BRISBANE PHILHARMONIC ORCHESTRA.

THE REVOLUTIONARIES

METRO SERIES CONCERT #4

SUNDAY NOVEMBER 27, 3.00PM
OLD MUSEUM CONCERT HALL, BOWEN HILLS
TICKETS WWW.BPO.ORG.AU

Image: James Goss

CONDUCTOR: CHEN YANG
SOLOIST: LEVI HANSEN

PROGRAM:
BEETHOVEN EGMONT OVERTURE OP.84
BEETHOVEN PIANO CONCERTO NO. 3 IN C MINOR OP. 37
SHOSTAKOVICH SYMPHONY NO. 5 IN D MINOR OP. 47

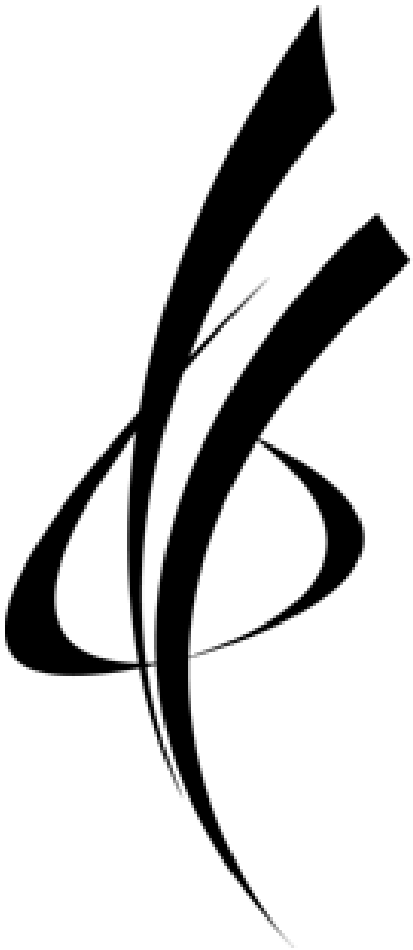
CONCERT PROGRAM

LUDWIG VAN BEETHOVEN
Egmont Overture Op.84

Piano Concerto No.3, Op.37
I. Allegro con brio
II. Largo
III. Rondo. Allegro

INTERVAL

DMITRI SHOSTAKOVICH
Symphony No. 5 in D minor Op. 47
I. Moderato—Allegro non troppo
II. Allegretto
III. Largo
IV. Allegro non troppo



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(Concertmaster)
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Emma Eriksson
Keith Gambling
Peter Nicholls
Graham Simpson
Hwee Sin Chong
Nicholas Thin#
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Marina Levy#

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Conductor
CHEN YANG

BPO is delighted to be working once again with respected conductor Chen Yang.

Chen Yang has held the position as concertmaster of the Queensland Theatre Orchestra (QTO) after graduating from the Queensland Conservatorium of Music with distinction in violin performance. He later joined the Queensland Symphony Orchestra (QSO) for many years.

Chen performs regularly as leader & conductor of both The Sinfonia of St Andrew's Orchestra and The Corda Spiritus Orchestra of Brisbane. Last year he was invited as guest conductor for a successful Gala Concert with The Northern Rivers Symphony Orchestra celebrating their 20th anniversary.

Chen has worked in music education for many years with his association with the Queensland Youth Orchestra (QYO) leading their Junior String Ensemble (JSE) consisting of up to 70 talented young string players. At present he is also conductor and string teacher at St Hilda's School, Southport.

His other musical interests include playing baroque violin with The Badinerie Players of Brisbane.

Soloist
LEVI HANSEN

The BPO is delighted to showcase our remarkable local talent, and we welcome Brisbane-based pianist, Levi Hansen

Levi recently completed a Bachelor of Music at the Queensland Conservatorium where he studied under Natasha Vlassenko. During his degree he was awarded the Margaret Anne Kerrison prize and MK Lassell prize for outstanding performance in his studies.

Levi is currently continuing at the Queensland Conservatorium completing a Master of Music majoring in Performance. He also performs with various orchestras and ensembles in Brisbane, including the Queensland Youth Symphony and most recently, with violin virtuoso Attilla Sautov and his Symphonic Rock Ensemble.

ABOUT THE ORCHESTRA

The Brisbane Philharmonic Orchestra (BPO) is Brisbane's leading community orchestra. The orchestra brings together up to 200 musicians a year to play a variety of classical orchestral music. Over 100 members of the incorporated association form the core of the orchestra. Other players perform as casual musicians, but often join as full-time members after their first concert with BPO. The orchestra was founded on principles of musical excellence and development, communal participation, and organisational professionalism.

