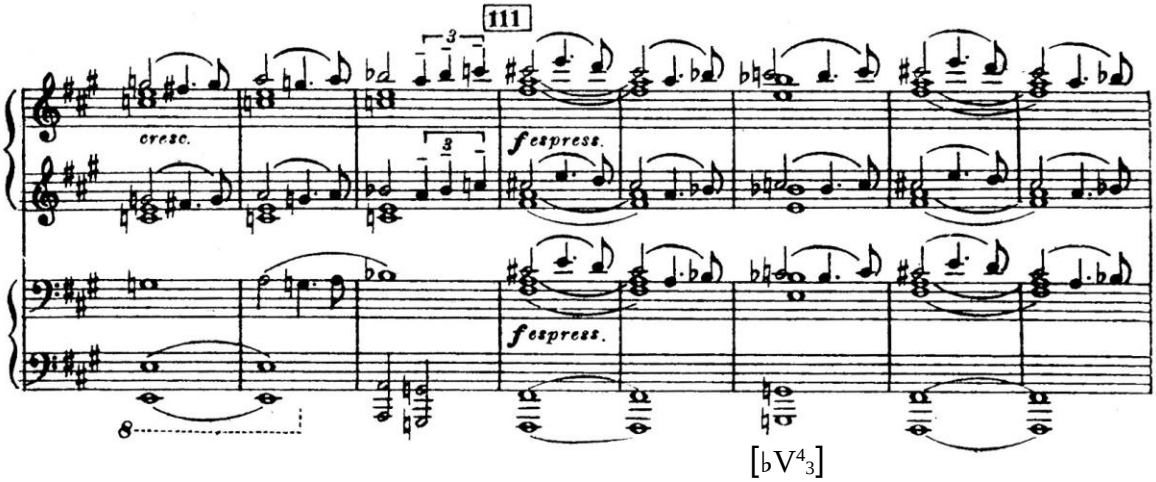
Yet I found neither a description nor even a mention of this phenomenon in available literature.

The struggle between Shostakovich's highly individual melodic language and rather traditional harmony in terms of general tonal plan, cadences, and most of the harmonic progressions may bear witness to a kind of "socio-tonal battle" that the composer waged with himself for the right to express his personal voice in the conditions imposed upon him by Stalin's criticism and Zhdanov's cultural policy.[28] Obviously, the composer wanted his music to be performed and, moreover, sincerely wished to be understood by the people of his country. This battle sometimes leaned in favor of regular tonality, and then such compositions as "Waltz No. 2" and songs for movies emerged.

[28] The Soviet cultural doctrine, according to which artists, writers, and composers had to adhere to the party line in their creative work, was developed by the ideologist Andrei Zhdanov, then secretary of the CPSU Central Committee. This policy was carried out directionally from 1945 to 1948, up until Zhdanov's death, but its echoes were felt for another ten years—A.R.

Yet, when the battle leaned rather in favor of modality, unique harmonic progressions were born, like those of the funeral marches from the third movement of the Eleventh Symphony (rehearsal numbers 108 to 113), and from the second movement of the Fifteenth Symphony (bars 1–17). In the first case, the ♭V$^{4}_{3}$ interchanges with the minor tonic (see Example 3). In the latter case, the melodic-harmonic progression begins with F minor and leads to C major, which feels here like a very distant key, as if it were a modulation to other worlds, and not to the regular dominant.

Example 3 Eleventh Symphony, second movement, bars 1–7 of rehearsal number 111
(in the composer's arrangement for 4 hands)

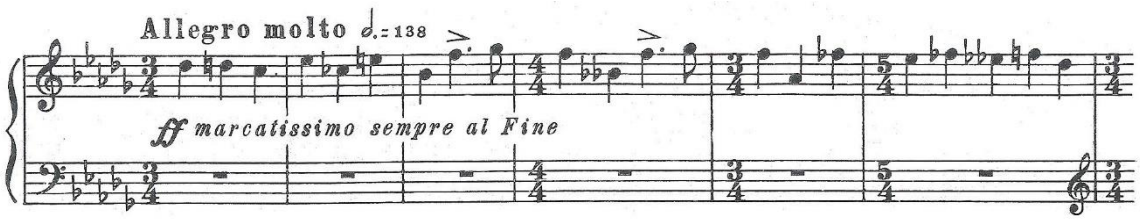


However, in most cases, the battle ended with a "victory" of a personal and at the same time widely perceived style, as, for example, in the second theme from the second movement of the Seventh Symphony (rehearsal numbers 76–79), where bitonality, unique modality, and unusual harmonic progressions again and again lead to a muffled, but so coveted B minor.

Easy Deviations and Rudeness-eliminating Actions

Politburo members, even if they did not have a good understanding of contemporary music, did know how to count to twelve. This is why, until the 1960s, Soviet composers avoided dodecaphony like the plague, so as not to be unambiguously ranked as formalists. Being one of the most scared composers, Shostakovich did not think in this direction at the time. It is curious, however, that the theme of his Fugue in D flat major from Preludes and Fugues, Op. 87 (1950–51) contains *11 tones*; it lacks only G (natural) to be a 12-tone (see Example 4).

