

SHOSTAKOVICH

Complete Music for Piano Duo and Duet Volume One

Symphony No. 9, Op. 70

Suite, Op. 6

Concertino, Op. 94

Dances from the film scores

Vicky Yannoula and Jakob Fichert,
piano duo and piano duet

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SHOSTAKOVICH: Complete Works for Two Pianos and Piano Duet, Volume One

by Malcolm MacDonald

The piano was always at the centre of Shostakovich's musical universe. He began to show signs of musical talent as a child, and at first it was not clear whether he was going to be principally a pianist or a composer. He started his first piano lessons at the age of nine with his mother, Sofiya Vadilyevna Kokaoulina, who had studied the piano at Irkutsk in her native Siberia and later at the St Petersburg Conservatoire. He was such a quick learner that he soon progressed to study with the distinguished but irascible piano teacher Ignati Albertovich Glyasser; and two years later entered the Conservatoire at the age of thirteen as a member of the class of Alexandra Rozanova, who had been his mother's piano teacher. Later he became a pupil of Leonid Nikolayev, a highly cultured composer and pianist whose piano pupils included such prominent virtuosi as Shostakovich's friends and contemporaries Maria Yudina, Lev Oborin and Vladimir Sofronitsky.

During all this time the pull of composition was getting stronger – he had improvised little piano pieces almost as soon as he learned to play, and his first published works for piano were written while he was still a Conservatoire student. But Shostakovich admired and valued Nikolayev, his piano teacher, much more than his composition teacher Maximilian Steinberg, and immediately after leaving the Conservatoire he was ranked as a promising concert pianist. The piano remained important to Shostakovich throughout his career: he wrote some of his most important works for it, including the two concertos, the two sonatas, and the monumental set of 24 Preludes and Fugues. Moreover, he usually played the piano parts of his chamber works and songs at their first performances, and there is no doubt that he had the requisite technique to play even the most challenging of his own keyboard inventions. In addition to his works for solo pianist, Shostakovich also wrote a number of compositions for two pianos, or for four hands at one piano.

His earliest surviving two-piano work is the **Suite in F sharp minor, Op. 6**, composed in Petrograd in March 1922. Shostakovich himself, with his fellow-pupil Lev Oborin, gave

the premiere in the Small Hall of the Moscow Conservatory on 20 March 1925. This is an ambitious piece – in some early lists of Shostakovich's works it is described as a sonata, and it sometimes gives the impression of being an early attempt at a symphony reduced for four hands. (F sharp minor is, of course, the key of Shostakovich's eventual First Symphony, Op. 10, begun in 1923.) An indication that Shostakovich valued the Suite highly is the fact that he dedicated it to the memory of his father, Dmitri Boleslavovich Shostakovich, who had died suddenly in February 1922: the Suite was, therefore, composed immediately after the event, which has been described as 'nothing short of a disaster for the [Shostakovich] family'.¹

The most striking aspect of this early work, from the outset – and one that indicates that it is a genuine two-piano piece rather than disguised symphony – is its lavish imitation of bell-sounds, which tap in immediately to a Russian tradition that goes back to the Coronation Scene in Mussorgsky's *Boris Godunov*. Indeed, the opening Prelude [9] could be categorised as highly effective bell-study. Exploiting the ability of two pianos to pass clanging chords back and forth, Shostakovich immediately sets up an atmosphere of disquiet, as if the bells are tolling in a time of deep trouble. A gentler, almost Chopinesque theme follows, intensifying the mood of elegy. These elements alternate, the bells sounding as if in the distance while the Chopinesque theme grows eloquent, but becoming much more brilliant as the movement moves to its close.

The second movement, in A minor, is entitled 'Fantastic Dance' [10], and has much in common with the *Three Fantastic Dances* for piano solo that Shostakovich had written in 1920. Though it has something of the swing of a polka, the themes are characteristically Russian: again, the spirit of Mussorgsky seems to be trying to break through. The central trio section has an oriental air, and the dance ends in a hectic stretto. There follows an extended Nocturne in D minor [11] – a deeply if rather anonymously romantic movement that seems already to point forward to such plums as the slow movement of Shostakovich's Second Piano Concerto composed 35 years later. But it moves to an impassioned climax in which the pealing bells of the Prelude return, and afterwards help to contribute to the figuration supporting the main melody. There is considerable further development in this discursive movement, though, with a clear reprise of the opening section and a reflective coda with a hint of nightingales.