Since its creation in 2000, the BPO has become the community orchestra of choice for over 500 musicians. It is eagerly sought as a performance partner for touring choirs, festivals, and internationally acclaimed instrumentalists and vocalists. The BPO performs its own series of symphony concerts and participates in multiple community and festival events throughout the year, attracting an audience of over 2,500 people. The orchestra's main metropolitan concert series includes four to five symphony concerts at Brisbane City Hall and the Old Museum Concert Hall. Programs vary between concerts featuring the great classical, romantic, and 20th century composers, light concerts including film music, as well as concerts with programs targeted at a younger audience. Additionally, BPO occasionally performs chamber music concerts, featuring smaller groups in a more intimate setting.

The BPO maintains many community partnerships including with the Queensland Music Festival, 4MBS Festival of Classics, Brisbane City Council, and The Brisbane Airport Corporation. These partnerships provide essential connections in artistic, educational, professional, and social programs and cater to the association's increased responsibility to culturally enhance localities and bring a diversity of people together in a fast-paced, ever-impersonal global village. Unusually for a community orchestra, entry to the BPO is by audition and the ensemble is the only community orchestra within the city that rotates guest conductors by invitation rather than establishing a permanent Music Director. Uniquely, this allows a variety of the finest local professional conductors to deliver diverse and innovative programming to artistically stimulate members of the orchestra.

PROGRAM NOTES

Ludwig van Beethoven
(1770-1827)
Egmont, Overture Op 84 (1810)

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Beethoven, himself a musical revolutionary, was in turn inspired by political revolutionaries who shared his lofty ideals of equality and freedom. The dedication of the *Eroica* symphony to Napoleon is well-known (as well as Beethoven's subsequent fit of rage when Napoleon declared himself Emperor and betrayed his revolutionary principles leading Beethoven to strike out the dedication with such savagery that the paper ripped from the force of his pen!), but other works also share this revolutionary inspiration.

The incidental music Beethoven wrote for an 1810 revival production of Goethe's play *Egmont* is some of his most popular and successful music for the stage, in no small part due to the dramatic and effective overture. The play is about the 16th century Count of Egmont in the Spanish Netherlands (now Belgium), whose unjust execution by the Spanish sparked the revolution that would eventually lead to independence of the Netherlands (which at the time included both Belgium and the modern Netherlands). Written while Vienna was under siege from the French, the subjects of heroism and oppression would no doubt have been close to Beethoven's mind during the composition!

The overture is in the dramatic and serious key of F minor, and is a kind of drama in miniature, beginning with a slow introduction with a unison *forte* chord by the full orchestra which sets the dark and tense mood. The main theme of the overture features a characteristic pattern of two long notes followed by a short note (the rhythm of the sarabande, a Spanish dance, to suggest the Spanish enemy), and will recur throughout the work. Although in 3/2 time, plaintive woodwind melodies starting on the half bar give the introduction an unsettled feel, culminating in a return of the opening chord and the sarabande theme, now *fortissimo*.

The rest of the introduction is full of nervous energy with repeated notes on the second violins and violas forming the foundation for plaintive descending phrases passed backwards and forwards between the woodwind and the first violins. The energy slowly peters out, and then out of the subdued mood comes a repeated

pattern on first violins and cellos, which sets the tempo for the main *Allegro* section of the overture, which is in sonata form.

The fast theme of the overture is initially played by the cellos, and is based on some of the woodwind material from the introduction. It is somewhat rhythmically ambiguous at first with an accented upbeat tricking the ear and making it difficult to hear that the metre has changed into 3/4 for several bars. A series of question and answer phrases lead into an extended crescendo by the strings (with woodwind offbeat 'punctuation') that grows into a violent restatement of the fast theme for full orchestra, before a return of the sarabande theme of the introduction, now as a brusque fanfare-like statement offset by lilting woodwind melodies.

The following section features a brief lightening of the mood, with a sudden modulation to a more-ebullient section based on ascending scales, which then leads into a section which transforms the fast theme as a series of major key wind solos, which slowly wind down again back into minor. The main theme then returns in the recapitulation, after which the melodic material of the fast section is presented again.

