

**SHOSTAKOVICH: SYMPHONY NO. 4**  
**Is Music Dangerous?**  
**Perusal script**

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**VO 1 - Communism is Soviet power...**

**Narrator**

At the Russian Revolution... in 1917...

the composer Shostakovich was eleven years old...

Russia, his country, the largest in the world, was in a time-warp...

The majority of the population were illiterate peasants...

working – and often starving – on the land...

Modern industry existed only in a few cities...

like Moscow and St. Petersburg...

Just a few years later...

when Joseph Stalin became leader of what was now...

the Soviet Union...

he set himself the almost inconceivable task...

of dragging this vast continent into the 20<sup>th</sup> century...

**Actor** [*voice of Stalin*]

Russia has suffered continual beatings...

and humiliation from the rest of the world...

because of her backwardness...

We are one hundred years behind the advanced countries...

We must catch them up in ten...

We must do this, or be crushed...<sup>i</sup>

**Narrator**

The whole of society was directed to this monumental effort...  
If individual lives were lost or ruined, that was inevitable..

**Actor** [*a sinister and malevolent slogan*]

You cannot make an omelette without breaking eggs!<sup>ii</sup>

**Narrator**

Every Soviet citizen was drawn into the herculean struggle...  
to force an entire nation into the modern age...

And the artists...

novelists, poets, film-makers, playwrights, painters and composers...  
they too were to bend their shoulders to an enterprise so vast...  
it was intended to change the course of human history...

**ME 1 –**                    **Building and Hammering**                    (1'50")

**VO 2 -**                    **...plus the electrification of the whole country**

**Narrator**

Like every young person of his time...  
Shostakovich was caught up in the tumult...

He was a child of the modern age...  
fascinated by the new world around him...

In his Second Symphony...

a factory whistle in F sharp!

**Actor**        *[mounting excitement]*

In his Third...

the triumphant working classes on the march!

**Narrator**

His ballet 'The Bolt' depicts...

industrial hammers and machinery...

cogwheels...

workers doing keep-fit exercises...

**Actor**

His most popular movie-score was...

'The Counterplan'...

an epic tale of industrial miracles in a turbine-factory...

Stalin loved it!

**Narrator**

One hyperventilating journalist of that time summed up...

**Actor**        *[intoxicated]*

What is closer to the proletariat?

The pessimism of Tchaikovsky and the false heroics of Beethoven...

a century out of date!..

or the precise rhythms and excitement of our modern music?

With Beethoven, the workers were utterly bored and just waited for it to end...  
But contemporary Soviet compositions...  
aroused contagious emotions in the audience...  
The proletarian masses...  
for whom machine oil is mother's milk...  
have a right to demand music consonant with our own era...  
not the music of the bourgeois salon...  
which belongs to the time of Stephenson's first locomotive...<sup>iii</sup>

**ME 2 –**                    **Out of the earth**    (1'00")

**VO 3 -**                **Building the new**

**Actor** [*thoughtfully, as though remembering, but with excitement*]

In those far-off days...  
life seethed around us, sucking us into its vortex...

All of us who experienced those years... with Shostakovich...  
will remember the intensity of this whirlpool...  
which threw up an explosion of creative energy...

This young composer was determined...  
to break with the stale and ossified traditions...  
imposed upon him by his teachers...

What he wanted...  
was a complete, dynamic expression of modern-day reality...  
a music... resonant with the dramatic turbulence of our history...  
and... with a sense of the catastrophe to come...<sup>iv</sup>

## **Narrator**

As Soviet manpower raised, month by month...  
new cities and industrial complexes...  
where previously there'd been only villages and open steppe...  
so... Shostakovich was determined to create... ..  
new music on the grandest scale...  
reflecting the grandest aspirations...

He resented being distracted from this project...  
by having to earn his living...  
composing trivial theatre scores, popular songs, and movie music...

He published a manifesto:

**Actor**      *[politically strident, defensive, enthusiastic, sophomoric]*

Let me sum up!

Let music take the lead!

Down with composers writing only to serve other artists!

Down with musical theatre!

I declare that I renounce all further work in these unworthy areas...

Enough regurgitating the same old clichés for other people...