¹ Elizabeth Wilson, *Shostakovich: A Life Remembered*, Faber & Faber, London 1994, p. 27.

The finale [12] begins *Adagio*, once again with bell-imitations, and the tread of a funeral march, which soon accelerates into an *Allegro molto*, a combative passage based on a theme that reveals itself progressively in clipped, *staccato* phrases. This gives way to excited tintinnabulations at the upper end of both keyboards, and then a romantically nostalgic theme closely related to the Nocturne. This music expands into a further slow movement of nostalgia and regret, and it is late in the day that the *Allegro molto* returns, along with yet more bell sonorities. It initiates a drive to a coda in which the chiming figuration of the Prelude returns in combination with the funeral-march rhythm, making a grim conclusion to this youthfully talented work.

One of Shostakovich's more obscure film scores was that for Klementi Mint's *Korzinkina's Adventures*, a half-hour comedy about a singer with stage-fright. Shostakovich wrote the music (Op. 59) in autumn 1940. The 'suite' compiled by Gennadi Rozhdestvensky includes all the original music for the film, employing a large orchestra and chorus and, for 'The Chase', a piano duet [8]. It's a rumbustious galop, played very fast, which carries all before it with impetuous élan. Shostakovich wrote it in short sections which could be separated and repeated, shuffled or dropped as necessary and, although the director took advantage of this facility, the suite reunites them.

Shostakovich routinely arranged his symphonies for two pianos or piano duet – as, indeed, did Brahms and other nineteenth-century masters – to facilitate performance to friends in advance of their orchestral premieres and for personal pleasure afterwards. This common practice was also convenient for letting Communist Party apparatchiks decide whether the work was ideologically worthy of performance. It is interesting to note that his long-suppressed Fourth Symphony, the premiere of which was cancelled in 1936 and which was not heard in its orchestral dress until 1961, was in truth not entirely unknown in the intervening period because it was occasionally played to small groups in its two-piano reduction. Shostakovich clearly felt that these symphony arrangements had independent value, for he made a recording of the piano-duet form of the Tenth Symphony in Moscow in 1954, with his close friend the composer Moisei Weinberg² as duet partner.

Shostakovich composed his **Symphony No. 9 in E flat major, Op. 70**, between the middle

² Weinberg (1919–96), born in Warsaw, was given the name Mieczyslaw; 'Moisei' was how a Soviet border guard entered the name on Weinberg's papers as he fled from the invading Nazis in 1939. Shostakovich knew him as 'Metek'.

of July 1945 and the last day of the following month, August. Significantly, Shostakovich is said to have spent every evening during the period playing Haydn symphonies as piano duets with the composer Dmitri Kabalevsky (who would turn on him and become one of his chief traducers during the *Zhdanovschina* of 1948). The version of his own symphony for piano duet was apparently written alongside the orchestral score, and it was in this four-hand form that the Ninth was first heard, performed by Shostakovich and Svyatoslav Richter in the Moscow Philharmonic Hall on 4 September 1945. (The orchestral version was not premiered until November.)

This work was not the ‘Ninth Symphony’ that Shostakovich had originally intended to write. It had been widely expected that he would produce a grandiose work, with vocal soloists and chorus, celebrating the Russian victory over Nazi Germany. In November 1944 he was quoted as saying:

I have a dream – common, I should think to every Soviet artist – of creating a large-scale work which will express the powerful feelings we have today. I think that the epigraph to all our work in the next few years will be the simple but glorious word, ‘Victory’. In these days of decisive battles, and in the coming years of peace, the people will demand vivid, inspiring music which will embody the heroism of the Great Patriotic War and the nobility and moral beauty of our nation [...].³

It is possible that these words – if Shostakovich ever spoke them – were laced with irony. Compare what he had written a few months earlier to his close friend Isaak Glikman: they shared a long-lasting correspondence in which the platitudes of Soviet propaganda were mocked by being pushed to absurdity: ‘my psychological state has never been better. And how could it be otherwise, when we are surrounded by the crash of victory salutes, and the scent of victory permeates every fibre of one’s being?’³

In January 1945 Shostakovich announced to his students that he had begun writing such a work. In April he played what he had so far composed to Isaak Glickman, among others, but when the War ended, despite keen public interest in what musical response he would provide to enshrine the experience of victory, Shostakovich unexpectedly shelved the project. (The fragment of this unfinished ‘pre-Ninth’ Symphony was first performed only in 2008.) Instead,

³ *Story of a Friendship. The Letters of Dmitri Shostakovich to Isaak Glikman with a commentary by Isaak Glikman*, transl. Anthony Phillips, Faber & Faber, London, 2001, p. 26.

he marked time for three months and then – apparently aware he would have to produce something – wrote the Ninth that is known now, a work of entirely different character.

