

"a terrifying depiction of the devastation  
and atrocities of war..."  
- Andrew Litton

# SHOSTAKOVICH SYMPHONY NO. 8

DALLAS SYMPHONY ORCHESTRA  
ANDREW LITTON conductor

DE 3204



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***DMITRI SHOSTAKOVICH***  
**SYMPHONY NO. 8 IN C MINOR, OP. 65**

- 1 **Adagio-Allegro non troppo** (23:50)
- 2 **Allegretto** (5:57)
- 3 **Allegro non troppo** (5:52)
- 4 **Largo** (9:35)
- 5 **Allegretto** (14:03)

Emanuel Borok, concertmaster  
David Matthews, English horn  
Wilfred Roberts, bassoon  
Christopher Adkins, principal cello

**Andrew Litton, conductor**  
**Dallas Symphony Orchestra**

TOTAL PLAYING TIME: 59:17

Listeners acquainted with any of the 15 Shostakovich symphonies know that they frequently have political overtones. His two most popular symphonies, Nos. 5 and 7, are good examples. In the Fifth Symphony, Shostakovich sought to reinstate himself in official good graces after Stalin's adverse reaction to the composer's opera, *Lady Macbeth of Mtsensk*, in 1936. The following year was the 20th anniversary of the October Revolution. By commemorating that event with the Fifth Symphony, Shostakovich responded successfully to Stalin's political directive for music with a mission. The piece became his passport to official rehabilitation.

Four years later, in his Symphony No. 7, Shostakovich memorialized the Nazi siege of Leningrad. During the Great Patriotic War (as the Russians still call World War II), the "Leningrad" symphony became a rallying cry for Soviet patriotism. It

also achieved immense popularity outside the USSR, evolving into a symbol of the Allied effort against the Nazis. The "Leningrad" Symphony became so well known that when Bartók satirized it in the fourth movement of his Concerto for Orchestra just two years later, most listeners got the joke right away.

Shostakovich's other two symphonies composed during the war years are sometimes grouped with the "Leningrad" as a war triptych. That grouping makes sense primarily from a chronological standpoint, because the Ninth (1945) is largely a light, divertimento-like composition, only political in that it celebrates the war's end. **Among** this triptych, the **Eighth Symphony** is the "heavy": weighty in psychological content and bleak in outlook. It is one of Shostakovich's most personal political statements. The Eighth Symphony is the voice of an entire people engaged in mortal

conflict. It addresses both the profound psychological trauma and the savagery of military combat. Few symphonies by any composer have the unrelieved grimness and dark view of the human condition of the Eighth. This is a work that drains the listener's emotions.

Shostakovich wrote his Eighth Symphony in summer 1943 at a retreat in Ivanovo provided by the Union of Soviet Composers and intended to be a 'House of Rest and Creativity' for composers. Despite the enormity of the score, which takes slightly over an hour in performance, he completed it in just a little over two months. The premiere took place in Moscow on 4 November, 1943, with Evgeni Mravinsky conducting.

By 1943, fortunes in the war had shifted. So had the composer's view of the conflict. Instead of exhorting his countrymen to heroism,

Shostakovich considered war's darkest side in the Eighth Symphony. The music is tragic in the extreme, so much so that it incurred official disapproval for Shostakovich from the Soviet authorities. Socialist Realism, the official state doctrine for composers, had no room for tragedy. This new symphony was not the propaganda vehicle the Soviet authorities were anticipating, and Shostakovich was duly censured. Even his musical colleagues took him to task, castigating the Eighth Symphony because it presented a conundrum without offering a way out. Its darkness was too final. Outside the USSR, Shostakovich appeared to have disappointed his fans as well. While the "Leningrad" continued to find enthusiastic international audiences, the Eighth fell comparatively flat.

During the intervening half-century since the war ended, this profound symphony has gone in and out of

(He allocates important solos, for example, to piccolo and piccolo clarinet.) The motor rhythm of the *Allegro non troppo* plunges us directly onto the battlefield. Using biting, acerbic orchestration such as shrieking woodwind calls, Shostakovich evokes the terror of missiles shooting through the air and grenades exploding at one's side. The music is driven by hysteria: raw, barbaric, even diabolical. The composer leaves us no doubt as to his opinion of war, which he paints as a hideous mechanized nightmare.

With the fourth movement, *Largo*, we reach the emotional heart of the symphony. Shostakovich uses the form of a *passacaglia*, a series of continuous slow variations on a theme, which in this case is repeated eleven times by cellos and basses. This *passacaglia* has the aura of a funeral march. These marchers have lips drawn tight, perhaps for fear of emotional breakdown in the face of

numbing grief. Despite some fine use of orchestral color in this movement, the overall impression is one of lack of contrast. That absence is curiously welcome, providing a measure of stable comfort that is reinforced by the steady repetition of the *passacaglia* theme.

Shostakovich finally begins to dissolve the nerve-wracking tension that has escalated over the course of the symphony.

If he were another composer, Mahler or Beethoven, for example, we might expect the finale to provide triumph through tragedy. Shostakovich wrote that his finale was a look into the future, meaning the post-war era. He envisioned a time when beauty would emerge triumphant, eclipsing all evil and ugliness. The desolate landscape he paints in the symphony makes one wonder if he were prescient about the cold war and the difficult late years of the Stalinist era. A solo bas-

soon ushers in the finale, which proceeds *attacca* as the *passacaglia* resolves to C major. Shostakovich continues the variation structure, adding two fugues and a brief quotation from the third movement at the climax, lest we forget what torment led to the ensuing calm.