I am clearing the way for... a mighty symphony...<sup>v</sup>

**ME 3 –**                      **Reach for the skies**                      (38<sup>”</sup>)

VO 4 - *Parks of rest and culture*

**Narrator**

With modern industrialisation came modern entertainment...

The radio... the gramophone... clubs and music-halls...

Films and dances from faraway America...

Chaplin, Ellington, Disney...

As a teenager, Shostakovich played piano in silent-movie theaters...

up and down Leningrad's main street, Nevsky Avenue...

He discovered jazz...

Later, many would remember this time as a holiday for Soviet youth...

**Actor** *[naive, but touching, with a sense of the horrors that followed]*

When it was summer... we would go out to the parks...

and dance together on the open dance-floors...

Sometimes my friend Zoya and I...

would just walk up and down Nevsky Avenue arm in arm...

showing ourselves off and looking at everyone else...

We called one side of the street... Virgin Street...

and the other... Whorestrasse...

We dressed in the typical fashion of the day...  
in skirts and blouses...  
made from brightly colored material decorated with patriotic motifs...  
factories, engines, tractors, and the hammer and sickle...  
And we wore white socks and canvas shoes...<sup>vi</sup>

**ME 4 –**                    **Fairgrounds and masks**                    (55”)

**VO 5 -**                    **Muddle instead of music**

**Narrator**

In the mid-1930s Shostakovich was world-famous...

**Actor**

His new opera...

...A Lady Macbeth of the Mtsensk District...

ran like a musical...

in three different theatres in Leningrad and Moscow...

and abroad in Berlin... Paris... London...

**Narrator**

And New York, where the critic of the Times...

called the music of the notorious rape-scene...

**Actor**

Pornophony!

**Narrator**

Here was a great voice of the 20<sup>th</sup> century...  
a celebrity of modern music...

And the Soviet government loved it...

Shostakovich's international success...  
proved that Soviet art... like Soviet industry...  
could conquer the world...

Now... he sat down to compose his Fourth Symphony...  
his most ambitious work so far...

Then... on 26 January 1936, Stalin visited the opera...  
to see for himself this 'Lady Macbeth'...  
this famous achievement of Soviet culture...

Part way through, he left the theater...

Two days later... in the national newspaper 'Pravda'...

**Actor**

The Truth!



**Narrator**

There appeared an article... unsigned, but headed...

**Actor**      *[these words must carry the weight of deep and heavy threat]*

'Muddle instead of Music!'

From the first moment, the listener is shocked...  
by deliberate dissonance and confusing streams of sound...

Tiny fragments of melody emerge for a second...  
then disappear into a grinding, squealing roar...

Everything is coarse... primitive... vulgar...

There is no singing, only grunts...  
squawks... shrieks...  
musical chaos... cacophony...

In this piece, 'music' is turned inside out deliberately...

This is a game which may end very badly...

The composer has not considered for a moment...

what our Soviet audience needs and expects...

He scribbles and confuses all sounds...

so as to make sense only to effete petty bourgeois 'formalists'...

who have lost all semblance of wholesome taste...

*[with mounting menace]*

He has ignored the categorical demand of Soviet culture...  
that coarseness and savagery be abolished...  
from every corner of Soviet life...

This opera has had great success with bourgeois audiences abroad...

That is because it tickles their perverted taste...  
with fidgety, neurotic noises...<sup>vii</sup>

**ME 5 –**                    **Iron and Coke**        (2')

**VO 6 –**    **A pen in the teeth**

**Narrator**

When that article appeared in Pravda...  
Shostakovich was in the middle of his new symphony...

Two movements were completed and there was one to go...

A few courageous spirits tried to protect the composer...  
from the storm that swirled around his head...

The distinguished writer... Maxim Gorky...  
sent an outraged letter to Stalin himself...

**Actor**            *[grand anger]*

This article has fallen like a ton of bricks on the head of this young man...  
and he is utterly dejected...

What do they mean by this word 'muddle'?

Those who criticise Shostakovich...  
should give a technically precise description of his music...

Instead, all they've done...  
is to provoke herds of the ungifted and every charlatan in the land...  
to hound this most talented of our composers...<sup>viii</sup>

**Narrator**

Shostakovich continued working on his symphony...

