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Allusion and Quote: The Social Meaning of Musical References in Shostakovich's Works

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Across different eras and cultures, allusions have been one of the most subtle and at the same time effective artistic devices for conveying an author's message through subtext. The Soviet era in Russian history was one of those socio-cultural contexts that gave birth to so many artifacts of this kind that it could easily be considered a classic example of the use of this technique in the modern times. The article analyzes various forms of allusion, including quotation as a type of contextual metaphor, in the works of the leading and at the same time most targeted Soviet composer Dmitri Shostakovich. Quotations from famous classical works in Shostakovich's music, whether or not they are considered to have a predetermined meaning, are addressed along with references to classical, popular, or folk music, as well as messages conveyed through Jewish idiom, whatever it may be, which in itself seems truly unique to the Russian composer's toolkit.

Keywords: Russian Symbolism, Aesopian language, Shostakovich, allusion, quote, Jewish idiom

Introduction

Homemade Appetizers

British musicologist David Fanning reveals Soviet composer Dmitri Shostakovich's metaphorical answer to the question of what a musicologist is: "I'll tell you. Our cook, Pasha, prepared the scrambled eggs for us and we are eating them. Now imagine a person who did not cook the eggs and does not eat them, but talks about them—that is a musicologist" (Fanning, 1995, p. 1).

I was reminded of this brilliant response in 2010, when—then still a continuo player—I was invited to accompany Handel's *Israel in Egypt* at a conference of kibbutz choirs at the Hebrew University of Jerusalem, together with the British conductor Andrew Parrott. One day, we were working diligently on the "Hailstones". The next day, the conductor began rehearsals with this section of the oratorio. It sounded good, but not perfect. One of the choristers asked Parrott how it was. In response, the maestro told a parable. An Anglican priest spent the night in the church's guesthouse. In the morning, he was served soft-boiled eggs. The eggs were stale, but the priest was polite and ate them. Then they asked him how it was, and he replied, "Well, it was good in parts". The kibbutz choir members were a little confused, trying to understand the maestro's British humor, but I burst out laughing. Back then, I was still cooking those very eggs myself, using Shostakovich's definition.

And now we can begin.

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Theoretical Foundations

The scholarly investigation into the musical style of Dmitri Shostakovich (see Figure 1) has been passing different periods, starting from the mid-1940s and up to recent insights. The first observations of Soviet theorists, most notably Dolzhansky (1947) and, even earlier, Mazel (1967 [actually written in 1944 and remaining unpublished for over 20 years]), merely described the connections between modal melody and (still) harmonic tonality in the composer's language of the mid-1930s and early 1940s, revealing what would henceforth be called "Shostakovich modes". Investigations of later decades are already dealing with such features as semantics, symbolism, quotations (e.g. Bobrovsky, 1961; Aranovsky, 1977), and all the contextual level corresponding to the development of the composer's style, that included what has neither been relevant, nor was it seen in earlier period. Aranovsky's article is still highly relevant in this respect, though not translated from Russian, and thus only referred to in single publications. However, this study gives a complement exploration into kinds of citations, references, and the world of semantics in Shostakovich's last symphony, which indeed is a treasury of the subtext delineating the dramaturgy of this highly representative work. Up until Puolakka's (2017) article, which explores the meanings of quotes in Fifteenth Symphony including their meaning and context in the original works from which they came, Aranovsky's (1977) insight could be considered the main source for addressing the extra-textual semantics in late Shostakovich's works.

Figure 1. Dmitri Shostakovich, early 1940s. Courtesy: Encyclopaedia Britannica, Inc.

Most, if not all, studies of Russian Symbolism or semantics/semiotics in Russian art (whatever that means) are based on the work of Mikhail Bakhtin and, later, Yuri Lotman. Even if the context of the phenomenon being studied in Russian music, poetry, or fine art is not directly related to Bakhtin-Lotman theory (that emphasizes dialogue as fundamental to meaning, culture, and social interaction), you are unlikely to find a study of Russian culture in the early 20th century that does not mention the names of these two scholars. However, in studies of Soviet art, you will rarely find mention of these names, as symbolism and semantics here rather give way to reflections on the hidden text, which in this context means the language of Aesop under the Stalinist regime.