C major is generally a triumphant key; traditionally it was the Viennese key of sunlight. Certainly it has no such association in this context. With his sunless return to C-major, Shostakovich looks for the germination of fresh green shoots on terrain devastated by war. A series of brief solos for individual strings and woodwinds lends a chamber-like atmosphere to the symphony's last moments, calling our attention to specific living beings, rather than to collective humankind. These soloists come across as if they were human voices, a manifestation of Shostakovich's faith in the indomitability of the

individual spirit. Still, the thin half-smile of the conclusion compromises its diatonic quietude, making it more the wan, lost hope of a happy ending than the real article.

Laurie Shulman © 1996

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Internationally known American conductor **Andrew Litton** is a regular guest conductor in the world's leading concert halls and opera houses. Music Director of the Dallas Symphony Orchestra since 1994, he is forging one of America's strongest new artistic partnerships. The youthful Mr. Litton, sought out for his musicianship and communicative skills, has conducted over 90 orchestras worldwide in both symphonic and operatic performances. Prior to this recording, his second for the Delos label, he has made over 30 recordings for Virgin Classics, EMI, Sony, Decca, ASV,

CBS Masterworks, Dorian, MCA/RPO, RCA Red Seal, Telarc, and others. Mr. Litton is committed to presenting classical music on television. The Dallas Symphony's youth concert, "Amazing Music," aired nationally during the summer of 1995 on the Arts & Entertainment network with Mr. Litton as conductor and host. Outside of Dallas, highlights of Mr. Litton's recent appearances include Carnegie Hall with the Dallas Symphony, leadership of the English National Opera's new production of *Salome*, and guest appearances with the Cincinnati Symphony, Vancouver Symphony, Bournemouth Symphony, Monte Carlo Philharmonic, Orchestre de la Suisse Romande, the Royal Scottish National Orchestra and the Scottish Chamber Orchestra, among others. Having conducted productions in the world's leading opera houses, Mr. Litton frequently programs opera in concert form with the Dallas Symphony.

Following his Juilliard education, in 1982, Andrew Litton became the first American and youngest winner of Britain's BBC/Rupert Foundation International Conductors Competition, and in the fall of that year, joined the National Symphony Orchestra in Washington D.C. as the Exxon/Arts Endowment Conductor to Music Director Mstislav Rostropovich. During the 1985-86 season, he served as the National Symphony's Associate Conductor. In 1986, Mr. Litton became Principal Guest Conductor of the Bournemouth Symphony; in 1988 he was named Principal Conductor and Artistic Advisor; and in 1994 he was named Conductor Laureate. The University of Bournemouth awarded Andrew Litton an honorary Doctorate of Music in recognition of his work in Great Britain.



### *John Eargle describes VR<sup>2</sup> and Surround Sound*

In preparing McDermott Hall (the auditorium at the Meyerson Symphony Center) for the VR<sup>2</sup> recording of the Shostakovich Eighth Symphony, we removed the risers from the stage for more flexibility in positioning both players and microphones. We kept the same settings of the hall's extensive acoustical reverberation chambers and positioning of the orchestra that we had used earlier in the Delos Dallas Symphony recording of the music of Tchaikovsky (DE 3196). The balance of reverberant pickup to the direct sound of the orchestra was altered

slightly to limn out more the many orchestral solo lines in the work.

As is usual for VR<sup>2</sup> recordings, this project was archived in eight-channel format for eventual remix to discrete surround sound when a future consumer playback format is defined by the industry. Meanwhile, for those listeners with Dolby Surround decoders, or similar devices, this recording will present a clear sonic picture of the hall, with its generous early reflections and smooth reverberant signature.

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Delos' **Dolby Surround**<sup>™</sup> recordings are encoded naturally during the basic recording session through the use of microphone techniques that randomize stereo pickup of ambient and reverberant cues in the recording space. This creates the spacious sound in normal two-speaker stereo listening for which

Delos is noted. Through careful monitoring, these techniques also insure that surround playback enhances the listening experience by reproducing an ambient sound field more closely approaching that of a musical performance in a reverberant space.

*John Eargle*



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Svetlana Furdui, mezzo-soprano • Vassily Gerello, baritone • Dallas Symphony  
Chorus • DE 3196 (DDD)**

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Executive Producer: *Amelia S. Haygood*  
Recording Producer: *Andrew Keener*  
Recording Engineer: *John Eargle*  
Associate Engineer: *Stephen Basili*  
Editing: *Peter S. Myles*  
Recorded January 2-3, 1996,  
McDermott Hall, Meyerson Center, Dallas, TX  
20-bit Digital Processing: *Prism AD-1*  
Monitor Loudspeakers  
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Postproduction: *Waveform Mach 13*  
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Neumann 130 & 140*  
Console: *Soundcraft 200B*

Litton Photo: *John Gilbride*  
Creative Direction: *Harry Pack, Tri-Arts and Associates*  
Graphics: *Bruce Dizon*  
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Symphony community for their invaluable assistance on  
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Operations; Victor Marshall, Artistic Administrator; Lamar  
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John Gutierrez & staff.*



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## Andrew Litton comments on this recording —

*Delos is a most welcome addition to our sphere of activities, says Dallas Symphony Music Director Andrew Litton. To find a record company in this day and age that believes in us and will let us pursue the artistic things we want to achieve is a magical thing.*

*Delos has a phenomenal sound engineer in John Eargle. In combination and in concert with our producer, Andrew Keener from Britain, he has been able to capture a remarkably natural sound of the hall and the orchestra. Nobody before this has been able to record the sound in the Meyerson Symphony Center as the audience hears it. Until now, the microphone was not physically capable of picking up the afterglow, the warmth, the reverberation that everybody loves so much. When people listen to the Dallas Symphony on Delos they will hear, for the first time, the closest representation of what the orchestra actually sounds like at home in the hall.*

**1943**





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