**Actor**      *[defiant]*

If they cut off my hands...  
I will carry on composing, holding my pen in my teeth...<sup>ix</sup>

**Narrator**

Years later he recalled...

**Actor**

After "Muddle instead of Music"...  
the authorities tried to persuade me to repent... and expiate my sin...

But I refused...

What helped me in those far-off days was my youth and physical strength...

Instead of repenting, I wrote my Fourth Symphony...

**SAMPLE/DO NOT COPY**

**Narrator**

Stalin was now attempting ever greater miracles...

Thousands of miles of railroads...

to be laid in record time over swamps and marshes...

Vast hydroelectric projects...

The excavation of gargantuan shipping canals...

And to achieve this... forced labor...

prisoners, arrested in hundreds of thousands...

crowded together in camps with little food...

digging the frozen ground... sometimes with their bare hands...

One of them wrote a poem...

**Actor**                    *[numb]*

Where mossy cliffs and waters slumber,

There, thanks to the strength of labor,

Factories will be built and towns will grow.

Smoking chimneys will rise up

Under Northern skies...

And buildings will shine with the lights

Of libraries, theaters and... clubs...<sup>x</sup>

**ME 6 –**                    **Water and explosions**    (45")

*(NB The projections include original recorded sound of explosions which run at the same time as the orchestra plays)*

VO 7 -

*The Kremlin Mountaineer*

**Narrator**

While Shostakovich was writing music...  
others were keeping secret diaries...

**Actor**      *[capture the incredible courage of such writing and its secrecy]*

These last months have been like an avalanche...  
sweeping through our lives...  
terrifying... nightmarish...  
destroying families and homes in its path...

It came... and it's right here in front your eyes...  
but still you can't believe it...

**Narrator**

The fabric of society... was being torn apart...  
by daily denunciations...  
arbitrary arrests...  
mass imprisonments...  
and executions...

**Actor**      *[capture the horror and the fear]*

The vomit rises in my throat...  
when I hear how calmly everyone around says...  
“He was shot... someone else was shot... shot... shot...”

That word is always in the air, like an echo...

People pronounce it as though they were saying...  
“He went to the theater”...<sup>xi</sup>

### **Narrator**

People had to learn to hide themselves, to wear a mask...

A poem...  
by one of Russia’s greatest writers, Osip Mandelstam...

He gives strange names to Stalin...  
‘The Kremlin mountaineer’... and the ‘Ossete’...  
referring to Stalin’s tribal origins...  
in the high mountains of the Caucasus....

**Actor**     *[a poem which had disastrous consequences for its author]*

We live without feeling the country beneath us,  
our speech at ten paces inaudible...

and where there are enough for half a conversation  
the name of the Kremlin mountaineer is dropped...

His thick fingers are fatty like worms,  
but his words are as true as pound weights...

His cockroach whiskers laugh,  
and the tops of his boots gleam...

Around him a rabble of thick-skinned leaders,  
he plays with the attention of these half-men...

Some whistle, some miaul, some snivel,  
but he just bangs and pokes...

He forges decrees like horseshoes –  
some get it in the groin, some in the forehead, in the brows, in the eyes...

And whatever the punishment – raspberries...  
and the broad chest of an Ossete...

**Narrator**

One of those who listened to the poet reading these words...  
informed on him...

He was arrested... confined in mental hospital... exiled...  
and eventually... sentenced to hard labour in Siberia...

He died on the way, probably of starvation and disease...

**ME 7 –**                      **Rearmament**                      (1'20")



**Narrator**

Stalin moulded his image to suggest omnipotence...  
He was the father of the nation, a parent to all Soviet children...

There was even a schoolyard slogan...

**Actor** *[capture the surreal harshness of this idea]*

Stalin is my father and my mother!...

**Narrator**

Every Soviet citizen was encouraged to marry...  
and bring forth Soviet children...

But it was hard to be a parent in Stalinist Russia...

While still a teenager, Shostakovich wrote to his mother...

**Actor** *[a 16-year-old, whose mother dislikes his girlfriends]*

Dearest Mamochka!...

