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Artistic Influence, Stylistic Irony, and Musical Reference in Dmitri Shostakovich’s Cello Concerto No. 1

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Artistic Influence, Stylistic Irony, and Musical Reference in
Dmitri Shostakovich’s Cello Concerto No. 1

Ryan Michael Hoffman

A research project submitted to the Graduate Faculty of
JAMES MADISON UNIVERSITY
In
Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements
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Doctor of Musical Arts

School of Music

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Abstract

This paper examines Dmitri Shostakovich’s Cello Concerto No. 1, opus 107, as an exemplary work of the composer. In order to attempt a holistic understanding of the piece, I approached it in several ways. First, I examined the influence of several composers, including Saint-Saëns, Prokofiev, and especially Mahler. Mahler’s influence is most significant in the juxtaposition of incongruous elements, often to ironic effect. My second major topic of interest is in harmonic processes particular to Shostakovich. His use of harmony is unique in the way it successfully avoids traditional tonal processes while remaining accessible and engaging to the listener. My third area of discussion involves Shostakovich’s frequent use of musical reference, both to his own music and outside sources. References of this nature often have personal significance for Shostakovich, a fact that the Cello Concerto demonstrates. For a fourth approach, I discuss Shostakovich’s formal clarity in this piece, which is another trait that makes his music accessible. This clarity is aided by a cyclic reappearance of the piece’s opening motive in later movements. I also discuss some aspects of orchestration that make the form and content of the piece effective. My research of the concerto indicates that the piece displays a characteristically personal style for Shostakovich, observable in the topics discussed here.
In this project I examine Dmitri Shostakovich’s Cello Concerto No. 1, opus 107, as an exemplary work of the composer. Dmitri Shostakovich occupies a unique place in the twentieth century, as one of the greatest composers both from the Soviet Union and in the symphonic genre. My interest is inspired by Shostakovich’s ability to resonate with audiences despite his modernist style, a style that is itself interesting because it generally avoids modernist trends such as atonality and serialism. I feel that Shostakovich’s First Cello Concerto is a great piece both within its genre and within the composer’s works, and my research has lent support to this conviction. The concerto demonstrates Shostakovich’s style through characteristic use of harmony, form, melodic reference, and juxtaposition of ironic elements.

In order to attempt a holistic understanding of the piece, I approached it in several ways. First, I found the influence of several composers to be relevant. There are a few influences of Saint-Saëns and Prokofiev in the concerto in particular, and a pervasive influence of Mahler, whose influence can be seen throughout Shostakovich’s music. Mahler’s influence is most significant in the juxtaposition of incongruous elements, often to ironic effect. My second major topic of interest is in harmonic processes particular to Shostakovich. His use of harmony is unique in the way it successfully avoids traditional tonal processes while remaining accessible and engaging to the listener. Although a thorough discussion of Shostakovich’s harmony is beyond the purview of this paper, I point out several trademarks and the ways they are used in the Cello Concerto. My third
area of discussion involves Shostakovich’s frequent use of musical reference, both to his own music and outside sources. References of this nature often have personal significance for Shostakovich, a fact that the Cello Concerto demonstrates. I also discuss Shostakovich’s formal clarity in this piece, which is another trait that makes his music accessible. This clarity is aided by cyclic reappearance of the piece’s opening motive in later movements. Additionally, I note a few aspects of orchestration that give the piece formal clarity and dramatic effect.
A discussion of Shostakovich’s music necessitates some discussion of the Soviet government’s repression of composers, and the repression of Shostakovich in particular. While this is by no means the only lens through which to view his music, the harsh criticism and implicit threats he faced had a profound and lasting impact on Shostakovich. Episodes of cultural terror were most prevalent during the rule of Joseph Stalin, leader of the Soviet Union from Vladimir Lenin’s death in 1924 until his own death in 1953. Public figures who expressed disagreement with Stalin found themselves accused of conspiracy against the country and were typically executed. In the time known as the Great Terror (1937-1938), various groups based on ethnicity or ideology were systematically chosen for removal, amounting to over one million people arrested for political reasons, with hundreds of thousands of those executed.¹

As described by Laurel Fay, Shostakovich himself endured the imprisonment or execution of many of his friends and colleagues, and often feared for his own life when the government expressed displeasure with his work. During Stalin’s purges of his political enemies in the Great Terror, even Shostakovich’s own family was affected. Sofya Varzar, the mother of his first wife Nina, was sent to a labor camp. His older sister, Mariya, was exiled to Central Asia, and her husband, Vsevolod Frederiks was also arrested and sent to a labor camp.² His uncle, Maxim Kostrikin, also disappeared. Elena Konstantinovskaya, Shostakovich’s former mistress, was arrested but released in about a

¹ Hiroaki Kuromiya, “Stalin and His Era,” The Historical Journal 50, No. 3 (September 2007): 713.
year. Several other friends and colleagues were also arrested, including some who had written song texts or librettos for him. Two professional losses were particularly devastating. One was the theater director Vsevolod Meyerhold, with whom Shostakovich had had a long friendship, and who died in prison after his arrest. Another was Shostakovich’s patron, Marshal Mikhail Tukhachevsky, a military leader who had acted as Shostakovich’s protector, but was arrested and shot, accused of being an enemy of the people.³

At the same time of this wave of arrests and executions came the first official attack on Shostakovich’s music. The denunciation happened in 1936 after Stalin attended his opera, Lady MacBeth of the Mtsensk District, and stormed out. Two days later, the infamous editorial “Muddle Instead of Music” appeared in the official newspaper, Pravda. It lambasted the opera in crude, non-technical terms. Although the opera had merited both popular and critical acclaim for the previous three years, the article claimed that “the listener is flabbergasted by the deliberately dissonant, muddled stream of sounds…To follow this ‘music’ is difficult, to remember it is impossible…”⁴ This article was followed shortly by another entitled “Balletic Falsehood,” which attacked Shostakovich’s ballet, The Limpid Stream. These articles were both unsigned, indicating they expressed an official opinion that had no chance of being contested. They set a new standard for political control of the arts, being indistinguishable in rhetoric from attacks in the press against those designated as enemies of the people.⁵

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⁴ Fay, 84.
Shostakovich managed to regain favor in 1937 with his Symphony No. 5, but in 1948 he again endured official condemnation. As before, these attacks were spurred by Stalin’s offense at an opera, in this case Vano Muradeli’s *The Great Friendship*. Although he used a nationalist subject and a conservative musical style, Muradeli unwittingly offended Stalin.⁶ Stalin, a Georgian himself, disliked Muradeli’s portrayal of the Georgian people as enemies of the Red Army. He was also angry that Muradeli wrote a Lezghinka, Stalin’s favorite dance, rather than incorporating an existing Lezghinka.⁷ After Stalin attended the opera, Andrei Zhdanov, the Central Committee member responsible for culture, immediately released a decree attacking several Soviet composers. This time, Sergei Prokofiev, Aram Khachaturyan, and Vissarion Shebalin were condemned along with Shostakovich, although he in particular was made a scapegoat, with lesser composers claiming that their mistakes came from his negative influence. After this decree, Shostakovich wrote many of his works “for the drawer,” because they were not safe for the current political climate. Film music became his principal source of income during this time. He also wrote a few symphonic works to placate the Party and prove that he had accepted their criticism.⁸

