

21M.260: STRAVINSKY TO THE PRESENT

Class 14: March 31

AGENDA

Warm-up: Problems in biography, history, and interpretation

- The intentional fallacy
- Biographical criticism
- Musical ephemerality, reception, and hermeneutics

Shostakovich String Quartet No. 8, Op. 110, Movement 3

- Understanding D-S-C-H
- Dance and connotation
- Shostakovich and tonality – your examples

Soviet History

- “Socialist realism” vs. “Formalism”
- The *Pravda* affair

Other music:

- Shostakovich’s Fifth Symphony and affective power
- *Lady Macbeth of the Mtsensk District* and shocking sexuality
- Prokofiev as a contrast

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WARM-UP

This warm-up asks you to think critically about some important questions relating to the interpretation of music, particularly through the lens of politics.

1. In the absence of text or an explicit program (e.g. in a symphonic poem), to what extent and in what ways can musical sounds be political?
2. When Shostakovich wrote in certain styles, the political powers at the time had an interpretation of what that meant negatively. What were some of the musical features they objected to, and to what extent are those features obviously political?
3. Later on, commentators in Western Europe and North America (i.e., the non-Communist side of the Cold War) tried to argue that even in many of Shostakovich's "appeasement" works, there were hidden messages that indicated his dissent and lack of compliance with the regime. What are the advantages of looking for such hidden messages? What are the problems?
4. To what extent is it useful to know what was going on in a composer's life during the period of time he was composing a particular work? Why? What questions can we answer this way? What are some of the problems that arise? (This is called "biographical criticism.")

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