While in its classical form Aesop's language involves the use of metaphor instead of pointing to an object, at the end of the 20th century quotation was introduced as a kind of allusion or reference. If, generally, the treatment of quotations as references was most clearly addressed in Bicknell (2001), research frameworks applied to Shostakovich's musical language in the above-mentioned context can be found in publications of the last two decades or so (e.g. Fay, 2000; Barsova, 2000; Wilson, 2012; Puolakka, 2017). With that said, the question of using a "Jewish idiom" (so notable in Shostakovich's works from the mid-1940s to mid-1960s) as a reference, symbol, or even a hidden manifestation of a civic position of the Russian Soviet composer, has not been directly addressed in scholarly research until at least two recent publications by Ritzarev (2023; 2024), which can thus be considered the beginning of the discussion, and whose importance cannot be overestimated.

Research Question, Design, and Methods

The research question of this study, formulated on the basis of existing, including the latest, sources and the author's fairly detailed knowledge of Shostakovich's music, is actually divided into two interrelated questions: (1) What kinds of musical references does Shostakovich use in his works and what socio-cultural layers do they emphasize? (2) Are the allusions, quotations, and idioms a kind of Aesopian language in the Stalinist conditions of time and place, or do they rather represent, consciously or not, various forms of Russian Symbolism in the Soviet era?

In order to cover the various aspects of the research question and their relevance to quite different topics and problems, three seemingly independent blocks were chosen as the scientific basis for this study. The first such block will address the phenomenon of Symbolism in Russia at the turn of the 20th century and until the end of the World War I, coinciding with the October Revolution of 1917—how it manifested itself in art and how it was described in relevant studies. The second block will focus on forms of Aesopian language in Soviet art and its reflection in scientific research. The third block will be devoted to Jewish themes or, more precisely, "Jewish idiom" in the Soviet context as a symbolic means of expressing civic position.

The study follows traditional methods of studying past composers and their works, with elements of an interdisciplinary and multidisciplinary approach that combines the study of sources of the time, later, and modern ones—both in the original language (in the context of the work in question) and in English—with a detailed acquaintance with the musical material under discussion and its surrounding context.

The Culture of Allusion in Soviet Art

Outlines of Russian Symbolism

The starting point, or rather the precedent for allusions and allegories in Soviet art, can be considered the phenomenon known as Russian Symbolism. What does this collocation mean, and what names come to mind associated with this era (style, movement)? First and foremost, these are names from various fields of art, literature, and music: Valery Bryusov, Andrei Bely, Alexander Blok, Kuzma Petrov-Vodkin, Nicholas Roerich, and Alexander Scriabin.

At the height of the Decadent movement that swept Russia at the beginning of the 20th century, a new artistic, initially literary, stylistic trend emerged, associated with the publication of the landmark poem by Valery Bryusov (1873-1924) *The Coming Huns* (1905), in which he "welcomes the new barbarians coming to destroy the old culture and usher in a new, younger civilization on its ruins" (Lodge, 2010, p. 276). The Russian intelligentsia could not help but sense the approaching time of great changes. "The First Russian Revolution of

1905 showed that the timer had been set, and it was a matter of, if not months, then only a few years for the revolution to return" (Rosenblatt, 2025, p. 167). Although Andrei Bely and, especially, Alexander Blok represented the culmination of Symbolism in poetry in the pre-war (World War I) years, its influence can be traced back to the 1950s, including in the work of Soviet dissident writers such as Boris Pasternak (1890-1960). Thus, *Literaturnaya gazeta* (The literary gazette) of September 9, 1958, denounced "the decadent religious poetry of Pasternak, which reeks of mothballs from the Symbolist suitcase of 1908-10 manufacture" (Ivinskaya, 1978, p. 231).

Although perhaps the most important Russian Symbolist artist was Mikhail Vrubel with his paintings *The Demon Seated* (1890) and *The Demon Downcast* (1899), Symbolism in Russian art is more closely associated with the artists of the World of Art group, mainly the theatre painters: Viktor Borisov-Musatov, Alexandre Benois, Kuzma Petrov-Vodkin with his famous painting *The Bathing of the Red Horse* (1912), and Nicholas Roerich (see Figure 2), whose later works are considered quite esoteric and influenced by the teachings of the Russian philosopher Helena Blavatsky and her interpretation of the religions and customs of the Far East.