Soviet artists who found themselves under official censure were invariably labeled as “formalists.” Originally meaning a work with an overly academic style, in the Soviet Union the term was wielded as a club against those whose music was difficult to understand, and therefore not in the spirit of socialism. As described above in the case of Muradeli’s *The Great Friendship*, even this definition could be ignored if some other

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⁷ Ibid., 240.
⁸ Ibid., 277.
offense was found. It is evident that discourse of this nature was repulsive to
Shostakovich. He even felt able to scoff at it a year before “Muddle Instead of Music”:

At one time I was subjected to fierce critical attacks, principally for
formalism. I did not and do not recognize such reproaches to the slightest
extent. I have never been and never will be a formalist. To disparage any
work whatsoever as formalist on the grounds that the language of the work
is complicated and sometimes not immediately understandable is
unacceptable foolishness.9

The accepted aesthetic for Soviet artists was known as socialist realism, which
became official doctrine in 1934 as the standard that formalism supposedly offended.
This idea emphasized that the artist had a responsibility to his or her fellow citizens, and
should therefore create art that both reflected reality and supported the egalitarian goals
of socialism.10 In the words of Zhdanov, art was to “depict reality in its Revolutionary
development.”11 Beyond emphasizing lyricism, patriotic tone, and mass appeal, the term,
like formalism, was poorly defined. Despite its goal of depicting revolution, it resulted
not in new styles that broke from tradition, but conservative styles rooted in the
nineteenth century. Programmatic composition was often emphasized to make the
message clear. Thus, after socialist realism became official doctrine, Shostakovich began
to incorporate many musical “topics,” or ideas with extra-musical associations like
pastoral scenes or war, into his works.12

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9 Fay, 88.
11 Miranda Clare Wilson, “Shostakovich’s Cello Sonata: Its genesis related to Socialist Realism.”
DMA diss., University of Texas at Austin, 2005. In ProQuest Dissertations and Theses,
April 9, 2013).
12 Richard Taruskin, “When Serious Music Mattered.” In A Shostakovich Casebook, edited by
An examination of Shostakovich’s music indicates that he meant it to relate to the world he saw—in other words, he can be seen as a realist. Stalin’s Five Year Plans, the first in 1928 and the second in 1933, involved massive increases in industrialization, as well as collectivization of farms. These changes were not as easy as expected and created considerable hardships. Many people lived in fear because of the purges. However, official doctrine required an optimistic view of reality. Soviet artists were supposed to present the slogan “Life is Better, Life is Happier.” But Shostakovich’s music neglected to present this rose-colored image. In fact, Kay has suggested that the true reason for official outrage at *Lady Macbeth* was the negative outlook of the opera.\(^{13}\)

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Circumstances of the Concerto’s Composition

In 1953, Joseph Stalin died, and Soviet artists finally experienced some reprieve from cultural terror. Nikita Khrushchev took power and relaxed the treatment of the artistic community, saying that Stalin had been too subjective in this area.14 The harsh Zhdanov decree of 1948 was reversed in 1958 by a decree “On the Correction of Errors in the Evaluation of The Great Friendship, Bogdan Khmelnitsky, and From All My Heart.” This decree returned Shostakovich and other persecuted composers to good official standing, and lifted the ban on so-called “decadent” music, meaning either Western European or formalist.15 While the memory of Stalin’s rule would still loom over Shostakovich, now there was much more freedom for experimentation without fear. It was in this less stringent environment that he produced his first cello concerto.

Shostakovich began work on the concerto May 1, 1959 and completed it July 20 of that year. On June 6, 1959, the Soviet cultural newspaper, Sovetskaya Kultura, published an interview with Shostakovich. In it, the composer revealed that his next work would be a cello concerto. He described the first movement Allegretto as a “jovial march,” but would not be more specific, saying that form and expression changed throughout his composition process. He also mentioned that he took inspiration from Prokofiev’s Sinfonia Concertante, which had “entirely captivated” him.16

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15 Elizabeth Wilson, Shostakovich: A Life Remembered, 2nd ed., 333.
Like many twentieth-century cello works, Shostakovich’s concerto was written for the Russian cellist, Mstislav Rostropovich. Rostropovich had studied composition under Shostakovich at the Leningrad Conservatory. After completing his studies he collaborated with the composer for many performances, including several of his 1934 Cello Sonata, which they also recorded together. Rostropovich had long wished for Shostakovich to compose him a concerto, and as early as 1946 asked the composer’s first wife, Nina Varzar for advice on the subject. She replied “Slava, if you want Dmitri Dmitriyevich to write something for you, the only recipe I can give you is this—never ask him or talk to him about it.” Rostropovich chose to follow this advice, although it required much self-control on his part.

After seeing the Sovetskaya Kultura interview, Rostropovich still restrained himself until finally Shostakovich contacted him. On August 2, the composer played the piece for Rostropovich on an upright piano at the flat of his sister, Mariya Dmitriyevna. During the Moderato second movement, he shed a tear and explained that the piece was very dear to him. He was very concerned with whether Rostropovich liked it, and continually emphasized its personal importance. Rostropovich was truly impressed with the concerto, and after taking some time to convince the composer of this, Shostakovich said he would dedicate it to him. The cellist practiced the concerto for ten hours each the next two days, eight hours the third day, and on August 6 when he played it for Shostakovich he proudly told him that he didn’t need a music stand because he could play it from memory. The premiere took place on October 4, 1959, performed by Rostropovich, with Yevgeny Mravinsky conducting the Leningrad Philharmonic, which

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had the privilege of premiering nearly all of the composer’s symphonies and concertos, as it was located in his hometown.\textsuperscript{19}

\footnotesize
The Cello Concerto in E-flat can be examined in relation to Shostakovich’s interest in the music of other composers. In composing this concerto, he had studied all the famous cello concertos for instruction. Somewhat surprisingly, his favorite one, as he told Rostropovich, was the Saint-Saëns Concerto No. 1 in A minor. For him it was “the best in terms of structure, duration, and orchestral balance.”

With this in mind, it is interesting to note that Saint-Saëns’ concerto generally runs from around eighteen to twenty minutes, while Shostakovich’s concerto lasts approximately twenty-five to twenty-six minutes. While Saint-Saëns employs a three-movement form, albeit one in which each movement follows without a break, Shostakovich uses four movements, with the first being separate and the last three continuing without pause. Shostakovich’s third movement, which is an extended cadenza for the soloist, is a feature that distinguishes it from the Saint-Saëns and mainly accounts for the difference in duration. According to Ivashkin, this movement was not in the first draft of the concerto, so the composer’s original plan would have resembled the traditional fast-slow-fast structure. While the pieces may not be identical structurally, Shostakovich may have been influenced by Saint-Saëns’ cyclic return of the opening material in the finale, a topic discussed in more detail in Chapter VII.

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20 Wilson, Rostropovich, 135.
In his orchestration, Shostakovich also clearly took note of Saint-Saëns’ excellent sense of balance, which always allows space for the cello to be heard. Rather than including a large orchestra as is typical of his symphonies, in the Cello Concerto, Shostakovich omits the brass except for a solo horn, which is featured quite prominently, and for percussion includes only timpani and celesta, which are both used sparingly. As seen in Example 1 below, when the cello is in a low range, he writes sparsely for the orchestra and takes care not to write in the same register as the cello. However, the cello has greater ability to project in high positions on the A string, and he takes advantage of this by including more of the orchestra, as seen in Example 2, on the following page.