At the end of the recapitulation, a transition passage based on the sarabande theme brings the main section of the overture to an abrupt end with a sudden silence - foreshadowing the hero's execution, according to Beethoven's sketches for the work - and then after a brief woodwind phrase the ebullient coda begins pianissimo with a scurrying first violin passage which grows to a powerful fanfare. The joyful music grows louder and louder, until after two rising phrases, the lower strings, horns and trumpets play a majestic "victory" theme which Beethoven re-used for the final scene of the play where the eventual victory against the oppressor is foreshadowed, and the overture finishes triumphantly with the piccolo joining in to sail above the orchestra on the final chords.

Goethe himself hailed the music as being of "remarkable genius", and his opinion was shared by others, with the overture now being frequently played by itself as part of general concert repertoire, and recognised one of the last great works of Beethoven's middle period.

Piano Concerto No. 3 in C minor, Op 37 (1803)

.....

C minor, for Beethoven, had a particular association with heroism and innovation - it is the key of his famous Fifth Symphony, as well as lesser-known masterpieces such as his experimental Fourth String Quartet. The Third Piano Concerto is not quite the groundbreaking worth that the Fifth Symphony is, but it nevertheless marks an important progression both in Beethoven's own output and in the medium of the piano concerto itself. His first two completed concertos - while confident and extroverted as befits the composer's forceful personality - were firmly in the classical style (albeit with somewhat more showmanship than typical for Haydn or Mozart!); the Third marks one of the first works that is undisputedly "Beethoven".

Part of the change away from the lighthearted concertos of his youth would be Beethoven's own personal circumstances - as he approached 30 he began to notice the first signs of the deafness that would claim his hearing and force his withdrawal from public performance. During this time he started to despair, and contemplated suicide, but as he wrote in his famous *Heilegenstadt Testament* in 1802 (midway during the composition of the concerto) he felt a duty to "Art" to compose and produce music as long as he was able.

This embracing of difficulty is mirrored in the overall structure of the concerto - a serious, minor key first movement moving

PROGRAM NOTES (CONT.)

via a reflective, tender slow movement to a finale which struggles between major and minor, only to finally end in major-key triumph; not dissimilar to the “fate to triumph” structure of the Fifth Symphony that he started composing soon after the Third Concerto’s premiere. The first movement appears to have been completed in 1800 and then (unusually) there was a hiatus with the second and third movements not following until 1802, with the whole concerto being finished in time for a premiere in April 1803.

The Third Concerto is perhaps best viewed as the logical culmination and fulfilment of the Classical concertos of Mozart and Haydn in that it looks backwards as much as forward - the opening theme is deliberately modelled on and in homage to Mozart’s own C minor piano concerto, K491 (the opening of both concertos consists of a rising C minor triad), and for the last time in his piano concerti Beethoven leaves space for a cadenza of the soloist’s own devising.

And yet there are several unusual or experimental features - the solo part calls for the full range of the piano of the day (including the top octave which had only recently been included in the instruments range compared to the piano of Mozart’s day), the orchestral exposition is unusually long, and the soloist enters after the cadenza of the first two movements, taking lead in the codas of both movements in what would traditionally be only the orchestra’s preserve (also another homage to Mozart’s C minor concerto which similarly has the soloist playing after the cadenza). Both the tempo (Largo) and the key of the slow movement are unusual: E major is strangely remote from the C minor of the outer movements (a device that Beethoven would later use to great effect in his last concerto, the ‘Emperor’). In his following concertos, Beethoven would move away from the traditional model even further - having the soloist enter before the orchestra in the Fourth Concerto, and in the Fifth, having the cadenzas fully composed by the composer.

Beginning with a march-like theme on strings and an answering phrase on woodwinds, the first movement is around 16 minutes long, and contrasts this forceful theme against a warm, contrasting second subject played by first violins and clarinets. The soloist enters with two ascending scales, before playing the main theme unaccompanied and joined by the orchestra in the second exposition which closely follows the structure of the orchestral exposition. The central development section features the main theme turned into a more-expansive, lyrical version, with elongated piano melodic lines over a repeated accompaniment in the orchestra, before becoming more agitated. After the recapitulation, the stormy cadenza (by Beethoven himself) finishes with four subdued trills and then a coda which grows from a simmering beginning to a fiery conclusion.