Figure 2. Nicholas Roerich, Guests from Oversees, 1901. Public domain.

In music, the eminent Russian Symbolist composer was Alexander Scriabin, whose ideas about synthetic performances, music, poetry, dancing, colors, and scents used to bring about "supreme, final ecstasy", led him through the chain of symphonic poems—*The Divine Poem* (Symphony No. 3, Op. 43, 1904) and *Prometheus: The Poem of Fire*, Op. 60 (1910)—towards *The Poem of Ecstasy*, Op. 54 (the last sketch of which is dated 1908), which he eventually did not complete, dying prematurely in 1915.

One of the most recent examples of Russian musical symbolism is the song "Bride" by Georgy Sviridov (1915-1998), the third piece from the *Petersburg* cycle created between 1975 and 1995. In this work, "the bell-ringing of the piano and the verbal image of the Virgin joining the funeral procession complement the spiritual part of the story of the bride following the groom's coffin" (Rosenblatt, 2022, p. 550). This song contains a variety of symbols between the worlds of life, death, religion, and resurrection.

The spread of Russian Symbolism in the West was not without the activities of Emilii Medtner (1872-1936), the brother of the Russian composer Nikolai Medtner, who was a philosopher, literary and music critic, and also an admirer, supporter, and promoter of the poet and theorist of Russian Symbolism Andrei Bely. In the 1910s, he began to frequently visit Germany, developing an interest in the theory of Sigmund Freud and becoming close to his follower Carl Jung, telling him about Russian Symbolism. At some point, he became Jung's patient for a good enough reason: His wife, Anna, "soon after their marriage and moving to Medtner's family house, fell in love with his brother Nikolai, and her feeling turned out to become mutual" (Rosenblatt, 2025, p. 170). Those interested in learning what happened next are invited to consult the source mentioned, but here we will make an ellipsis, since the time for digressions is over, and move on to the practice of allegory and Aesopian language, which largely displaced symbolism in Russian artistic reality following the changed circumstances in Russia, which by that time had become Soviet.

Aesopian Language in the Context of Stalinism

The cultural phenomenon and practice of everyday communication between people known as Aesopian language is, as the name suggests, as old as Aesopian times themselves. In different countries and regimes, there have always been restrictions on what can and cannot be said out loud, primarily in relation to socio-political issues and the persons/parties in power. Tsarist Russia was no exception. However, the communists who came to power after the monarchy in post-revolutionary (1917) Russia apparently imposed such strict restrictions and rules on what could be said publicly and what was strictly forbidden, that the phenomenon of the evolution of Aesopian language in Soviet everyday life and in artistic media, where applicable, has become a subject of study both in post-Soviet Russia and in the West.

The literature on this topic examines issues related to censorship in the USSR, the levels and registers of everyday conversation based on allegories, and Soviet art that used Aesopian language.

Censorship in the USSR in the 1920s, and especially in the 1930s, was so severe that even people from Lenin's inner circle were removed from group photographs if they were prosecuted or, even worse, convicted, even before the Great Purges carried out by Stalin and his henchmen. King (1997) provides examples of original photographs and their later modifications in which images of individual people are missing. Same way, he who studied in a Soviet school in the 1940s may recall textbooks in which some photographs of the country's leaders were simply blacked out with ink. Students and teachers might do that in their copies out of a deep fear of being associated with "enemies of the people"—a standard libel for Stalin's political opponents who had fallen out of favor or been executed.

Yugay (2018) accurately describes the structure of Aesopian language among Soviet people—allegories and coded meanings used to convey any message that could be interpreted as disloyalty—that have existed since the 1930s, when people found these forms of expression without discussing things directly, since you never knew where a snitch might be. Aesopian language was inextricably linked to the function of protecting its speakers from the danger of being caught for "subversive activities", espionage for foreign countries, and other punishable offenses that threatened freedom and life. This latently shaped the habit of thinking not linearly, but only "curvilinearly". Decades later, people continued this practice, even in (seemingly) safer times and places.