Example 1: Shostakovich, Cello Concerto, Allegretto, measures 16-19
Example 2: Shostakovich, Cello Concerto, Allegretto, measures 106-108

As indicated in the *Sovetskaya Kultura* interview, another influence particular to this piece is Sergei Prokofiev’s *Sinfonia Concertante* for cello and orchestra, which was composed in 1952 and also dedicated to Rostropovich.\(^{22}\) Shostakovich had made it clear

\(^{22}\) Ivashkin, 127.
to Rostropovich and others his fascination with Prokofiev’s piece, even claiming that he had worn out his LP recording to the point that it would no longer play. Rostropovich also noted that the composer never missed one of his performances of the *Sinfonia Concertante*. He was entirely convinced of some connection between the two works, and liked to point out this idea: “I emphasize this since in certain publications it has been written that they [Prokofiev and Shostakovich] were antagonists. But this is complete nonsense. It is true that they were not real friends either, they were very different personalities; but each of them held the other’s music in enormous respect.”

At least two particular features from Prokofiev’s piece seem to have directly influenced Shostakovich’s concerto. Rostropovich recounted Shostakovich’s enthusiasm for the loud timpani blow that punctuates the ending of the piece, played memorably in one performance by a one-legged war veteran: “Slava, how that one-legged guy thumped his drum! He called everything to a halt with that final blow!” There was no doubt in Rostropovich’s mind that the seven timpani blows at the end of Shostakovich’s own concerto were inspired by this moment. And while these are certainly not the only two pieces to end with timpani hits, in both cases the timpani calls a sudden halt to a particularly frenzied passage by the soloist in the highest register.

Another inspiring feature of the *Sinfonia Concertante* seems to have been the combination of the cello with celesta, which occurs during a slow section of the third movement. Again, Shostakovich mentioned this part to Rostropovich as a feature he

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24 Wilson, *Rostropovich*, 134. One of the publications to which Rostropovich no doubt referred is Solomon Volkov’s controversial *Testimony*.
enjoyed. Compared to Prokofiev, Shostakovich’s use of the celesta in his concerto is notably more striking. In each piece, the appearance of the celesta occupies a low point in dynamic intensity. However, while Prokofiev uses it in the middle of a movement, merely adding color to a passage that also features strings and woodwinds accompanying the solo cello, Shostakovich features it in one of the most profound moments of the concerto, at the end of the slow second movement. This occurs after an impassioned climax. When the intensity evaporates, the cello recapitulates its entrance from this movement, but this time employs ghostly false harmonics. With muted strings in the background, the celesta is then featured in dialogue with the cello, creating an ethereal effect.

The cello concerto also demonstrates Gustav Mahler’s enormous influence on Shostakovich’s style. According to the composer Krzystof Meyer, Shostakovich often spoke enthusiastically about Mahler, and seemed to have trouble choosing a favorite Mahler symphony because he rated them all so highly. “But,” he claimed, “if someone told me that I had only one more hour to live, I would want to listen to the last movement of Das Lied von der Erde (The Song of the Earth).”

Shostakovich’s love of Mahler was fostered by his friendship with the Russian musicologist, Ivan Sollertinsky, who wrote the first Russian-language book on Mahler in 1932. Sollertinsky saw Mahler’s music as fitting into the Marxist-Leninist

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27 Wilson, Shostakovich: A Life Remembered, 2nd ed., 524.
philosophy. In 1941 he delivered a lecture entitled “Historic Types of Symphonic Dramaturgy,” which drew a line from the symphonies of Beethoven to those of Mahler and Tchaikovsky, and on to contemporary Soviet symphonic composers, including Shostakovich. Beethoven was the model symphonist for Sollertinsky, as well as Soviet composers in general. In the same way that disciples of both Wagner and Brahms believed that they were following in the spirit of Beethoven while their counterparts were not, Sollertinsky saw the epic and heroic spirit of Beethoven embodied in Mahler but felt that Beethoven had been betrayed by most of the Romantic composers. Sollertinsky felt that the bourgeois revolution in Europe had provided a fertile ground for Beethoven’s epic symphonies, but subjective glorification of individuality in Nineteenth-Century Romanticism made it impossible for the creation of more true epic works.

However, Sollertinsky found Mahler and Tchaikovsky to be less subjective than other Romantic symphonists. He noted a “ Chaplinesque ” grotesque distortion of musical material in Mahler, by which he meant a “ profoundly humane feeling disguised by the self-protective mask of buffoonery.” He saw this distortion as a model for including humor in symphonies, and held up Shostakovich’s own Sixth Symphony as an example of this distorted lyricism. Mahler considered each symphony like a whole world, with a universal scope incorporating various themes and genres, and Sollertinsky believed the

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30 Shostakovich’s own music often references Beethoven, including a quote of the “Appassionata” Sonata in his Piano Concerto No. 1, and the “Moonlight” Sonata in the last movement of his Viola Sonata. The general consciousness of Beethoven in the Soviet Union is also evidenced by Stalin’s expectation that Shostakovich would compose a grand, heroic work for his Symphony No. 9, although Shostakovich defied this expectation.
31 Roseberry, 21-2.
32 Downes, 237.
Soviet symphony should follow this model.\textsuperscript{33} Shostakovich seems to have agreed with this idea, as evidenced by his own eclectic use of styles.

The influence of Mahler can be seen throughout Shostakovich’s works. For instance, Eric Roseberry sees a parallel between the forms of both composers’ Fifth Symphonies. The opening theme of each symphony, played by the trumpet in Mahler and low strings in Shostakovich, is memorable yet not the actual primary subject of the sonata-allegro form used in the piece. The primary subject in both cases is calm and lyrical in contrast. The introductory material then returns as a ritornello in both symphonies, gaining independence in various ways. In Shostakovich’s symphony, for example, it is transformed into the second subject.\textsuperscript{34} Additionally, Shostakovich’s Second and Third Symphonies follow Mahler’s example of beginning in one key and ending in another. Both have a revolutionary subject—Symphony No. 2, \textit{Dedication to October}, glorifies Lenin and the October Revolution, while Symphony No. 3, \textit{The First of May}, “expresses the festive spirit of peaceful construction,” in Shostakovich’s words.\textsuperscript{35} As both symphonies depict a great change in society, there is a programmatic function fulfilled by beginning in one key and ultimately reaching another.\textsuperscript{36} The Cello Concerto, on the other hand, both begins and ends in E-flat, although the final movement begins in G minor before reaching the tonic key.

Both Mahler and Shostakovich were eclectic composers, fitting a wide variety of styles into their music. Shostakovich’s own eclecticism was no doubt influenced by his work as both a silent film pianist, and a film composer. Mahler is famous for combining

\textsuperscript{33} Roseberry, 22-3.
\textsuperscript{34} Roseberry, 47.
\textsuperscript{36} Ibid., 129.
incongruous styles, especially combining serious, even emotionally painful music with flippant material not associated with “high art” music, and the same kind of combinations can be seen in Shostakovich. For Mahler, this tendency seems to be rooted in an event from his childhood, in which he fled a violent argument by his parents, and outside encountered a barrel organ playing a happy Viennese tune, “O du lieber Augustin.” Mahler often employs similar juxtapositions in his music, and uses trivial styles—not only popular music, but military marches and bird calls—to incorporate everyday life into his all-encompassing symphonic worlds.37 A classic example of this use by Mahler is the third movement of his First Symphony, which famously uses the tune “Frère Jacques” in the minor mode as a funeral march. Another example is in the second movement of his Fifth Symphony, where at one point the tragic character is interrupted by a light march.