The reasons for this change of plan are unclear, but perhaps Shostakovich simply grew weary of the unremitting, unsmiling pace of the ‘pre-Ninth’ fragment, and of his role as semi-official symphonic chronicler of the times. One thing is plain, at least – the eventual Ninth, for all its considerable symphonic sophistication, reverts in part to the world of Shostakovich’s ballet and theatre scores from the 1930s. If it cocks a snook – and it does, mildly – at pomp and officialdom and refuses to provide the desired poster-art apotheosis of Soviet victory, it may be over-interpretation to look for some deep, bitter, political criticism in this blithe and subtle music. Shostakovich had always been a musical humorist: ‘the Soviet Rossini’, as he was widely known, before he became ‘the Soviet Beethoven.’ Through Symphonies Nos. 5–8 he had re-made himself into an epic symphonist. But he must have yearned sometimes for the old irreverent freedoms. (In fact, the Sixth Symphony takes a break in that direction in its finale, so close in manner and substance to his satirical ballet scores.) Perhaps he even imagined that in the euphoria of victory, the state might release its utilitarian grip upon art. Instead, the grip was about to be tightened – and Shostakovich’s Ninth Symphony would be declared a prime example of ‘formalist’, ‘anti-Soviet’ art.

The first movement of the Ninth [1] – the shortest in all Shostakovich’s symphonies – has often been described as Haydnesque; it is Classical in cut, even to the extent of having a repeated exposition – a well-nigh redundant nod to venerable formal principles. But its lithe, agile motion, tonal side-slips and wit are indeed common properties of Haydn and Shostakovich. The rather grotesque second subject is given to trombone, percussion and piccolo; although in the full orchestral version the pianos cannot compete with these instrumental surprises, their galumphing chords inject the necessary hint of burlesque.

The *Moderato* second movement, by necessary contrast, evokes a mood of pastoral melancholy [2]. The orchestral score features long, haunting lines for the woodwind, often unaccompanied, and the heavy brass is not used at all; the result is a wealth of spare, clean textures that call, in the duet version, for sensitive *sostenuto* playing. Throughout the Symphony, in fact, the spare, stripped-down nature of the textures make for idiomatic and uncluttered keyboard parts, in which the listener is often made more strongly aware of the

inventiveness of Shostakovich's counter-melodies than is possible with the different weight of tone available to a full orchestra.

The third, fourth and fifth movements are played without a break. The short *Presto* scherzo in G major [3] is a cheerful harum-scarum dance that must be executed with breathless precision. It eventually slows and gives way to the portentous brass fanfares in B flat minor that mark the start of the *Largo* fourth movement [4]. A single line (in the orchestral score a solo bassoon) lifts up an eloquent but troubled voice in unbarred recitative, as if delivering a eulogy at a graveside. This device recalls the trombone oration just before the finale of Shostakovich's Third Symphony (1929), an altogether more agitprop piece. There the recitative led into a triumphant choral finale; here, just as the music has created a properly solemn mood, the bassoon line it lifts itself out of gloom to enunciate the main theme of the *Allegretto* finale [5], a genial, slightly tipsy tune which has something of the character (though the metre is not exact) of a *chastuchka* – like one of those satirical urban ditties which are as much a part of Russian life as tea or vodka. A march-like second theme takes over and the movement drives to a manic galop for coda, confirming the balletic character of the music. Throughout, it has proved to be highly effective material for four hands at one piano.

The burgeoning musical skills of Shostakovich's son Maxim Dmitrievich led the composer to write or arrange several short works for young pianists, both solo and duet, in the late 1940s and early 1950s. The **Merry March** for two pianos, which is dedicated to Maxim, was composed in May 1949 [14]. On the manuscript it is designated as Op. 81, a designation that it surrendered to the patriotic cantata *The Song of the Forests* later that year; it has also appeared in print as Op. 84b though in Derek C. Hulme's authoritative catalogue of Shostakovich's works it is referred to as 'Sans op. O (i)'.⁴ The March sets off in D major and proves to be an ebullient and ingenious piece in which the two pianists carry the tune in canon at half a bar's distance. The pastoral trio in C sharp minor is begun by Piano I alone but then again develops into a canonic dialogue between the two pianists' left hands. The tempo quickens and the March comes trotting back verbatim.