In Soviet cinema of the 1960s and early 1970s, folklore was used as a means of allegory, serving as a way to solve artistic problems under censorship.

The turn of auteur Soviet cinema towards folkloric allegory and its inherent figurativeness can be linked to the fact that this historical period was essentially characterized by a "muteness" (different from the cinema of the 1920s), an inability to speak openly in art. This period thus manifested a growing need to find a way to express themes and images on screen that were explicitly or implicitly taboo (Vorobeva, 2021, p. 1264).

That said, in cases such as the use of religious music in a film, it was relatively easy for officials to detect it early on and forcibly remove it from the score.

Music, as the most abstract art form, allowed composers for the use of Aesopian language in its most refined and sophisticated forms, which would later take decades to decipher. However, the very fact of the personal attitude of leaders such as Stalin (and also Hitler) to classical music and their "commitment" to it (see Self, 2013) placed musicians in a rather difficult position, where any deviation from the classical norm by an acting composer could lead to disfavor, not to mention the bold experiments of the 20th century, which were extremely unpopular among tyrants. This situation prompted Soviet composers to use various hidden symbols and forms of expression, without openly challenging tradition but speaking through hints, quotes, and other allusions and allegories. Between the 1940s and 1960s, the "Jewish idiom" became one such form with a strong metaphorical meaning and social subtext.

Jewish Theme as a Manifestation of Civic Position

In multinational Soviet Russia, public displays of any connection to Judaism as a religion, culture, or simply ethnic/genetic origin were not accepted, as were any other "national" discussions. However, when during World War II, information about the complete extermination of European Jews became available in the Soviet Union (where it also occurred in occupied territory), the silence surrounding this fact on the part of the Soviet authorities and the media caused a reaction of solidarity amongst the intelligentsia.

The forms of such solidarity varied: from music, including melodies somehow connected with the folklore of those places where Jewish music could be identified as such, to poetic texts related to events of a general and specific nature, such as Babi Yar, a place near Kiev where, on September 29-30, 1941, a huge number of Jews were shot and thrown into a ravine.

Another event that shook Soviet society and the creative intelligentsia was the Doctors' Plot (January 1953), when Jewish doctors were accused of attempting to "harmfully treat" the country's leaders. The case was closed and deemed a "mistake" shortly after Stalin's death in May 1953. Any action in support of Jews during that period, while extremely dangerous for the person expressing such support, will retroactively be regarded as a high-minded display of civic stance.

By the early 1960s, the dissident movement, representing the first public criticism of the system, was largely associated with the "Sinyavsky-Daniel trial" of 1966, when two writers were tried for publishing their works abroad. Characteristically, one of the writers was of Jewish origin, and the other, not being Jewish, chose a Jewish pseudonym, thus also demonstrating a civic stance.

The above sequence of well-known facts (which today require no proof or reference) was chosen here because it highlights the very tendency to use Jewish themes and related artistic devices and techniques as an expression of civic engagement in the USSR in the first decades after World War II, and especially in view of the fact that Dmitri Shostakovich, unlike many others, although not Jewish, was one of the first, and sometimes the only, composer to actively and convincingly respond to all these events. This will be explained and

demonstrated in more detail in the relevant section, but for now we can move on to the immediate topic of this study—the interpretation and analysis of the various references in the composer's music.

References in Shostakovich's Music: Interpretation and Analysis

In Search of Meaning

Yet, before moving on to the typology and definition of the meaning of various quotations and allusions throughout composer's works, we will make a small (and final) digression, be it considered a guesswork or, rather, an aside.

As a composer whose works are replete with all sorts of references, Shostakovich provides fertile ground for pondering "what could this mean?". Regardless of the type of reference, over the past half-century, interpretations of one and the same certain case have shifted from the intra-musical to the ultra-social, in keeping with the politicization of the humanities.