Shostakovich used similar examples in his music, and although this practice cannot be traced to a single life event, it is likely it related to his life in some way. Perhaps, as Deryck Cooke has observed for Mahler, he realized that “there is no more effective way of highlighting tragedy than to bring the trivial and ribald into grotesque opposition with it.”38 In addition, Shostakovich must have been acutely aware of the duality of private life versus public life. Although socialism assumed that the individual’s goals and well-being coincided with those of the state, Shostakovich had learned through his public persecution that the Soviet state could turn against the

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38 Ibid., 17.
individual, thus emphasizing individuality after all. This isolation was shared by Mahler, who had said “I am thrice homeless, as a native of Bohemia in Austria, as an Austrian amongst Germans, as a Jew throughout the world. Always an intruder, never welcomed.”

Shostakovich’s Fourth Symphony has been noted by Downes as a prime example of Shostakovich’s Mahlerian style, due to both its massive scope and eclecticism. The third movement finale’s opening funeral march, which bears an interesting resemblance to the melody of Mahler’s Fifth Symphony funeral march, is followed by scherzo and dance styles. Taruskin sees the ending as a direct reference to Mahler—it is a quiet drawn out conclusion that follows a climax, ending with harp and celesta. A related example of juxtaposition in the Cello Concerto can be found in the central part of the second movement, shown in Example 3. This intensely sad music, mainly consisting of a romantic string-dominated texture, changes for a few bars to an oom-pah accompaniment by the woodwinds. Although the chromatic harmony underlines the emotional nature of the music, the accompaniment style seems less serious.

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40 Cooke, 7.
41 Stephen Downes, 237.
Example 3: Dmitri Shostakovich, Cello Concerto No. 1, Moderato, Measures 96-99

The first movement of the Cello Concerto is, as a whole, an example of incongruity. As Shostakovich had initially advertised, it is a “jovial march,” although much naïveté is required for one to be satisfied with that explanation. Intense chromaticism, a motivic repetition that is nervous or insistent rather than melodic, and a refusal to remain in a march-like duple meter, undermine any joviality. The movement contains another juxtaposition, albeit one of a different nature than the second movement. As seen here in Example 4, Shostakovich pairs mechanical eighth-notes in the woodwinds with expressionistically violent chords in the solo cello. These two parts relate to the first and second themes of the movement, respectively, although in this passage both have lost their initial character.
Example 4: Shostakovich, Cello Concerto No. 1, Allegretto, measures 203-206

Mahler’s influence may also be seen in particular passages by Shostakovich with similar musical material to examples by Mahler. One example may be seen in the finale. Roseberry has already pointed out a similarity between Mahler’s lied “Des Antonius von Padua Fischpredigt” (“Saint Anthony’s Sermon to the Fishes”), and the second movement scherzo of Shostakovich’s Fifth Symphony. As seen in Examples 5 and 6, a portion of this lied also bears an interesting resemblance in melodic shape as well as rhythmic content to a theme from the cello concerto’s finale, which enters at the meter change to 3/8. As will be discussed later, Shostakovich was fond of self-quotation, and Mahler clearly shared this affinity, for he based the scherzo of his 2nd Symphony on this lied as well.

43 Roseberry, 49.
Example 5: Mahler, “St. Anthony and the Fishes,” Measures 9-11

Example 6: Shostakovich, Cello Concerto No. 1, Allegro con moto, measures 149-152

A similar parallel can be seen at the end of the cello concerto’s slow second movement, which features the dialogue between the cello in false harmonics and the celesta, described earlier. The other notable feature of this passage is meandering eighth-notes in the violins, with mutes, which provide a hazy backdrop to this dialogue.

Steinberg has referred to a similar use in Mahler’s *Lied von der Erde*, Shostakovich’s avowedly favorite piece of music.\(^{44}\) The analogous passage to which he refers is no doubt in the second movement, “Der Einsame im Herbst” (“The Lonely One in Autumn”). While not a direct quotation, running eighth-notes played by muted violins once again provide a backdrop to a few solo instruments, which include oboe, clarinet, and bassoon in this case. Examples 7 and 8 illustrate this similarity. The loneliness described by the title is felt due to the sparse arrangement and soft dynamic.

Shostakovich’s setting certainly creates a sense of loneliness as well, and one even more desolate than Mahler’s. This is accomplished by an even sparser arrangement, the icy

tone color of the cello’s false harmonics, and a bass line that is either absent or static during this section.

Example 7: Mahler, *Das Lied von der Erde*, “Der Einsame im Herbst,” beginning 2\textsuperscript{nd} measure of rehearsal 20

Example 8: Shostakovich, Cello Concerto no. 1, Moderato, measures 158-161
V

Use of Harmony

One of the fascinating aspects of Shostakovich’s music is his cultivation of a style that operates outside of traditional tonality while still creating a harmonic world to which the average listener can relate. The fact that Shostakovich is one of the most commonly performed twentieth-century composers owes much to his harmonic style. While using a very chromatic language, and often avoiding traditional tonal chord progressions, Shostakovich nevertheless provides a sense of key center, and uses triads and other familiar sonorities to create an accessible language.

The opening motive of the Cello Concerto No. 1 is a good example of Shostakovich’s use of triads and chromaticism, as well as an ironic combination of elements. As seen in Example 9, this motive, an important building block throughout this movement, contains what is enharmonically an E minor triad in the first three notes. Within the tonic key of E-flat, these notes are harmonically ambiguous, even seemingly incompatible with the key. The half-step fall to B-flat makes the motive seem even more open-ended, until the orchestra’s entrance confirms the role of the B-flat as fifth of the tonic triad. Thus Shostakovich manages to shakily establish the tonic, using unconventional means which nonetheless use thirds, a familiar consonance for the ear.

The cello’s chromaticism is in stark contrast to the nonchalant diatonicism of the orchestra, which answers with an anapest (short-short-long) rhythm that, as discussed in chapter VII, is found throughout the piece. This incongruity between the soloist and
orchestra provides an apt musical metaphor for the struggle of an individual against demands for conformity, such as Shostakovich endured against the Soviet government.

Example 9: Shostakovich Cello Concerto, Allegretto, measures 1-2

Shostakovich regularly uses a few harmonic trademarks that can be seen in the cello concerto. One of these is an emphasis on Neapolitan inflection, or use of chords built on the flatted second scale degree. His use of an enharmonic E minor chord within the key of E-flat in the concerto’s opening is one example. Notably, Shostakovich eschews traditional treatment of the Neapolitan. The chord is typically a major triad that progresses to the dominant chord, two details that he ignores. Another prominent occurrence is found in the F# minor central episode of the second movement and is shown in Example 10. The cello’s melody in this section is infused with great emotional pain by the G minor harmony in the fourth measure, which occurs over an F# pedal. Like in the opening of the concerto, Shostakovich uses the minor Neapolitan, and ignores the conventional progression to the dominant.
Another common trait, noted by Roseberry, is the use of either oscillating fourths or arpeggiated fourths. This quartal harmony is effective for avoiding a strong sense of tonic while still providing the ear with familiar sonorities. For Shostakovich, fourths often serve the purpose of building tension. Fittingly, he uses both techniques in the solo cello part during the climax of the concerto’s passionate second movement, as can be seen in examples 11 and 12.