You tell me to be careful...

and not to throw myself into the whirlpool of romance...

I'd like to philosophise a little about this...

I'm sure you don't think I'm only interested in physical love...

But if a married woman falls out of love with her husband...

and gives herself to another... there's nothing wrong with that...

Love should be free. ..

The best thing would be the total abolition of marriage...

But that's... utopian...

Without marriage there'd be no family...

and that would be a disaster...

So you see, when I think about it, my head starts spinning...

### **Narrator**

In 1932 Shostakovich married Nina, a young scientist...

Four years later... a few weeks after this Fourth Symphony was finished...

their first child was born... Galina, a daughter.

### **Actor**

On the morning of Galina's birth...

five of us turned up at Shostakovich's apartment...

including two famous conductors...

Yevgeny Mravinsky...

and Otto Klemperer, who was in the Soviet Union to conduct Beethoven...

He'd been told about Shostakovich's new piece...

and was thinking of giving the Western première...

The composer sat at the piano in his study...  
and performed the whole symphony from beginning to end...  
and then we celebrated the new-born baby... with champagne...

**ME 8 –**                      **Childhood**                      (2'28")

**SAMPLE/DO NOT COPY**

*Photo of Shostakovich with his children*

**Narrator**

Stalin... like so many dictators... wanted to wipe society clean...

New rules were laid down...  
to control sexual and moral behaviour...  
and sport and physical fitness were promoted...  
to improve collective health and discipline...

Shostakovich loved sport... especially soccer...  
He often went to matches... he was a qualified referee...  
he read the sports pages in the papers...  
and in his diaries he recorded all the details...  
which teams had scored... and the names of all the players ...

Once, while his wife was away...  
he invited an entire soccer team to a meal in his apartment...

**Actor** *[pedantic, but awe-struck]*

As his friend, I was also invited...  
The occasion went off very well...  
though it was naturally a little tough for the composer and the footballers...  
to find conversational topics of mutual interest...

After the meal, we repaired to Shostakovich's study...

and one of the soccer-players produced a guitar...  
and then they asked Shostakovich to play his music on the piano...

He was happy to do that...

Once they'd gone, he stretched himself out on the sofa...  
like a man who's done a good day's work...

"Well, now we've actually got to know some of our heroes"<sup>xii</sup>

**ME 9 –**                      **Physical exercises**                      (1'53")

**Speech 10 -**                      **Automata and the absurd**

**Narrator**

In those years...  
the gap between the appearance of people's lives...  
the healthy sports events and smiling faces...  
and reality...  
became ever wider...

**Actor**                      *[with a sense of the extreme significance of this statement]*

The cement that held our lives together... was terror...<sup>xiii</sup>

**Narrator**

It was common to retreat into silence...

**Actor**        *[from a secret diary... filled with darkness and fear...]*

The best way to protect yourself...  
is to look dumb and completely self-confident...

Most people don't see beyond their own backyards...

They are slaves, slaves in everything they do...  
and toadies to the marrow of their bones...<sup>xiv</sup>

**Narrator**

Life became absurd...

**Actor**        *[within this miniature masterpiece by Daniil Kharms, there is the feeling of a Dostoyevsky novel compressed into a few Gogol-like words... This story is almost biblical in its mythic quality. Don't just make it funny.]*

Once there lived a red-headed man who had no eyes and ears.

He had no hair either, so they only called him 'red-headed' ... hypothetically.

He couldn't speak, because he had no mouth. He also didn't have a nose.

He had no arms and legs. No stomach, no back, no spine and no internal organs whatsoever.

In fact, he had nothing!

So it's not clear what we are talking about.

It'd be better... to say no more about him.

**ME 10 –**                    **The Strange Parade**            (28")

**Speech 11 -**            **The Funeral**

**Narrator**

It now became an everyday experience...  
for those you knew... to disappear...

**Actor**            *[from the secret diary]*

I am not afraid of death...

What I dread is that the things I cherish and hold dear...  
will be no use to anyone...  
discarded, burned, given away to strangers...<sup>xv</sup>

**Narrator**

The great poet, Anna Akhmatova...