Example 4 Fugue in D flat major (Op. 87, No. 15), bars 1–6



In the 1960s, however, the composer no longer considered it right to continue to consistently avoid the 12-tone techniques. Yet life had taught him to be extremely cautious. Thus, the second theme in the second movement of the Sonata for Violin and Piano, Op. 134 (1968) contains all 12 tones but—as if to explain why he has nothing to do with formalists—Shostakovich successively beats the B flat major chord immediately before and after the series. After this easy deviation from the Party line clearly went without consequences, the Fifteenth Symphony, Op. 141 (1971) is already a masterful synthesis of tonality, modality, and 12-tone technique, while the latter, being installed into the tonal context, is treated as sonoristics, intonationally enhanced modality, or chromatic tonality. After each 12-tone construct, a clear tonal cadence or tonal fragment appears, including—in this very role—a quote from Rossini's *Wilhelm Tell*. The sonoristic effect of 12-tone constructs is also used in the very last of Shostakovich's works—Sonata for Viola and Piano, op. 147 (1975).[29]

During the Brezhnev period, when the composer's life, in fact, was not in danger (except for his deteriorating health), Shostakovich returned to the palette of ironic and grotesque music. Here, works unsuited to the genre of classical romance appear—starting with Five Romances for voice and piano to texts from the satiric magazine *Crocodile*, Op. 121 (1965).[30] The story of the "rudeness-eliminating actions" to the words from the explanatory note at the police station is perhaps one of the brightest pages in the history of comic music.

A rare artistic device, self-irony, is used in the "Preface to the Complete Edition of My Works and a Brief Reflection on this Preface," for bass and piano, Op. 123 (1966).[31] This is rather atonality, but with the preservation of the author's "intonational vocabulary" (Boris Asafiev's term), first and foremost his autograph—"DSCH" (D-Es-C-H, that is, the Russian-adopted German abbreviation for D-E♭-C-B). The most tonally perceived fragment is a progression, which resembles the ♭II$_6$ – I, to the word «СССР» ("USSR") in a long list of composer's positions and duties that follows his musical signature:

[29] The "unorthodox" use of dodecaphony in Shostakovich's late works has been noted by a number of researchers, for example, Levon Hakobian: *Music of the Soviet Era: 1917–1991* (2nd ed.) (London: Routledge, 2017), p. 218.
[30] Пять Романсов для голоса и фортепиано на тексты из сатирического журнала «Крокодил», соч. 121 (1965).
[31] «Предисловие к Полному собранию моих сочинений и краткое размышление по поводу этого предисловия» для баса и фортепиано, соч. 123 (1966).

Первый секретарь Союза композиторов РСФСР.	(First Secretary of the Union of Composers of the RSFSR.
Просто секретарь Союза композиторов *СССР*.	Just a secretary of the Union of Composers of the *USSR*.)

This directly corresponds to the historic precedent in Russian romance—the well-known Dargomyzhsky's "Worm" («Червяк», 1858) to Kurochkin's translation of Béranger, in which this noticeable chord ($\flat II_6$) falls on the word «сиятельством» ("excellency"):

Ведь я червяк в сравненье с ним!	('Cause I'm a worm compared to him!
В сравненье с ним, лицом таким,	Compared to him, to such a man,
Его *сиятельством* самим!	His *excellency* himself!)

The Last Joke

Now let's get back to the epigraph to this article. It was originally written in Russian,[32] at a time when such politically incorrect, at times Aesopian language, was the norm if not the only acceptable form of expressing something in the "kitchen talk" of the intelligentsia, which was an important part of the late Soviet and early post-Soviet Russian culture. Not surprisingly, this largely corresponds to the style (language and even some kind of disrespect) that is used in Volkov's book for almost all its characters. Yet, the English translation of *Testimony* (which was the *originally* published material) was done so clumsily that it reads like a blasphemous falsehood to sensitive readers (both English- and Russian-speaking).[33] The appearance of a "reverse translation" of the book into Russian in 2009[34] to some extent improved the situation, as it allows you to feel what was originally *meant* there.

Remember the passage about the meeting of Glazunov with the choreographer Petipa, none of whom can recall the plot of Glazunov's *Raymonda*? Or Prokofiev's story:

And this was where Prokofiev landed like a chicken in soup. He came to Moscow to	А вот почему Прокофьев угодил, как кур в ощип. Он приехал в Москву, чтобы

[32] «Отличительной особенностью музыки Шостаковича является не дважды пониженный фригийский лад, но отмеченность печатью гения от первой до последней ноты. По силе – Бетховен, по глубине – Бах, по сплаву самобытности с традицией – равных не было. Дважды в жизни композитора прилюдно били по голове печатным органом. И правильно делали: художнику нужно создавать условия для работы, чтоб чувствовал свою ответственность перед историей и не расслаблялся.» (Александр Розенблат. *История музыки с птичьего полета: Заметки клавесина-отшельника*. Неопубликованная рукопись, около 1998).