Example 11: Shostakovich Cello Concerto, II (Moderato), measures 130-131, oscillating fourths

Example 12: Shostakovich Cello Concerto, II (Moderato), measures 145-148, arpeggiated fourths

One final issue in Shostakovich’s harmonic language is influence of the Second Viennese School and twelve-tone technique. Despite the strong influence of this method on composers around mid-century, Shostakovich rarely makes use of it, although it

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becomes more prominent in some of his later works. For a Soviet composer, serial composition would have been an obvious style to avoid, lest accusations of formalism arise. He once railed against it in an essay titled “Dodecaphony Shatters Creativity,” calling its use dogmatic.\footnote{Karen A. Bates-Crouch, “Formal Structure in the Cello Concerto No. 1, Opus 107 by Dmitri Shostakovich” MM thesis, University of Nebraska, 1990.} However, like many public statements he made, it is hard to know if the article was written for him, and if he was forced to sign it.

In any case, Shostakovich cannot have been completely against serial composition, even if he did not fully embrace it. Several times in his life he mentioned Alban Berg as a master of Western music, and expressed his grief to Sollertinsky when Berg died.\footnote{Laurel E. Fay, \textit{Shostakovich: A Life}, (New York: Oxford University Press, 2000), 88.} He does not seem to have expressed equal enthusiasm for either Schoenberg or Webern. This seems relevant, since Berg, more than the other two members of the Second Viennese School, referenced tonal music with his twelve-tone style. Shostakovich’s appreciation of these composers’ methods is occasionally felt in his music.

Even before Schoenberg invented dodecaphony, the Second Viennese composers used methods incorporating all twelve pitches. A prime example is Webern’s Opus 11, \textit{Three Little Pieces} for Cello and Piano. The work is typical of Webern’s sparse compositional style. Example 13, on the following page, shows the first three measures of the first movement, with pitches numbered at their first appearance. Within the first two and one-half bars, all twelve pitches have been used. Despite the lack of a sustained melody, this portion of music is easily seen as a phrase due to the diminuendo and ritardando at its end, with \textit{a tempo} immediately following. Out of these twelve pitches, Webern saves B-natural and B-flat to appear as the final two notes of the phrase. Despite
the lack of a tonal center, this delay creates a sense of gravity towards these pitches, the only two not yet heard. Throughout the Three Little Pieces, Webern uses this practice to delineate sections. Each movement even ends with a few pitches “missing,” which are then featured prominently at the beginning of the next movement.


![Musical notation]

The introduction of the Cello Concerto’s fourth movement, shown in Example 14, displays evidence of this Second Viennese School influence, as Roseberry has observed.\(^4^8\) The cello’s dyads here, combined with the orchestra’s chords, do not follow traditional harmonic function. Yet, they prepare the arrival of the tonic G by including the eleven pitches other than the tonic. Furthermore, the penultimate note is the dominant pitch of D, which is itself led up to by Shostakovich’s trademark arpeggiated fourths in the cello solo. The entrance of G is also the entrance of the finale’s rondo theme. Thus, this passage creates a sense of tonal center while still being conscious of all twelve pitches.

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\(^4^8\) Roseberry, 442.
Example 14: Shostakovich Cello Concerto, IV (Allegro con moto), measures 1-10

Shostakovich uses similar methods in some of his string quartets. The opening of the Eighth String Quartet, despite having an accessible motivic unity, creates great tonal ambiguity by including all twelve pitches within the first six bars, delaying D-flat until the sixth full measure. Additionally, the Twelfth Quartet begins with what appears to be
a serial row in the cello. However, with its final two pitches, A-flat to D-flat, it establishes the tonic of D-flat and proceeds in a tonal fashion.\footnote{Norman Kay, \textit{Shostakovich} (London: Oxford University Press, 1971), 54-55, 63-66.}
Shostakovich often makes use of reference and quotation, both to his own music and to outside sources. This practice likely stems in part from his early work as a pianist for silent films, during which he often became bored and made practical use of the time by fitting material from his concert programs into his improvisations. The ideology of socialist realism also affected this practice. To send a clear, revolutionary message, composers incorporated specific musical “topics” for which listeners already held programmatic associations. Shostakovich was even more used to these topics due to their importance in accompanying on-screen action. As shall be discussed, personal reasons also likely influenced certain choices of quotation.

The opening motive of the Cello Concerto, the most important building block of the piece, is in fact a self-quotation, though from an unexpected source. It is the opening to a number entitled “Death of Heroes” from his score to the film *The Young Guard* (1948), which depicts the bravery of a group of young Soviet citizens during the German invasion during World War II. As seen in Example 15, the motive is nearly identical, only much slower and harmonized differently. In the cello concerto, the first three notes are harmonically ambiguous, but the last note is simply the fifth of the tonic triad.

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However, in “Death of the Heroes” the first three notes form the tonic triad of C minor, moving to a dissonant chord of only C and F#.

Example 15: “Death of the Heroes” (Adagio) from The Young Guard

The irony of using what is essentially a funeral march as the source for this so-called “jovial march” must have been obvious to Shostakovich. Much of his music can be related to the concept of “forced rejoicing,” with a famous example being the conclusion of the Fifth Symphony. One possible reading of the Cello Concerto could be the realization of the Soviet artist-citizen, represented by the soloist, of the tragedy and horrors taking place around him. Shostakovich himself was silent about any specific meaning to the piece. When asked, he humbly said “I just took a simple, tiny theme and tried to develop it.”

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Shostakovich made his most extensive use of self-quotation in his Eighth String Quartet, composed the year after the cello concerto. Although he officially dedicated the Quartet to “the victims of fascism and war,” based on a visit to the ruins of Dresden, Shostakovich considered this quartet to be autobiographical. He told his friend Isaak Glikman: “When I die, it’s hardly likely that someone will write a quartet dedicated to my memory. So I decided to write one myself.” The true impetus for the quartet’s composition was that he had been chosen to be head of the RSFSR Composer’s Union, and therefore was forced to join the Party, a situation that had left him feeling suicidal.53

One aspect of the Eighth Quartet that underlines its autobiographical nature is its abundance of self-quotation. Works quoted include Shostakovich’s First, Eighth, and Tenth Symphonies, his Second Piano Trio, his opera Lady MacBeth of the Mtsensk District, and the opening motive of the Cello Concerto, further proof of the concerto’s personal significance to the composer. The quartet also quotes a revolutionary folk song, “Tormented by Grievous Bondage.” The Cello Concerto motive first appears in the third movement of the quartet, which shares the concerto’s Allegretto tempo. Although the movement is mainly a demonical 3/4 waltz, Shostakovich transitions seamlessly to a literal quote of the concerto, which is in duple meter, as seen in Example 16 below. Furthermore, he uses a transformation of the Cello Concerto’s motive as the primary material in the intensely tragic Largo fourth movement. While the first violin sustains an A# through the opening of the movement, the three lower voices present a distorted version of the Cello Concerto motive, as seen in Example 17. As in the original Young Guard version, the three voices spell a tonic (C#) minor triad in unison. However, the

fourth note, instead of being the longest, is merged with the anapest (short-short-long) rhythm that accompanies the motive in the Cello Concerto. As in *the Young Guard*, the arrival is a dissonant two-note chord, except this time it contains a major second rather than a tritone interval. The shock of the dissonance is magnified by the low register and fortissimo accentuation of the chord.