**Actor**        *[one of the great 20th century Russian poems]*

This was a time when only the dead smiled,  
Happily at rest.  
And like a useless signboard  
The city of Leningrad swung in front of its own prisons.

Demented from torture,  
Regiments of the already condemned tramped onwards,  
And the whistles of steam-trains sang  
Short songs of farewell.

The stars of death hung above us  
And innocent Russia writhed  
Under bloody boots  
And the rubber tyres of black police-cars.

**Narrator**

There were more and more public trials...  
Plots, each more fantastic than the last...  
were reported in every treacherous detail...  
in the newspapers and on the radio...

Leading politicians... scientists... academics... generals... ordinary people...  
were all suddenly revealed to be saboteurs and spies...  
for the British or the Japanese...

Stalin's Chief Prosecutor, was Andrei Vyshinsky...



*Film sequence with Vyshinsky yelling. Wait until after his third phrase:  
'Vot oni! Agenty!' ['There they are! Agents!']*

In December 1934 Sergei Kirov...  
the most respected leader in the country after Stalin...  
was assassinated... probably on Stalin's orders...  
though this never has been proved...

Kirov's murder launched a torrent of destruction...  
waves of arrests that swept through city after city...  
summary executions...  
and freight trains crossing the country hour by hour...  
filled with prisoners dying of starvation and disease...

The journey East towards the camps took weeks...  
and thousands died along the way...

**Actor** *[from one of the greatest of all camp memoirs]*

There was a crash as the door was barred with an enormous bolt...  
a shudder and the train was moving...

How slowly it crawled, day after day, like a slow-motion film...

The wheels creaked agonizingly and rattled...  
splashing the precious water from our mugs...

The food they gave us was salty soup of herring tails...  
We dared not eat it for it made us thirsty...

The July heat got worse and worse...  
and the air was so humid it burned your skin...  
The roof of the cattle-car was red-hot...  
and the nights not long enough to cool it...

Our only thought was how to hold our clay cups...  
and not let the precious drops of water in them...  
be spilled by the jolting of the wheels...  
or by a sudden movement from the person next to us.<sup>xvii</sup>

**Narrator**

At Kirov's funeral, Stalin was a pall-bearer...

**ME 11 – Immolation (3'38")**

*(NB There is real original mono sound at the start of this extract, the Chopin funeral march. This quickly fades, and is followed by live music)*

**VO 12 - The rehearsal**

**Narrator**

Shostakovich's symphony was finished in late April 1936...  
And... amazingly... accepted for performance in the following season...

**Actor**        *[the voice of Shostakovich's friend, remembering]*

The conductor was Fritz Stiedry...  
a great musician and an emigre from Nazi Germany...  
now in charge of the Leningrad Philharmonic...  
Shostakovich regarded him highly.

The new symphony had been allocated many rehearsals...  
and I attended them all...  
Stiedry worked the orchestra very hard...

I can't speak for the composer... but I noticed a wanness in the hall...

Rumours had been circulating...  
that Shostakovich had ignored the criticism...  
to which he had so lately been subjected...  
and had deliberately written a symphony that was devilishly complicated...  
and stuffed full of forbidden 'modernism' and 'formalism'...

**Narrator**

The last movement...  
written after the composer's public denunciation and disgrace...  
is the strangest...

The music changes course...  
diverts into a stream of ridiculous song-and-dance numbers...  
silent-movie chases... sentimental waltzes...  
and upbeat marching-songs for young pioneers...

It's as though, faced with an experience beyond words... or music...  
Shostakovich had dropped into a nearby music-hall...  
or come face-to-face with a little parade at the corner of a street...

**ME 12 –**                    **Music-hall sequence**        (3'00")

**VO 13 -**                **There will be no symphony**

**Actor**                [*Shostakovich's friend again. Suggest his 'mounting anxiety'*]

One fine day...

an official from the Composers' Union turned up at rehearsal...  
and he brought with him a dignitary from Communist Party headquarters...

While the orchestra went on working, these two went upstairs...

After a while, the manager of the concert-hall, Mr Renzin...  
appeared and summoned Shostakovich to his office...

They went up the spiral staircase at the back...  
I waited in the Hall...