We tend to overlook the fact that the appearance of a quote or allusion in a particular work may be the result of hearing that piece on the radio that morning. People did not have the means to listen to music at all times on YouTube and Spotify, and listening to music was limited to a personal collection of 78 rpm vinyl records (later 33 rpm LPs), listening to the radio, or attending a concert. The weight of music heard was much higher than it is today. Such a situation can be imagined, for example, with a fragment of the overture to Rossini's opera *William Tell* in the Fifteenth Symphony, but certainly not with the song "Buy My Bagels" from Odessa in the Second Cello Concerto. Thus, de Certeau's (1984) reflections on the everyday life may be relevant and applicable here as well. That said, we cannot treat every allusion or reference in music as a completely conscious act, since musical associations are sometimes as abstract as the music itself. However, if the sonata form in instrumental music since the 18th century represented the most abstract generalization of the dialectic of life, then any question of allusions and quotations raises the question: What did I (the composer) or what did he/she (the listener reflecting on the composer) want to say? In other words, by the mid-20th century, if you wrote a symphony or string quartet that contained no quotations or references to anything significant, it was as if you had said nothing...

Discussion of Style as a Message

Over the years, scholars have attempted to decipher the style and other characteristics of Shostakovich's sonata-form works, particularly his symphonies and quartets, in search of various emotional, social, and, importantly, political messages. For example, the mystery of the apparently classical Fifth and Ninth Symphonies, which might contain hidden signs of the composer's secret resistance to the authorities, has been thoroughly studied. Thus, Barsova (2000) examined the musical symbols of the "last journey", including references to Berlioz's "Marching to the Scaffold" in the Fifth Symphony; and Watson (2019) searched for the "true Ninth" behind the famous one. The more complex (in terms of musical means) Tenth Symphony presented its own tangle of questions, the unraveling of which has become the goal of several studies, in particular the work of Karl and Robinson (1995), aimed at unraveling the "expression of cognitively complex emotions" contained within it. This list could be greatly expanded to include a discussion of references in the composer's symphonies, quartets, and concertos, each of which deserves discussion and study in this regard, and many of which have already become the subject of such research.

When it comes to Shostakovich, the style of writing music is inextricably linked with the composer's unique personality in its multifaceted manifestations. Kondakov (2023), defining "the principles of political and

philosophical musical allegories in the creative work of D. D. Shostakovich" (p. 139), brought a firsthand account by the composer on his Fifteenth Quartet—six slow movements, all in E-flat minor, based on a letter from the composer to his friend, the literary critic Isaak Glikman:

> I wrote a useless and ideologically flawed quartet. I thought that if I ever died, it was unlikely anyone would write a piece dedicated to my memory. So I decided to write one myself. It could have been written on the cover: "Dedicated to the memory of the author of this quartet". (p. 139)

This passage is typical not only of the composer's personal style of communication, but also of his approach to his own works, which will be further demonstrated in more detail through textual and musical solutions and references in his *Preface to the Complete Collection of My Works*.

Kondakov is perhaps the first scholar to offer a very convincing division of all 15 of the composer's symphonies into logical (stylistic, chronological) triads, each of which corresponds to a certain period in the life of the composer himself and his country—from the anxious and at the same time joyful atmosphere of the 1920s to the most general humanistic problems of man and humanity—life, death, and immortality—in the 1960s and 1970s (2023, p. 141).

Typology of References in Shostakovich's Music

Below is an attempt to systematize the references in Shostakovich's music by type, selecting five of the most characteristic from his musical arsenal, each accompanied by an example, an explanation of its socio-cultural meaning, and some broader considerations on the matter.

1. Quotations from Famous Classical Works

Several examples of this kind can be found in the Fifteenth Symphony. This work has become a near-textbook example of the quotation of familiar melodies from past classical music in 20th-century music, with the most detailed analysis being presented in Aranovsky (1977), and the most recent in Puolakka (2017) and Rosenblatt (2020).

Direct quotations (or allusions to a very clear musical source) in the symphony occur in two forms: (a) with a predetermined meaning (for example, two motifs from Wagner's *Der Ring des Nibelungen*—the fate motif and the death motif); and (b) without such a predetermined meaning (a fragment from Rossini's *William Tell*). The music contains numerous themes (both melodies and clusters) built on a 12-tone scale, alluding to Schoenberg's approach to overcoming the inertia of Western tonality[1]. These patterns, which could easily be associated with lapses in consciousness, calls from the other world, and other signs of approaching the end of life, contrast with purely tonal themes (such as the quotations above), which clearly symbolize life, and "Shostakovich tonality" patterns, which are associated with the composer's reflections on death and eternity.