The second movement - “one of the most Romantic pieces Beethoven ever composed” in the words of critic Richard Rodda - begins with solo piano, playing a quiet, slightly-melancholy melody (the “wrong note” E naturals at first tricking the ear, which is expecting the “relative” key of E flat after the C minor of the opening movement), which grows into a brief burst of passion and then subsides as the orchestra enters, with flutes and muted strings providing a lush and gentle atmosphere. The central section of the movement features decorated piano solos, including an excursion into remote keys with piano arpeggios under extended flute and bassoon melodies. The piano returns with the main theme, now joined by a countermelody by the orchestra, played

with hushed intensity, and then after a final orchestral tutti, the piano cadenza leads into a gentle coda, until a sudden forceful chord marks the end of the movement.

The finale is in sonata-rondo form, with a turbulent opening melody on piano passed onto oboe while the soloist plays running semiquaver passages, culminating in the first of several pauses which provide the soloist the opportunity to play a miniature cadenza. A contrasting major key theme with lilting ornamented phrases acts as the second subject, and there are several contrasting episodes, including a central section where after a warm clarinet melody and ornamented solos, a fugal passage introduced by lower strings turns into a series of accented repeated notes, which are picked up by the soloist and broadened into a lyrical restatement of the main rondo theme, which then ventures into the remote E major of the slow movement.

After a recapitulation of the main rondo theme and the ornamented major theme, an orchestral tutti brings things to a cadence point, and instead of the cadenza that would normally occur here, a solo piano passage - now in C major - leads into the sunny coda in 6/8 time which brings the concerto to a magnificent conclusion that would not sound out of place in one of Mozart's major-key concertos.

Beethoven himself gave the premiere in 1803, and apparently had not fully completed writing down the solo part - one of his friends, who turned pages for him during the premiere, stated that:
"I saw almost nothing but empty pages; at the most, on one page or another a few Egyptian hieroglyphs wholly unintelligible to me were scribbled down to serve as clues for him; for he played nearly all the solo part from memory since, as was so often the case, he had not had time to set it all down on paper. He gave me a secret glance whenever he was at the end of one of the invisible passages, and my scarcely concealable anxiety not to miss the decisive moment amused him greatly and he laughed heartily at the jovial supper which we ate afterwards."

As with many of Beethoven's premieres, it was performed as part of a mammoth concert, accompanied by the first two symphonies and the oratorio *Christ on the Mount of Olives*, and the orchestra wasn't up to the task - Vienna's "second tier" orchestra was all that was available (the "good" orchestra was playing a revival of Haydn's *Creation* across town the same night) and were woefully under-rehearsed.

Subsequent performances were more successful, with an early reviewer noting that the concerto requires *"a capable soloist who, in addition to everything one associates with virtuosity, has understanding in his head and a heart in his breast—otherwise, even with the most impressive preparation and technique, the best things in the work will be left behind".* The concerto was published in 1804, Beethoven finally transcribing the piano part in full, including his own cadenzas for each movement in the published score (which, as in today's concert, are typically played in modern performances), and the Third Concerto has since been an important part of the piano repertoire and frequently performed.

PROGRAM NOTES (CONT.)

Dmitri Shostakovich (1906-1975)
Symphony No. 5 in D minor, Op 47 (1937)

In the footsteps of Mahler, whose symphonies “contain the world”, Shostakovich's are dystopian fiction made song, containing the "brave new world" and all its attendant mingled dreams and nightmares. Few composers have faced the level of personal tragedy and stress associated with Shostakovich’s career as an artist under the oppressive Soviet regime, where for years he lived in fear that he would be denounced and executed, and yet was unwilling to betray his artistic principles by writing the banal, self-congratulatory music of “socialist realism” demanded by Party officials.

The resolution of this conflict led to Shostakovich’s mature musical style, in which irony and cynicism are interwoven together with the vulgar and the profound, in which a passage that on the surface seems joyful and celebratory contains hidden depths of tragedy. It is this compositional doublespeak that marred Shostakovich’s reputation in the West for many years, but his reputation (and some of his works) have been rehabilitated since the fall of the Soviet Union and he is now viewed as one of the great symphonists of all time.

This fall and rehabilitation of his reputation in the West is an ironic echo of the greatest crisis in his life, which occurred in 1936 when an article in the newspaper *Pravda* (reputedly written by Stalin himself after attending a performance and leaving early in disgust) denounced his opera *Lady Macbeth of Mtsensk* as “muddle rather than music”, sparking his sudden fall from grace - even more jarring as for the first decade or so of his compositional career, Shostakovich had been lauded as one of the artistic heroes of the Soviet Union from the landmark success of his First Symphony as a 19-year old *wunderkind*.