The **Tarantella** for two pianos [13] is referred to in the same source as 'Sans op. 0 (ii)'.⁵

⁴ Derek C. Hulme, *Dmitri Shostakovich. A Catalogue, Bibliography and Discography*, 3rd edn. Scarecrow Press, Lanham, Maryland, 2002, p. 281.

⁵ *Ibid.*, pp. 281–82.

though it has been printed as ‘Op. 84d.’ (Shostakovich’s Op. 84 is in fact the *Two Romances on verses by Lermontov* for voice and piano of 1950).⁶ The *Tarantella* is another children’s piece, though its origins are more exalted. Shostakovich’s prolific output of ballet, theatre and film scores – themselves essentially transitory – yielded a rich store of attractive individual numbers, many of which he recycled in different arrangements and other contexts. The *Tarantella* is a good example, for it is a shortened and simplified version, apparently arranged in 1954, of a movement from his music to the film *The Unforgettable Year 1919*, composed in 1951. (The orchestral form of this movement appears as the fourth movement, ‘Scherzo’, of the suite that Lev Atovmyan extracted from the film score, also in 1954.) It is a bubbling, athletic movement in G major, abruptly cut off as if foreshortened.

The *Waltz and Polka*, which were published together as a pair of piano-duet pieces, have very disparate origins among Shostakovich’s more utilitarian works. The Waltz [6], according to the piano-duet score, derives from the music he wrote to the film *Unity* (also known as *Song of the Rivers*) – a documentary in praise of labour unions directed by the famous Dutch director Joris Ivens for the East German DEFA Studios. Shostakovich’s score – numbered as his Op. 95 – contains several songs and choruses and was composed in 1954; but the Waltz, perhaps its best-known number, had in fact already been written: it occurs as the middle movement in the *Ballet Suite* No. 4 for orchestra (1953).⁷ This is a fast waltz in C major with a Palm-Court-like second strain that develops into a kind of tongue-in-cheek recollection of Chopin’s ‘Minute’ Waltz. It is to the ballet music that one must look for the cheerful Polka [7]. Between 1949 and 1953 Shostakovich’s friend Levon Atovmyan compiled the works known as *Ballet Suites* Nos. 1–4 from the composer’s ballets and theatre

⁶ Just to complicate matters, there is another Shostakovich Tarantella for two pianos: an arrangement he made of the movement originally entitled ‘At the Market Place’ – No. 16 in the overall sequence of 23 music cues – in his 1955 score for the film *The Gadfly*, directed by Alexander Faintsimmer for Lenfilm. The film score is Shostakovich’s Op. 97, and there is an orchestral suite, Op. 97a, drawn from it by Levon Atovmyan, in which the piece is retitled ‘People’s Holiday’ and occurs as the third movement. Though the most famous movement from *The Gadfly* is the celebrated Romance (No. 8 in the suite), ‘People’s Holiday’ is the next most popular, to judge by the number of arrangements that have been made of it for different instrumental forces by various arrangers. Although Shostakovich’s two-piano version is called ‘Tarantella’, other versions have appeared with the titles ‘Folk Festival’, ‘Folk Feast’, ‘Neapolitan Dance’ and ‘Spanish Dance’. Musically the movement is unrelated to the Tarantella included on this disc. Cf. Hulme, *ibid.*, pp. 335–37.

⁷ It seems unlikely that it was specially composed for that work, although the ‘Unity’ Waltz is the only movement (out of 21 in total) in the four *Ballet Suites* the original provenance of which seems to remain unknown.

works of the 1930s. The Polka, which he placed as the third movement of *Ballet Suite* No. 2, started life as the middle movement of the *Suite for Jazz Orchestra* No. 1 composed in 1934 for dance band. Its main tune has something of the character of a fairground organ.