Fifteen minutes later, Shostakovich came back to find me...  
and we walked together to his apartment a few blocks away...

His gloomy silence only added to my mounting anxiety...

At last – in a flat, expressionless voice... he told me...

'There will be no symphony'...

It had been removed from the programme...

Renzin had implored him to withdraw it himself...

Otherwise he would have been forced to take...

what he called “administrative measures”...

**Narrator**

Stalin was remaking an entire society in his own image...

And history too...

In picture-books, photo-albums and galleries...

the faces of once-living human beings...

were being ripped out, pasted over, or blackened and smeared with ink...

so that we should never see them again...

**ME 13 - The commissar vanishes (2'22")**

**VO 14 - Rebirth**

**Narrator**

Ten years passed...  
The Second World War...  
The death of Stalin in 1953...  
and still this symphony was not performed...

In 1958, twenty-two years after composing it...  
Shostakovich was in a Moscow hospital...  
The disease that would eventually kill him...  
had begun to destroy the movement in his right hand.

**Actor**        *[Shostakovich, in hospital, writing a letter to a friend. Gentle combination of irony, whimsy and pathos]*

My stay here is drawing to an end and I'll be home soon...  
My hand is better, but I won't be playing the piano in a while...

In my spare time, of which I've got a lot just now...  
I think about the Fourth Symphony...

I'd so like to hear it... but I don't have much hope of that...  
So I indulge myself by imagining the music in my inner ear...

**Narrator**

In that same year, 1958...  
Anna Akhmatova wrote a poem called 'Music'...  
It is dedicated to Shostakovich...

She didn't publish it...  
But she did read it aloud... and someone made a tape-recording...

*AKHMATOVA RECORDING (allow Akhmatova's declamation to establish and then come in over the top as the recorded sound fades)*

**Actor**        *[support the idea that you are translating what you just heard Akhmatova say in Russian]*

Something miraculous burns within it  
And, in my eyes, its edges are cut like the facets of a jewel.  
Music alone speaks with me,  
When others are too frightened to approach.

When the last friend turned away their eyes,  
Music was with me in my grave,  
And sang like the first storm in spring  
Or as though all the flowers had broken into speech.

**Narrator**

On the 30<sup>th</sup> December 1961...  
twenty-five years after he'd composed it...  
Shostakovich's Fourth Symphony was first performed...  
in Moscow, conducted by Kiril Kondrashin.

**Actor**        *[the friend again]*

I sat next to him...

*[pause, to suggest the intensity of this experience]*

Afterwards... back in his apartment.. he said...

“I think... in many ways...

the Fourth is better than the symphonies that came after...”<sup>xviii</sup>

**ME 14 – The Composer (2’02”)**

**Gerard McBurney**

2007-12-11, revised 3rd Oct 2010

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<sup>i</sup> Speech by Stalin, quoted in Conquest and elsewhere

<sup>ii</sup> Commonly quoted, including in Nadezhda Mandelstam: Hope against Hope

<sup>iii</sup> Cited in Boris Schwartz: Music and Musical Life in the USSR

<sup>iv</sup> M.S.Druskin, cited in Elizabeth Wilson: Shostakovich, A Life Remembered

<sup>v</sup> Declaration of the Obligations of a Composer, published in Rabochiy i teatr

<sup>vi</sup> The Long Journey Home

<sup>vii</sup> Sumbur vmesto muzyki, using transliterations in Fay and Schwartz

<sup>viii</sup> Quoted in Wilson

<sup>ix</sup> Quoted in Wilson

<sup>x</sup> Anna Applebaum: A History of the Gulag, p.58

<sup>xi</sup> Lyubov Shaporina, quoted in Garros, Korenevskaya and Lahusen: Intimacy and Terror

<sup>xii</sup> Isaak Glikman, Letters to a Friend

<sup>xiii</sup> Shchedrin in Think Today, Speak Tomorrow

<sup>xiv</sup> Shaporina

<sup>xv</sup> Shaporina

<sup>xvi</sup> Akhmatova, Requiem

<sup>xvii</sup> Ginzburg, Journey into the Whirlwind

<sup>xviii</sup> Glikman, Letters to a Friend