2. A Reference to a Famous Work

A striking example of such kind of references is the Viola Sonata, the composer's final work, whose concluding movement is based on Beethoven's Moonlight Sonata, that is, the first movement of his Piano Sonata No. 14. What was the composer trying to convey by obsessively returning to this endless melody, recognizable to almost everyone? Did he understand that he was on the same level as those composers who influence an entire generation once a century? Apparently so.

[1] In my observation, until about 1968 (Second Violin Sonata), Shostakovich used only 11-tone scales for the "12-tone technique", apparently to avoid possible criticism, after which he may have considered that using 12-tone scales, including in the Fifteenth, was already safe and he would not be accused of being committed to "formalism" (Rosenblatt, 2020, pp. 88-89).

3. A Reference to the Verbal Meaning of the Quoted Work

The use of the Neapolitan sixth chord ($\flat II^6$) in the almost atonal *Preface to the Complete Collection of My Works and a Brief Reflection on This Preface* is a slightly humorous curtsy to the great Soviet establishment, clearly referencing Alexander Dargomyzhsky's song *The Worm*, in which the chord is used to emphasize the grandeur of the Count, who pays attention to his character's wife: "After all, I am a worm compared to him, [$\flat II^6$] His Excellency himself". Shostakovich uses this chord when listing his public duties in the *Preface*: "Simply Secretary of the Composers' Union of the [$\flat II^6$] U.S.S.R." (see Rosenblatt, 2020, pp. 89-90).

4. A Reflection of the Popular Music of the Period

In the early 1930s, Shostakovich's work abounded with quasi-quotations of melodies common in Soviet Russia during the NEP era, as well as those inspired by his experience as a pianist in silent movies. Charleston, ragtime, and other rhythms of the time, as well as music from the demimonde, resound, for example, in his First Piano Concerto (1933) and permeate the score of the ballet The Golden Age (1930) from beginning to end. At the same time, the listener, recognizing the signs of the times, encounters not a single specifically quoted melody.

5. Citations from National Folklore

Russian songs of the 1905 Revolution, reimagined using a unique modal structure, form the thematic basis of the Eleventh Symphony (1959). Each melody in the symphony is rooted in actual songs associated with that period and its socio-political climate. At the same time, the song melodies undergo modal transformation, thus reflecting the composer's reflections on the time, its significance, and the heroism that led to the October Revolution of 1917, which ushered in the 70-year era of Soviet Russia.

Shostakovich and Jewish Idiom

Similar to the typology described above and even expressed to a greater extent, almost every reference to Jewish motifs in Shostakovich's music is clearly social and, as a rule, political in nature. But what do we actually mean by "Jewish idiom"? Examples of various forms of such an idiom—whether a descending intonation, a folk (klezmer) music genre, a quotation, or a depiction of behavior characteristic of the Jewish temperament—present this topic in light of historical events in which such references were relevant and significant for delineating the composer's civic position.

Melodies or harmonic progressions created (not quoted) with clear connections to Jewish/klezmer folk music are initially "altered" to Shostakovich's modes. These include: Trio No. 2 (1944), 3rd movement (without verbal references to the Jewish/Holocaust context); then Quartet No. 4 (1949), 3rd and 4th movements; Prelude and Fugue in F-sharp minor (1950-51) with very similar intonations and progressions (Dance of Death and Moan/Scream, respectively); and then Quartet No. 8 (1960), 2nd movement, quoting the theme from Trio No. 2, with the work dedicated to the victims of fascism; and then Quartet No. 10 with the 2nd and, especially, the 4th movements, when the instruments shout over each other, like members of the Israeli Knesset during parliamentary sessions.

The cycle "From Jewish Folk Poetry" (1952) contains melodies created in a style, commonly associated with Jewish music, having no direct or indirect quotations from either klezmer or Ashkenazi Jewish prayer music.