Example 16: Shostakovich, String Quartet no. 8, III, measures 138-142

Example 17: String Quartet no. 8, IV, measures 1-7

Shostakovich also quotes at least one outside source in the concerto. Most notably, the Georgian folksong “Suliko” is hidden within the fourth movement. It is hidden so well, in fact, that when quizzed by the composer, Rostropovich did not at first
realize where it was hidden. “Suliko” had been the favorite song of Joseph Stalin, and Shostakovich’s motivation for this use was surely a personal gesture towards his former tormentor. Its appearance is an example of “the fig in the pocket,” a hidden, insulting gesture, as well as “musical hooliganism,” as Rostropovich put it.55

As seen in Examples 18 and 19 below, Shostakovich took this song and contorted it into something grotesque. Originally slow, smooth and melodic, it becomes quick, angular, rhythmic, and dissonant. While the original folk song “Suliko” occupies a comfortable, narrow range, in the Cello Concerto Shostakovich displaces the last three notes higher, by intervals ranging from a third to a sixth in the solo cello part. Before the cello voices it, the quotation is heard in the orchestra, where the displacement is even greater. Shostakovich gives the first five notes to the strings in a low register, while the woodwinds shriek “Suliko!” several octaves higher. This call-and-response treatment returns throughout the movement, and in its final appearance, it is the cello that shrilly cries “Suliko!” As seen in Example 20, the three notes are at this point not only in an extreme register, but in rhythmic diminution and in complete harmonic disagreement with the orchestra—A-flat F G-flat against A-natural and D.

Example 18: “Suliko”

54 Elizabeth Wilson, Shostakovich: A Life Remembered, 2nd ed., 365.
Example 19: Shostakovich Cello Concerto, IV (Allegro con moto), Measures 91-93

Example 20: Shostakovich Cello Concerto, IV (Allegro con moto), measures 363-365

Shostakovich also quotes “Suliko” in Antiformalist Rayok, a satirical cantata based on the 1948 attacks on formalism. The nature of this piece necessitated that it be kept secret, so there is some debate over the date that Shostakovich began the work, which was only premiered in 1989. Only one person, Shostakovich’s friend Isaak Glikman, claims that the composer showed it to him in 1948, while others claim that he began work on it in 1957.\(^{56}\) In Rayok, a text parodying Zhdanov’s complaints about formalism is set to the tune of “Suliko”:

Dear Comrades! While realistic music mostly is written by so-called composers of the People,

formalistic music for some reason is written by those composers who are against the People.\textsuperscript{57}

Rayok also features an actual quote by Zhdanov: “There must be refined music, there must be beautiful music,” which is set to the style of Stalin’s beloved Lezghinka.\textsuperscript{58}

Shostakovich may never have achieved retribution towards his tormentors, but he dealt with it the best way he knew how—through musical satire.

Shostakovich continued the sarcastic, even maniacal use of folk tunes in the Second Cello Concerto, where he quotes a Ukrainian street song “Bubliki, Kupitye Bubliki,” variously translated as “Bread Rolls, Buy My Bread Rolls”, or “Pretzels, Buy My Pretzels.”\textsuperscript{59} This use was certainly less personal and more random than the quotation of “Suliko.” Several months before writing the concerto, on New Year’s Eve, Shostakovich had played a game of “My Favorite Melody” with his friends, and had unexpectedly chosen “Bubliki.” It appears through much of the Second Cello Concerto’s second movement, and again in the climax of the third movement, where the motive’s repetition and ascendance into the high register of the cello create a sense of hysteria.\textsuperscript{60}

Another type of reference in the First Cello Concerto is the composer’s musical monogram, DSCH. This motive is formed by using the German spelling of the pitches: D for D, S for E-flat, C for C, and H for B natural. The Eighth String Quartet uses the monogram throughout, further underlining the autobiographical nature of this piece.

Previous works in which Shostakovich used this motive include his Tenth Symphony and First Violin Concerto, although the Eighth Quartet’s use is the most pervasive. Although the Cello Concerto does not use this motive in its basic form, it can be found transposed

\textsuperscript{57} Wilson, \textit{Shostakovich: A Life Remembered}, 1\textsuperscript{st} ed., 477.
\textsuperscript{58} Wilson, \textit{Shostakovich: A Life Remembered}, 2\textsuperscript{nd} ed., 333.
\textsuperscript{59} Ibid., 444; Fay, 247-8.
\textsuperscript{60} Ibid.
and re-ordered in many passages, for example, with the notes C B A A-flat, as seen in Example 21.

Example 21: Cello Concerto No. 1, I (Allegretto), measures 41-42

Some, including Eric Roseberry and David Hurwitz, also see the concerto’s opening Young Guard-derived motive as a variant or alternative of DSCH due to its interval content, which also includes a minor third and minor second, as well as its similar harmonic instability that gives it a nervous, questioning character. Roseberry has also suggested that both motives musically depict the character of the composer himself, who was known to have a remarkably nervous disposition in public.⁶¹ There are additional reasons to see the concerto’s motive as an alternative musical monogram. For one, there is Rostropovich’s anecdote about how meaningful the piece was for Shostakovich. For another, the pervasiveness of the motive in this concerto is to an extent rarely rivaled elsewhere in Shostakovich’s music, except by use of DSCH itself. As discussed in the next chapter, Shostakovich uses it even beyond the first movement, with several cyclical reappearances.

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⁶¹ Roseberry, 378; Hurwitz, 152.
The appeal and clarity of much of Shostakovich’s music can be attributed to his use of traditional forms as used by Classical and Romantic composers. This usage is in keeping with the 1932 Doctrine of Socialist Realism, which implied a prescription for these forms. Clarity of form generally increases the accessibility of a piece of music, which was a purported goal of Socialist Realism. This is one reason that genres such as the symphony continued to proliferate in the Soviet Union while they were ignored by most twentieth-century composers outside of that country.

It is surely no accident that Shostakovich’s response to “Muddle Instead of Music,” the Fifth Symphony, employed a traditional four-movement plan consisting of a sonata-form movement, followed by a minuet-like scherzo, a slow movement, and a sonata-allegro finale. Two years before “Muddle,” Shostakovich had composed another model of both lyric and formal clarity, the Cello Sonata in D minor. Ironically, Shostakovich performed this very piece the day “Muddle” appeared in Pravda. It, too, follows a four-movement plan, featuring a rare (and first for Shostakovich) repeated exposition in the sonata-allegro first movement, a scherzo, a largo, then a rondo finale with an almost Haydn-esque theme.

The Cello Concerto No. 1 provides another example of formal clarity. As noted earlier, Shostakovich had admired the Saint-Saëns Cello Concerto for its formal structure,

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among other attributes. Without its cadenza, which is extensive enough to merit its own movement, Shostakovich’s concerto has a general structure used in concertos since the Baroque—three movements organized by tempo as fast-slow-fast. The individual movements each display remarkable formal clarity, with clearly delineated sections. The first and last, at least, are based on formal structures associated with the Classical Period.

The first movement of the concerto presents a clear example of sonata-allegro form, with an exposition containing two distinct themes, a development and a recapitulation. Kay suggests that in this movement, Shostakovich achieves a “real symphonic allegro,” a goal he had apparently felt was unsatisfied by his Tenth Symphony. The movement exhibits remarkable concentration of its material, with almost no time spent on episodes or transitions, but instead focusing steadily on the two main themes. Roseberry has suggested that, despite the Classical form, the movement can also be described as Neo-Baroque because of the continuous elaboration of the initial idea. The composer wastes no time with introductory material; the first notes come from the cello. In fact, all of Shostakovich’s concertos—including a second for cello and two each for piano and violin—begin directly with the soloist or provide only a few bars of introduction before the soloist enters.