However, as Stalin consolidated his power in a series of purges in the 1930s - in which several of Shostakovich’s friends were arrested and exiled or executed - any official tolerance of modernist avant-garde

compositional styles, which may have been politically useful in the 1920s as a flag-waving expression of the culture of the new Soviet Union, was now extinguished and Shostakovich's music was viewed as dangerously degenerate.

Shocked by the denunciation in *Pravda*, Shostakovich withdrew his recently-completed Fourth Symphony before its premiere, and nervously awaited his own (seemingly-inevitable) arrest and disappearance - even so much as to keep a packed overnight bag by the door waiting!

The challenge was how to react: to provide a new symphony that fell foul of the Party establishment would be fatal - likely literally, not just to his career - and yet to betray his artistic principles or to stop composing altogether would destroy him. What was needed was a way of expressing himself authentically, but disguising it in a way that the Party critics would accept it as ideologically acceptable.

Whether consciously or unconsciously, Shostakovich turned to the example of one of his musical heroes, Mahler, who also had the status of outsider and felt rejected and threatened by the establishment he worked in. Mahler's Fourth Symphony is on the surface a lighthearted work of fairy tales and childhood, but at its heart lurks sinister depths; from the Fifth Symphony onwards Shostakovich's compositions (excepting a few deliberately lightweight works churned out to keep the Party happy) would be full of ironic double meanings and cloaked in a protective veil of cryptic allusion and quotation.

As Shostakovich wrote to one of his friends: *"without 'Party guidance' ... I would have displayed more brilliance, used more sarcasm, I could have revealed my ideas openly instead of having to resort to camouflage."* Ironically, this forced adoption of a new style arguably made him into a better symphonist and composer, for all the personal harm it did!

"Socialist realism" as a musical style, exalted the Classical models of art, and in responding to this in the new Fifth Symphony Shostakovich did adopt a tauter, more-controlled musical style which used traditional forms as a framework; this pared-back style avoided some of the indulgent excesses of his earlier music, particularly the bombastic choral Second and Third symphonies with their saccharine words of praise for the Revolution.

Publically, at least, Shostakovich described the new symphony after its completion as follows:

The theme of my Fifth Symphony is the making of a man. I saw man with all his experiences in the center of the composition, which is lyrical in form from beginning to end. In the finale, the tragically tense impulses of the earlier movements are resolved in optimism and joy of living.

While this programme to the symphony was politically-acceptable (conforming, even if only at the end, to the enforced optimism of Socialist Realism), Shostakovich's private meaning and the public perception were different, with several quotations and allusions that show the symphony was intended as an expression of the horrors of life under Stalin.

The jagged leaping canon between lower and upper strings that opens the symphony features a characteristic rising-and-falling phrase, somewhat reminiscent of material from Beethoven's monumental *Grosse Fuge*, and then finishes with a repeated passage of three 'A's which brings the first phrase to a firm conclusion, and will later recur throughout the symphony. A following mournful descending melody on first violins has tinges of folk music inspiration and again will appear again later in the symphony. The remainder of the first subject develops and contrasts these musical ideas, including an ascending oboe melody that later features prominently in the development and coda.

Much of the musical material in the symphony is based on the opening

PROGRAM NOTES (CONT.)

subject's intervals, including its transformation into an extended, haunting second subject with the same rising-and-falling structure (now with widely extended intervals) over a repeated long-short-short rhythmic pattern. This means that the movement (and indeed much of the symphony) is based on the transformation of some relatively simple musical material.

Especially in the second subject, the movement has moments of chamber music-like intimacy, which is in distinct contrast with the unleashing of the full orchestral forces that occurs in the development section - first the piano and basses enter with a ponderous rhythmic pattern and then winds and strings join in to grow in intensity until there is a strident military march based on the opening violin theme, now played on trumpets and clattering snare drums. A transition passage based on the opening theme in canon in the strings offset against the second subject in canon in the brass ascends higher and higher until the climax occurs with the orchestra dividing into two massive sections - strings, winds and horns playing the main melodic material in unison, while the brass and timpani play defiant fanfares of the opening phrase, culminating in a return of the repeated 'A's played against the main theme in canon in the brass.

The subdued coda features a return of the second subject as a duet between flute horn, and then an unsettled, eerie ending with flute, piccolo, and solo violin playing solos based on the ascending oboe melody from the first subject against the string accompaniment, until three rising chromatic scales on celesta bringing the movement to an unsettled conclusion.