A slightly modified 1920s Jewish/Odessa song, "Kupite bubliki" ("Buy My Bagels"), opens the 2nd movement of the Second Cello Concerto (1966), runs through the entire movement, and then becomes the

musical material for the (well-prepared) climax, appearing quite unexpectedly in the 3rd movement. Ritzarev (2023; 2024) discussed this quote, attributing it to reflections on the Sinyavsky-Daniel trial and considering it to be probably the composer's last use of the Jewish idiom in any form. The concerto was written shortly after the Thirteenth Symphony, which opens with Yevtushenko's "Babi Yar" (although the Thirteenth Symphony contains no references, allusions, or quotations from Jewish music). Rostropovich, who premiered the concerto, emigrated shortly thereafter.

Discussion and Conclusion

The controversy around the music of Shostakovich, as Puolakka argues, "shows very little sign of calming down" (2017, p. 37). The apologetics on both sides of the globe follows two polar initial hypotheses: (a) Shostakovich was the follower and supporter of Communist regime; or (b) Shostakovich was hidden anti-Communist. The first position is based on the official statements signed or attributed to the composer, while the latter position initially begins with an acknowledgement of the composer's memoirs, published by Volkov (1979), as authentic. The second position is particularly supported by the hidden symbols found in Shostakovich's works, such as quotations, allusions, and other references including a "Jewish idiom", provided they are treated as a bearers of a certain sub-textual meaning.

Avoiding unnecessary debate about whether Shostakovich was one or the other in this regard, I simply propose viewing him as a public figure living in a real (and very complex) time, when you prefer to live by focusing on how to survive and how to manage your life, rather than on how to express or conceal your acceptance or rejection of what historians will later call one name or another. Shostakovich was a citizen of the USSR, and for him, Soviet Russia was his homeland, and he never faced the choice of whether or not to leave the country, depending on his political views (if that term, in its modern meaning, is even applicable to Soviet people of that time). He wanted to be heard, to have his works performed and accepted by a national audience, and this had its price—at times, as officially the leading Soviet composer, he had to make statements on behalf of his state, which under no circumstances allowed anyone to speak negatively about its leadership, either officially or unofficially.

Understanding the circumstances of life in the USSR may allow researchers to redirect the largely futile debate about whether Shostakovich was a dissident towards examining how his fears, feelings, and thoughts about the realities of life in his time[2]—consciously or, often, unconsciously—led him to use cues to convey hidden subtext in his works.

In conclusion, from the study itself, as well as from the work of other scholars, it can be concluded that Shostakovich uses various forms of musical references in his works—whether they be various quotations with varying degrees of accuracy, other stylistic (melodic or harmonic) allusions, or such striking references as an originally created (and not quoted) Jewish idiom—all of which relate to artistic devices that the composer has been using in his works for decades. Each of these forms appears as emphasizing a certain socio-cultural level and intended for perception either by a broad or musically sophisticated public, or even only by the composer himself—a mystery that was solved only decades after the composer's death, such as the hidden hints of the "last journey" motifs in the seemingly triumphant finale of the Fifth Symphony, solved by Barsova (2000, pp. 85-86) a quarter of a century after the composer's death.

[2] The British philosopher of Russian-Jewish origin Isaiah Berlin, who hosted the composer in 1958 when he came to Oxford to receive an honorary doctorate, noted in a letter "an extraordinary effect censorship and prison has on creative genius. It limits it, but deepens it" (Berlin, 2011, p. 640).

All in all, the range of references mentioned above appears to occupy a space between metaphor and Aesopian language and truly represent a genuine example of the various forms of Russian Symbolism of the Soviet Era. References to different layers of professional or folk music, including cultural or subcultural musical utterances are very different and in the same time clear in terms of what kind of reference is meant in each certain case. Composer's own treatment of the use of clearly heard citations was among the subjects of his correspondence with close friends, such as his personal secretary, literary and theater critic Isaak Glikman (Fay, 2000, p. 270).

At once the most performed and the most targeted Soviet composer, Shostakovich developed his own system of references to various layers of music—classical works, folk music, or "low genres"—that in each period served different tasks and in their entirety are part of the unique toolkit of the composer, along with his modes that are truly unique, too.

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