[33] Here I deliberately refrain from discussing the authenticity of Volkov's book, since this topic has already been well developed by scholars specializing in Russian culture and music, starting from Laurel E. Fay's Review of "*Testimony: The Memoirs of Dmitri Shostakovich* by Solomon Volkov, Antonina W. Bouis, Dmitri Shostakovich," *The Russian Review*, Vol. 39, No. 4 (Oct. 1980), pp. 484–93; Malcolm Hamrick Brown (Ed.), *A Shostakovich Casebook* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2004); and up until very recent observations, such as Hanna Bahorik, "Shostakovich and the Memoirs," *Musical Offerings*, 10/1 (2019), Article 1. DOI: 10.15385/jmo.2019.10.1.1.

[34] Соломон Волков. *Свидетельство. Воспоминания Дмитрия Шостаковича*. Обратный перевод с английского. http://testimony-rus.narod.ru/Testimony.pdf.

> teach them, and they started teaching him. Along with everyone else, he had to memorize the historic article in *Pravda* "Muddle Instead of Music." He did look through the score of my *Lady Macbeth*, however. He said, "Amusing."[35]
>
> учить других, а они начали учить его. Прежде всего прочего ему следовало изучить историческую статью в *Правде* «Сумбур вместо музыки». Он ознакомился с партитурой моей *Леди Макбет*. И сказал: «Забавно».[36]

Forty years after the publication of *Testimony*, I begin to admit that it could be just a joke of the composer himself, worthily continuing the line of the *Nose*, the *Preface*, and the "rudeness-eliminating actions" expressed in the democratic genre of "anecdotes from Shostakovich." A person who was capable of irony, grotesque, and black humor could also be capable of other forms of humor. It is probably more correct to give credit to Shostakovich himself—as his spirit has been reflected in the apocryphal folklore of the Moscow musical milieu—with his jokes in the style of Nikita Bogoslovsky,[37] which deserve more credibility than official documents written on his behalf in support of post-Zhdanov cultural policy.

Epilogue

Like many musicians and intellectuals of the late twentieth century, the author of this article did not escape a long-term passion for the personality and music of Shostakovich, devoting about fifteen years of his life to the performance and study of Shostakovich's works and the creation of a number of compositions that largely followed the musical aesthetics of the composer. There was something magnetizing in Shostakovich's personality that made you listen to the sounds of his works and provoked a burning desire for creative (performing, composing) complicity and research contact with this great person.

A look at the walls and shelves of my room, the farthest drawer of my table, and the depths of my memory reveals quite a few things that sequentially connect me with the composer: a yellowed poster of a piano recital, where I play all of his 24 Preludes and Fugues (1979); an incomplete dissertation: *"Lowered Major" in Shostakovich's Music: History, Structure, Semantics, Dramaturgy* (c. 1983–86); Trio in memory of Shostakovich, Op. 4 (1988). A complete collection of Shostakovich's music on vinyl records in the music library and about twenty pounds of books about him on the bookshelf complete the picture. I saw the composer close only once, in 1972, at the Leningrad premiere of his Fifteenth Symphony. He looked tired and very short-sighted man in massive darkened glasses. I was then a ninth grader learning piano and music theory.…

[35] Volkov, *Testimony*, 36.
[36] Волков, *Свидетельство*, 48.
[37] The Soviet songwriter N. Bogoslovsky was well known for his crass jokes in public spaces—A.R.

Many people who met the composer reported on their not indifferent attitude or direct concern for Shostakovich's personality and life. Composer Sergey Slonimsky states that Dolzhansky, who was chivalrously devoted to his artistic ideal, in the last days of his life, on the very day when his consciousness left him, as he lay dying, managed to dictate a telegram for Shostakovich's 60th birthday: "Your music was the sun of my life. Your fate was the source of my emotional turmoil. Thank you and bless you."[38]

Isaiah Berlin, who was deeply impressed by the composer's appearance and state of mind during his stay at Oxford, expresses his conclusion by saying: "[…] what an extraordinary effect censorship and prison has on creative genius. It limits it, but deepens it."[39] Yet, no matter what people on both sides of world culture and politics thought at one time or another, Shostakovich's music reflects and will further reflect on him, his country, and his era.

About the Author

Alexander Rosenblatt holds a PhD from the Hebrew University of Jerusalem (2013). Postdoctoral Research Fellow at the University of British Columbia (2013/14). Currently: Lecturer at Zefat Academic College, Israel. Author of academic publications in the USA, Germany, and Israel. Research areas: music and sociocultural issues, music of Christian worship, and personality in music.

[38] Sergey Slonimsky, "Knight of Music Science" (Сергей Слонимский. «Рыцарь музыкальной науки»), *Sovetskaya muzyka*, 9 (1983): 83.
[39] Berlin, *Enlightening*, 640.