The second movement is a Mahlerian scherzo, a bitter and grotesque parody of a dance, with the main melody (based on he first movement's descending violin melody) played on lower strings and then strident E flat clarinet, with prominent horn parts. The central trio section opens with an ironic, almost mocking, violin solo which is then taken over by flute, before a return of the scherzo, played pizzicato by the strings and then by the full orchestra, and a brief quotation of the trio before the end.

The third movement Largo is the heart of the symphony, a tribute and memorial to the uncounted victims of Stalin's purges, which reportedly left much of the audience weeping openly - few, if any, would not have lost a family member or friend to the purges. This intensely emotional movement was written in only 3 days and adopts some of the musical language of Russian Orthodox church music, particularly the *panikhida* (Orthodox requiem) and the tolling of bells, with the strings divided into multiple parts (the violins in three parts, cellos and violas in two) giving a polyphonic effect like a choir.

The "tutti" string sections, playing a mournful hymn-like melody, frame a series of wind interludes, as if solo voices: first a flute duet (Shostakovich's favourite orchestral woodwind), then a desolate oboe solo underneath a shivering tremolo violin line, which is taken over by clarinet, and then a mournful return on the main theme now played on funereal low clarinet and bassoon, which grows in intensity as the strings enter and the movement grows to the climax where the piano joins in with the intense tremolando string passages evoking the pealing of bells, with an impassioned cello version of the oboe solo melody and visceral double bass 'stings' like tolling bells. The final section of the movement has muted strings ascending into the high registers and then in a remarkable spatial effect the descending phrase is passed down through the divisi string parts so it sounds more distant as the pitch descends, and the movement ends peacefully with a harp solo and cathartic major chords.

The finale has divided critics around the question of whether it is sincere or a

parody, and begins with a wailing woodwind trill and a frenzied timpani solo as the brass play a martial theme. A series of march-like melodies follow one after another, until at the climax a heroic-sounding theme leads to a high conclusion and a series of forceful chords and the momentum comes crashing down. A horn solo plays a slowed-down version of the heroic theme under a string accompaniment, which rises up to a plaintive melody by violins.

In the subdued mood, there are some musical references to Mussorgsky's opera *Boris Godunov,* in which the oppressed serfs are forced to praise the Tsar, and then a direct quote from Shostakovich's song setting of a Pushkin poem "*Rebirth*" in which a picture, defaced by a 'barbarian' (the parallels with Stalin are quite clear!) is revealed again as a masterpiece:
"With the passing of time, the crude daubings of the barbarian will dry and flake off like old scales. The beauty of the original painting will be visible once more".

As the melody subsides, a thrumming timpani beat starts off the coda, with an energetic woodwind version of the main melody being joined by the strings and brass until suddenly after most of the symphony in minor keys there is a sudden modulation to D major and the bombastic coda blares out with 32 bars of repeated notes in the strings ('A's again, making their return from the first movement) and majestic brass chorales interspersed with forceful timpani beats until the entire symphony ends with pounding bass drum beats and one final chord.

Shostakovich's memoirs, Testimony, described the finale as follows:
The rejoicing is forced, created under threat... It's as if someone were beating you with a stick and saying, 'Your business is rejoicing, your business is rejoicing,' and you rise, shaky, and go marching off, muttering, 'Our business is rejoicing, our business is rejoicing.'

The symphony received a standing ovation of more than 30 minutes at the premiere - such a strong reaction that Party officials suspected that Shostakovich had stacked the crowd with supporters - but which was repeated at successive performances. Whatever the Party's view of the sincerity (or lack of) of the Fifth Symphony as a symphonic "apology", the overwhelming public reaction perhaps ensured Shostakovich's safety (Shostakovich's friend in later life, the cellist Rostropovich, reportedly believed that if it were not for the ecstatic public reaction, the Fifth Symphony would have gotten Shostakovich killed).

Publically, at least, the success of the Fifth provided the Party the opportunity to rehabilitate Shostakovich - thereby showing it could elevate just as easily as it could punish. According to a newspaper article which bears Shostakovich's name (but was unlikely actually written by him) soon after, the Fifth Symphony was "A Soviet artist's practical and creative response to just criticism". While this tag is likely not Shostakovich's, and the criticism of his work was anything but just, it has stuck as a description of the Fifth Symphony. Yet, with delicious irony, the triumph of the Fifth is in how Shostakovich appeared to capitulate and kowtow to the demands of the Party and give them exactly what they asked for - and yet not what they meant! His response to criticism was to produce a masterpiece full of hidden defiance without having to compromise his own artistic integrity.

Program notes by Cameron Hough

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