The two themes are easily distinguished from one another, though both have an insistent quality due to their repetitiveness and clear, driving rhythm. The first theme, derived from The Young Guard, is angular with short values, contrasted with the long values and generally stepwise motion of the second, which also mainly occupies a higher tessitura. The two subjects are divided by a few measures break for the soloist, and a

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65 Roseberry, 429.
change of key to the relative minor. This modulation from the tonic major key is an interesting reversal of Classical Period practice, in which a sonata-form movement in a minor key modulates to the relative major. The development sustains the relentless nature of the movement, with all material derived from that of the exposition. Much of it is built on a unit that combines an ascending, scalar version of DSCH with the opening motive, as seen in Example 22. This unit is then presented in diminution, as shown in Example 23.

Example 22: Shostakovich Cello Concerto, I (Allegretto), measures 141-143

![Example 22: Shostakovich Cello Concerto, I (Allegretto), measures 141-143](image1)

Example 23: Shostakovich Cello Concerto, I (Allegretto), measures 178-179

![Example 23: Shostakovich Cello Concerto, I (Allegretto), measures 178-179](image2)

The second movement also displays clear formal structure, if not a standard Classical one. As Roseberry has described, there is an ABACAB pattern, somewhat like an abbreviated rondo.\textsuperscript{66} It may also make sense to view it as a ternary form, with the A theme as an introductory ritornello. This theme, which is never played by the cello, contains a characteristic sarabande rhythm, seen in Example 24. The B theme is unusually folk-like and diatonic and seen in Example 25. After this section, the A theme introduces C, which contains the Mahlerian excerpt previously described, and leads to the

\textsuperscript{66} Roseberry, 438.
climax of the movement. The orchestra answers the climax with a forceful return to A. The B theme returns in a ghostly form, owing to the cello’s false harmonics and the featured celesta.

Example 24: Shostakovich Cello Concerto, II (Moderato), measures 1-2

Example 25: Shostakovich Cello Concerto, II (Moderato), measures 24-25

The third movement, Cadenza, seems to have evolved its structural function from the cadenza of the First Violin Concerto. The Violin Concerto contains four movements, with the slow third movement ending in the cadenza, which then leads directly into the finale. The Cello Concerto’s cadenza also connects the slow movement and finale, but is slightly longer, meriting its status as a separate movement. The Cadenza contains several sections, separated by ominous pizzicato chords. During the first three sections, the cello elaborates on themes from the second movement, including the C theme, the “Mahlerian” theme, and the B theme. After the third set of pizzicato chords, it begins to build momentum towards the finale, with tempo changes of Allegretto, Allegro, and Più mosso.

The Young Guard-derived motive from the opening of the first movement begins to re-emerge in the Cadenza within the constant triplets of the Allegretto section. Its return is first suggested in augmentation, in the passage shown in Example 26, as the A-
flat D-flat C-natural of the top pitches. While lacking the first note of the motive, and
leaping up only a perfect fourth instead of a fifth, the general contour and falling minor
second at the end are unmistakable. By the Cadenza’s Allegro section, the motive has
returned to its original single-note rhythm in a similar tempo to the first movement,
although it contains some octave displacement, as shown in Example 27.

Example 26: Shostakovich Cello Concerto, III (Cadenza), measures 82-83

Example 27: Shostakovich Cello Concerto, III (Cadenza), measures 100-101

The concerto’s fourth movement finale is essentially a rondo, though a less
Classical example than the first movement provided for sonata-allegro form.
Shostakovich demonstrated a lesson learned in the First Violin Concerto by giving the
soloist a break after segueing from the cadenza. This had been a request from the Violin
Concerto’s dedicatee, David Oistrakh, to which Shostakovich had readily agreed.67 Thus,
the G minor rondo theme is first played by the orchestra.

Throughout the last movement, the Young Guard motive from the first movement
works its way back and eventually merges with “Suliko.” This process begins near the
beginning of the fourth movement, as the motive is hidden within the last four notes of

67 Elizabeth Wilson, Shostakovich: A Life Remembered, 2nd ed. (Princeton: Princeton University
Press, 2006), 239.
the rondo theme itself (Example 28), although the first interval is a major third rather than a minor third. In addition, all of the contrasting episodes also contain hidden versions of the *Young Guard* motive, as seen below in Examples 29-31.

Example 28: Shostakovich Cello Concerto, IV (Allegro con moto), Rondo theme, measures 42-46

Example 29: Shostakovich Cello Concerto, IV (Allegro con moto), measures 65-66 (Motive in last four pitches shown)

Example 30: Shostakovich Cello Concerto, IV (Allegro con moto), measures 157-161 (Motive in last four pitches shown)

Example 31: Shostakovich Cello Concerto, IV (Allegro con moto), measures 210-212

The fourth movement works its way through these themes from its opening key of G minor and reaches the home key of E-flat in measure 273. While the meter at this key change is still 3/8, the *Young Guard* motive is now fully exposed in the orchestra, and harmonized precisely as in the opening of the concerto. Furthermore, it is accompanied
by the anapest rhythm that answered it throughout the first movement, as seen in Example 32 below. At measure 290, the horn ominously presents the theme in augmentation, returning to the solo role it had held earlier, as seen in Example 33. Pizzicato strings answer the horn with the anapest rhythm, while the solo cello accompanies with double-stops.

Example 32: Shostakovich Cello Concerto, IV (Allegro con moto), measures 271-273 (Return of unhidden motive, some parts not shown)

Example 33: Shostakovich Cello Concerto, IV (Allegro con moto), measures 290-293 (Motive in horn, in augmentation)

At measure 305, when the horn has played the opening *Young Guard* motive twice, the meter reverts to 2/4, and the solo cello takes up the motive as seen in Example 34. Although the cello part is now an octave higher than in the opening of the first movement, both the accompaniment and tempo are nearly identical to those used the first time. However, this apparent recapitulation occurs mid-phrase, and is in fact analogous
to the fifth bar of the first movement. Therefore, the recapitulation of the phrase actually occurs with the horn solo, before the recapitulation of the meter and instrumentation.

Example 34: Shostakovich Cello Concerto, IV (Allegro con moto), measures 309-310 (Motive in cello, duple meter, home key)

This otherwise normal recapitulation is short-lived, however. After twelve measures, the cello begins to repeat the anapest rhythm while the rondo theme now returns in the woodwinds, this time in sixteenth-note values rather than eighths. The rondo theme is also now staccato, rather than slurred as before, and joined by descending chromatic scales. This treatment gives it a derisive, cackling quality similar to Berlioz’s depiction of witches in his Symphonie Fantastique. Against this madness, the horn once again intones the first movement’s Young Guard motive. Example 35 shows this combination of motives.
Shostakovich continues by recombining these ideas in several different ways.