The culmination of Shostakovich's later essays in four-hand piano music is the **Concertino in A minor, Op. 94**, for two pianos, which he composed in 1953. It was a present for his son Maxim, who gave the public premiere with Alla Maloletkova in the Small Hall of the Moscow Conservatory on 8 November 1954. In form the piece is a little concerto in a single movement [15], with some clear pre-echoes of Shostakovich's Second Piano Concerto, written four years later (which is also dedicated to Maxim). The movement is divided into four sections, slow-fast-slow-fast, like a Baroque *sonata da chiesa*. The dotted rhythms of the majestic opening subject are also reminiscent of a Baroque overture. A more plaintive, lyrical theme is contrasted to this element, and also a stealthily treading bass theme that leads into a blithe *Allegretto* whose ever more vigorous and excited developments presage the famous *Festive Overture* of 1954 as well as the Piano Concerto No. 2. A perky subsidiary theme with a rolling bass figure leads into a muttering passage that proves to be the start of a lively *Allegro* development, in the course of which Shostakovich appears to quote, sardonically, a phrase from the Soviet national anthem.⁸ With the reappearance of the *Allegretto* theme in the bass the music builds to a big climax and relapses into the plaintive theme from the introduction, which achieves an affecting pathos over a long-held bass trill. After this brief slow interlude, development of the fast music stealthily resumes, only to flow smoothly into a recapitulation of the *Allegretto* that builds up to a festive coda. A brief recall of the plaintive theme merely delays, by a few bars, the high spirits of the ending. All in all the *Concertino* is a brilliantly effective piece that shares some of the qualities of the larger symphonic works being composed around it.

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⁸ The *Hymn of the Soviet Union* (*Gimn Sovyetskogo Soyuzu*), to craven lyrics by Sergei Mikhalkov (1913–2009) and a magnificent tune (?1938) by Alexander Alexandrov (1883–1946), replaced the *Internationale* as the Soviet National Anthem in 1944, but the words became an embarrassment with the death of Stalin and it was apparently performed without lyrics from 1953 to 1977, when Mikhalkov supplied a revised text. The anthem was dropped in 1991, but reinstated in 2000, with Mikhalkov supplying a third version of the lyrics. What bearing if any this has on Shostakovich's composition of the *Concertino* in 1954 must remain speculation.

Malcolm MacDonald is the author of The Symphonies of Havergal Brian (three vols., Kahn & Averill, London, 1974, 1978 and 1983) and the editor of the first two volumes of Havergal Brian on Music (Toccat Press, London, 1985 and 2009); further volumes are in preparation. His other writings include books on Brahms, Foulds, Schoenberg, Ronald Stevenson and Edgard Varèse.

Jakob Fichert has performed solo and chamber-music recitals in the UK, Germany, Italy, Hungary, Lithuania and other European countries, in such venues such as the Queen Elizabeth, Wigmore and Cadogan Halls and the Purcell Room in London, Colston Hall in Bristol and the Recital Hall of the Concertgebouw in Amsterdam, some of those concerts being broadcast live. He has recorded for Naxos; this is his first recording for Toccata Classics.

A native of London but growing up in Germany, Jakob studied at the Musikhochschule Karlsruhe with Wolfgang Manz, graduating with Distinction before undertaking a postgraduate course at the Royal College of Music, studying with Yonty Solomon. He obtained a Master's Degree in Chamber Music and stayed on as a Junior Fellow at the RCM until 2003. A keen pedagogue himself, Jakob has given numerous master classes in high-profile independent and specialist music schools. He also works as an examiner for the Associated Board of Royal Schools of Music and has been appointed lecturer for piano accompaniment at Leeds College of Music from spring 2011. He has a number of several prizes in international competitions to his credit, both as a soloist and chamber musician, including the Valentino Bucchi International Piano Competition for twentieth century music in Rome, the Liza Fuchsowa Memorial Prize for 'best chamber music pianist' at the Royal Over-Sea League and the International Taneyev Chamber Music Competition in Kaluga and Moscow.

Jakob has collaborated with numerous singers and instrumentalists, among them Oliver Coates, Diana Galvydyte, Janet Hilton, Helen-Jane Howells, Tamsin Waley-Cohen, Vicky Yannoula and the Manus Ensemble. He has also given lecture recitals on the piano and chamber music by Max Reger and initiated recitals of contemporary music, combining established twentieth-century composers with newly commissioned works for solo piano and chamber ensembles.

His website can be found at www.jakobfichert.com.



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SHOSTAKOVICH Complete Music for Piano Duo and Duet, Volume One

Symphony No. 9 in E flat major, Op. 70* 24:55

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Vicky Yannoula and Jakob Fichert
piano duet 1–8 and piano duo 9–15

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