

DLA thesis abstract

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The Cello Concerti of Dmitri Shostakovich

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I. Research background

At the time of the conception of the cello concerti Shostakovich was among the most renowned albeit most controversial composers of the Soviet Union. This implies that while a large amount of discussion surrounded him and his work originating from many sources, the value of the information provided by those sources is at least questionable depending on the external circumstances of the time. The composer's death did not put a definitive end to this ambivalent situation, in fact arguments regarding his oeuvre continued on a new level in the last third of the twentieth century. In this second phase of reception the role of initiator fell to Solomon Volkov and his hotly disputed book *Testimony*. While the debate surrounding it cannot be considered closed even today, it has had the undeniable effect of initiating a process of settling unresolved questions. These days, as more and more talented interpreters of his music emerge, a third period of Shostakovich's reception appears to be unfolding. The intellectual and emotional world of the two Shostakovich concerti is still not easy to comprehend, but each day sees new research material being processed and made available.

II. Resources

Alongside the scores of the concerti, the first audio and video recordings with the timeless interpretations of Mstislav Rostropovich provide ample primary source material. Contemporary accounts and critiques have also proved to be an important resource for analysis. Today, intensive research is being carried out in several parts of the world the results of which were available to me through publications in English. I also had the opportunity to learn about the impressions and value judgments of eminent Hungarian interpreters of Shostakovich (Csaba Onczay, Miklós Perényi, Pál Banda) through conversations in person.

III. Methods

In structuring the dissertation I have followed the simplest available method: an outline of information related to the conception of the works precedes the step-by-step assessment of the musical material of the concerti. Essential questions regarding the composer's handling of the instrument surface again and again as a complementary basis for analysis. I have dedicated a chapter each to the legendary interpreter of the pieces Mstislav Rostropovich and their reception in Hungary.

IV. Results

My work is the first summary of information about Shostakovich's two cello concerti in Hungarian. After more than half a century I have made an effort to identify and interpret the omissions and pieces of possibly intentional misinformation present in contemporary discourse. Behind the purely musical form of these masterpieces I have attempted to expose possible programmatic content at many points (mainly tractable through analysis of borrowed material). In this respect, the Second Cello Concerto has proved to be fertile ground for original thought as it appears to be relatively unexplored compared to the First and poses hard-to-answer questions.

V. Documentation of field activities related to the thesis

Over the course of my dissertation work I have had the opportunity to take part in two prominent Shostakovich performances with István Várdai and Miklós Perényi as soloists. As an orchestral musician my duties have included performing other works of Shostakovich: symphonies and works for chamber orchestra. My doctoral recital will include a performance of his Cello Sonata op. 40.