

Piano Concerto No. 1 in C minor, Op. 35

DMITRI SHOSTAKOVICH

B. September 12, 1906, St. Petersburg

D. August 9, 1975, Moscow

Completed in July 1933; premiered on October 15 of that year with the Leningrad Philharmonic under Yevgeny Mravinsky, with the composer as piano soloist and Alexander Schmidt on trumpet.

Scored for solo piano, trumpet and strings. (approx. 21 minutes).

In the early 1930s, Shostakovich, himself an excellent pianist, focused a considerable amount of attention on composing for the piano. Riding on several recent successes, the young composer responded to increased demands that he appear on stage as a performer by writing this concerto for himself. The joy and wit that permeate this first Piano Concerto are perhaps evidence of this period of success, which unfortunately soon took a downturn following Stalin's censure of Shostakovich's opera *Lady Macbeth of Mtsensk* in 1934 (although the concerto was well received by audiences in general). The composer was understandably uneasy following this very public condemnation, and much of his later work took on a feeling of doom and hopelessness that are, in retrospect, strikingly absent here.

The overall structure of the work, quite clearly based on classical models, begins with a movement in sonata form. At the bottom of a short, descending run in the piano, the trumpet announces itself, the lone wind presence in the entire piece; soon the piano takes over with a bright, lyrical melody. The work seems full of fragments of and allusions to other genres and styles, from marches to Bach to jazz. Overall the sound is quite lean, an effect achieved through spare orchestration, clear forms, linear melodies, and the heavy use of parallel octaves, particularly in the piano, which help it be heard above the orchestra. This clarity of line and gesture highlights the surprising "wrong" keys and unexpected accents, often giving the work the feeling of a parody. This aesthetic is in line with the neo-classical writing of Shostakovich's contemporaries, such as Stravinsky, Ravel, and Prokofiev; but periodic gestures - particularly the sweeping runs in the piano - evoke Liszt and Rachmaninoff as well.

The second movement is a lyrical waltz, poignant and at times quite dramatic, but without ever turning heavy or gloomy. The melody is passed between muted trumpet, piano, and strings; it is during this movement in particular that this work seems more like a chamber piece than a concerto, each part playing a basically equal role. The waltz closes with an arpeggio in the piano, rising slowly against the stationary strings.

A gently winding passage in the piano introduces the extremely brief third movement, no more than a minute and a half long and suddenly quite serious when the strings enter. The piano's return sounds almost improvisatory, and brings the listener almost seamlessly into the final movement, with a rising run in the piano that recalls us of the work's opening descending run and indeed restores the jocular tone of the first movement. A barrage of parodic fragments follows, again referencing a huge range of

styles. The piano reenters on a trill, an unmistakable spoof on convention by introducing (rather than closing) a humorous take on a traditional cadenza. The trumpet repeatedly interrupts with an attempted closing fanfare, but is thwarted twice by interjections from the piano before successfully bringing the work to a close.

The Detroit Symphony Orchestra last performed Shostakovich's Piano Concerto No. 1 at Meadow Brook Music Festival with Gary Bertini conducting and Donald Green as soloist.

DSO SHOP @ THE MAX RECOMMENDS:

Shostakovich, Piano Concerto No. 1, Dmitri Alexeev, piano, Philip Jones, trumpet, Jerzy Maksymiuk conducting the English Chamber Orchestra, EMI 82234.