The rondo theme is dispelled for a few measures, leaving the strings and woodwinds to trade the *Young Guard* motive and the anapest rhythm, respectively. However, the rondo theme returns one more time in the cello solo, competing against *Young Guard* in the woodwinds. Finally, the cello abandons the rondo theme to alternate between the anapest and the final three notes of “Suliko,” which are in fact merged with the anapest rhythm. The cello continues the anapest nearly to the end, while it is the orchestra that provides the last two declarations of *Young Guard*, which still remains non-diatonic, thus continuing its incongruity to the end. Although the E-flat finish is decisive, the lack of a dominant chord beforehand allows no traditional resolution; there has been no agreement reached between the various themes.
The Cello Concerto’s effectiveness is enhanced by its use of orchestration for both dramatic and structural effect. Shostakovich is known to have conceived his musical ideas with their instrumentation in mind, rather than treating orchestration as a separate process. In the Cello Concerto, Shostakovich uses variations in orchestration to emphasize formal structure. Each movement is distinguished by a particular emphasis in the orchestration.

In the first movement, the woodwinds are most responsible for the tone color, giving it a dry, Neo-Classical style. Shostakovich emphasizes extremes in register, with the rumble of the contrabassoon and shrillness of the piccolo giving a sinister, even darkly comical, intensity to the movement. The strings do not enter for the first forty-four measures; when they do, the cello’s elaboration of the first theme has momentarily returned to the tonic key, in a register two octaves above its entrance. As seen in Examples 36 and 37 below, the strings imitate the secco quality of the woodwinds, so that their entrance is more subtle than striking. Throughout the movement, the two sections often have more direct exchanges, but the woodwinds always maintain control over the character.

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Example 36: Shostakovich Cello Concerto, I (Allegretto), measures 1-3

Example 37: Shostakovich Cello Concerto, I (Allegretto), measures 45-47 (string entrance)
The Moderato second movement is immediately differentiated, not only by its slower tempo, but also by a Neo-Romantic string-dominated timbre. This lush color provides a proper setting for the emotional intensity of this movement, which was so personal to Shostakovich. While a solo clarinet appears in measure 35, the woodwinds do not enter as a section until the Mahlerian contrasting section described earlier, which occurs at measure 96. They join the full orchestra to create the central climax of the movement, but then disappear except for another clarinet solo, leaving the strings to once again determine the texture.

After giving one movement each to the string and woodwind sections (and one to the solo cello) Shostakovich brings balance in the rondo finale by giving the strings and woodwinds equal roles. Throughout this movement, the two sections either appear together, trade material with each other, or allow one to take most of the material while the other provides commentary. The refrain of the rondo appears in various guises, but always entrusted to either the solo cello or the woodwinds. When the cello takes this melody, Shostakovich achieves the balance he admired in the Saint-Saëns Concerto either by not including the full orchestra, as in Example 38, or writing sparsely for the instruments, as in Example 39.
Example 38: Shostakovich Cello Concerto, IV (Allegro con moto), measures 43-46
Other times, the woodwinds take the refrain, either while the cello has a break, as at the beginning of the movement, or while the cello has an accompanimental part, as in Example 40.
Shostakovich’s orchestration shows the influence of Mahler as well as Saint-Saëns. Mahler endows certain instruments in the orchestra with special status, and Shostakovich also uses a few instruments as soloists in their own right, including many of the same ones as Mahler. In the Cello Concerto, the horn, celesta, and occasionally the timpani and clarinet have special roles. These same instruments often have significant roles in other Shostakovich works.69

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69 Roseberry, 381.
The most important soloist in the Concerto, after the cello, is the horn. This instrument was also a favorite of Mahler, who gave it prominent roles such as in the Scherzo of his Fifth Symphony. Shostakovich had already given the horn an important solo in the third movement of his Tenth Symphony. This solo uses a motif that not only resembles a horn call from the first movement of Shostakovich’s favorite piece, *Das Lied von der Erde*, but also relates to a temporary obsession with Elmira Nazirova, an Azerbaijani pianist and composer. The pitches E, A, E, D, A spell “Elmira” through a combination of the French and German spellings of the pitches: E L(a) M R(e) A.\(^{70}\) Shostakovich’s interest in the horn continued in his later works as well. For example, his Second Cello Concerto prominently features its dual horns, in a strident fanfare that announces the third movement of the piece.

In the First Cello Concerto, the horn has important solos in all movements except the Cadenza, and often the player receives special listing in the performance credits for this reason. While the horn rests for much of the first movement, it appears throughout the development to ominously state the opening motive in its unaltered form. Roseberry has aptly described this use as an *idée fixe*, for it gives a sense of obsession to the first movement.\(^{71}\) During the recapitulation, the horn reappears to take the lead in presenting the second theme in place of the cello. As seen in Example 41, the cello assumes the role of the whole orchestra by accompanying the horn. In the slow second movement, the horn again takes an important solo role. It precedes the cello’s theme both the first time it appears, and when it returns in false harmonics at the end. In the fourth movement, the

\(^{71}\) Roseberry, 378.
horn continues its solo role by presenting the theme of the first movement in its cyclic return.

Example 41: Shostakovich, Cello Concerto, I (Allegretto), measures 264-266

Although previously mentioned in conjunction with the influences of Prokofiev and Mahler, Shostakovich’s memorable use of the celesta in the Cello Concerto No. 1 bears some discussion as to its relation to other works. Two years before the Cello Concerto, Shostakovich used the celesta in his Symphony No. 11 “The Year 1905,” a programmatic work based on the First Russian Revolution. The second movement graphically depicts the “Bloody Sunday” massacre of January 9, 1905, when workers bringing petitions to Tsar Nicholas II were fired on by police. Despite the historical setting, the symphony easily invites comparisons to the contemporary political situation, including the brutal crushing of a Hungarian uprising by Soviet troops the year before its premiere.72 The massacre itself is represented by a violent fugue, beginning in the low strings. In the quiet aftermath, Shostakovich combines the celesta with harp, creating a sense of icy devastation. The horrified reflection of this passage is similar to the celesta passage from the Concerto, which occurs after a great emotional outpouring in the slow movement’s climax, and thus acts as a meditative reflection on that outburst. Mahler’s

influence can be felt in this aspect, too, for he used the celesta in a similar reflective role, both in the first movement of his Sixth Symphony and the ending of his *Kindertotenlieder*.73

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Shostakovich’s First Cello Concerto, like many other works of the composer, has found a place in concert programs for its ability to speak to the audience. Shostakovich’s music not only provides a window into the history of the last century, but is also relevant to listeners after his time. Although he suffered at the hands of critics who claimed that he wrote music against “the People,” Shostakovich surely had humanity in mind when he composed. In fact, there was perhaps no composer who better represented the feelings of “the People.” The reception of his Fifth Symphony demonstrated the audience’s empathy for Shostakovich. As one attendee of the premiere wrote, “The whole audience leapt to their feet and erupted into wild applause—a demonstration of their outrage at all the hounding poor Mitya has been through.”74 In a place where it was forbidden to speak some truths, Shostakovich managed to do so in his music.

Shostakovich’s Cello Concerto demonstrates that his musical language is worthy of study for its accessible, yet highly expressive qualities. His love of Mahler can be observed in his own pairing of incongruous musical styles and techniques, which relate to his own life struggles. By including particular musical references, such as The Young Guard and “Suliko,” Shostakovich infused his music with personal meaning while still surviving inexplicably harsh censorship. His unique and expressive harmony explores several possibilities outside of traditional tonality, yet avoids being defined by one particular system. The clarity of his form, which includes obvious cyclic relationships, further aids the accessibility of his music. His writing and orchestration for cello and

orchestra are also worthy of attention for their effectiveness in creating a variety of tone color while not overpowering the soloist. Cellists are lucky to have a masterpiece such as this one in their repertoire.
Bibliography


