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**SELF-EXPRESSION THROUGH THE STRING QUARTET: AN ANALYSIS OF  
SHOSTAKOVICH'S STRING QUARTETS NO. 1, NO. 8, AND NO. 15**

by

**ARIANE C. GUSHUE**

**SUBMITTED TO SCRIPPS COLLEGE IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT OF THE  
DEGREE OF BACHELOR OF ARTS**

**PROFESSOR YOUYOUNG KANG  
PROFESSOR GAYLE BLANKENBURG**

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## Abstract

As a little boy, Dmitrii Dmitrievich Shostakovich pressed his ear against the wall to hear his neighbors play chamber music. He matured into one of the most prominent Soviet era composers. While the majority of academic interest Shostakovich centers on his symphonic works, his string quartets provide a window into a more intimate facet of Shostakovich's life. This thesis explores first, why Shostakovich turned to the string quartet after some of the most fearful years of his life: his demise and rise after the scathing *Pravda* letter that all but threatened his life. Second, this thesis analyzes three of Shostakovich's String Quartets: No. 1, No. 8, and No. 15. String Quartet No. 1, despite its simplicity, illuminates tender expressivity. Following years of intense artistic and personal scrutiny, Shostakovich sought an escape into an aural world of innocence. However, the quartet proves more complex than its surface suggests. Obscured harmonic complexities, intimate dialogue between instruments, and subtle recollection of prior movements lend the quartet a deeper meaning than its aural simplicity suggests.

Decades later, amidst personal crisis, Shostakovich turned to the quartet, again. Composed in 1960, the year of his invocation into the communist party, String Quartet No. 8 demonstrates how Shostakovich utilized the string quartet as an avenue for personal self-expression. The intertwining of his musical signature with constant self-quotations and allusions confirms the deep, personal reflection the quartet provided Shostakovich. This study recounts the quotations previously uncovered by David Fanning, but goes beyond identification and relates the content of the quotations to Shostakovich's emotional turmoil at the time of his party invocation. Finally, enduring anguishing physical pain and facing death, Shostakovich turned to the string quartet at the end of his life. String Quartet No. 15 provided Shostakovich an external outlet for his internal dialogue on death. Sentiments of meditation, fury, resistance, anguish, and resignation musically intertwine during Shostakovich's longest and most painful string quartet. This study demonstrates how Shostakovich used the string quartet as a medium for deeper self-expression.

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## Introduction

Both heralded as a national hero and criticized as a dissident, Dmitriï Dmitrievich Shostakovich (1906 – 1975) is most famous for his Fifth Symphony. Following the infamous criticism of his opera *Lady MacBeth* entitled “Muddle Instead of Music,” the Fifth Symphony re-established his public eminence and his acceptance by the threatening Soviet regime. Interestingly, less than a year following the warm embrace of his Fifth, Shostakovich composed his first of fifteen quartets. Though the quartets have not received the attention as the symphony has, there exists a growing body of scholarship that aims to understand these quartets as a personal and artistic outlet for Shostakovich. In her recent book *Music for Silenced Voices: Shostakovich and his Fifteen Quartets*, Wendy Lesser argues that Shostakovich composed quartets to seek out an “ideal” and “impractical” context that could never exist in the outside world.<sup>1</sup> Kenneth Gloag, who proposes that the quartet medium allowed Shostakovich “the construction and articulation of his own personal world,”<sup>2</sup> corroborates Lesser’s idea. Not all scholars embrace this stance. Some link his move to quartets as a function of a musical trend rather than the socio-political climate.<sup>3</sup> In my thesis, I analyze his quartets and assess how the quartets could be understood as an outlet for more liberal expression.

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<sup>1</sup> Wendy Lesser, *Music for Silenced Voices: Shostakovich and his Fifteen Quartets* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2011), 42-43.

<sup>2</sup> Robin Stowell, edit., *The Cambridge Companion to the String Quartet* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003) 300.

<sup>3</sup> Katarina Clark, “Shostakovich’s Turn to the string Quartets and the Debates about Socialist Realism in Music,” *Slavic Review* 72 (2013): 573-589.

I examine his quartets with a three-pronged approach. First, I address the climate in which he composed. I delve into relevant biographical content such as his early chamber compositions' personal significance and the criticism he faced in the years leading up to the composition of his String Quartet No. 1. Second, I discuss the genre of the quartet within the Soviet context and present the existing and diverging scholarship about the timing of Shostakovich's turn to quartets and what that indicates about their meaning. Against this contextual background, I analyze three of the quartets, No. 1, No. 8, and No. 15, composed by Shostakovich in 1938, 1960, and 1974, respectively. These quartets provide a longitudinal survey of Shostakovich's compositional practice in his quartets and reflect his artistic development. These analyses attempt to clarify the possible self-expressive function of the quartets in context of Shostakovich's precarious position in the Soviet Union.



## Chapter I: Success and Censure

Dmitriï Dmitrievich Shostakovich was born on September 26<sup>th</sup>, 1906 in St. Petersburg.<sup>4</sup> Mitya, Shostakovich's childhood nickname, grew up in a musical home.<sup>5</sup> His parents regularly hosted casual music-making gatherings. His father sang tenor and his mother played piano, an instrument she formally studied at conservatory prior to devoting her life to her husband and children. As a child, Mitya initially shied away from musical training. However, he indulged in hours of listening to music when his parents hosted informal domestic concerts. His mother recalled how Mitya hid beneath the piano to conceal himself, stay up past his bedtime, and listen to music.

When Mitya was eight years old, his mother gave him his first piano lesson.<sup>6</sup> According to Fay, Mitya's "musical gift commanded notice." Classmates gossiped about his talents, both as a performer and composer. His parents, musicians themselves, validated his talent and encouraged his formal training at Petrograd Conservatory. After personally bearing witness to Mitya's talents, Alexander Glazunov, the director of the conservatory, insisted on his immediate enrollment. He relayed to Mitya's mother, "I cannot remember ever having had such gifted children as your son within the walls of the

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<sup>4</sup> Laurel Fay, *Shostakovich: A Life* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999), 8.

<sup>5</sup> Fay, *Shostakovich: A Life*, 8.

<sup>6</sup> Fay, *Shostakovich: A Life*, 13.

Conservatory.”<sup>7</sup> In 1919, Dmitry Shostakovich enrolled as a student of piano and composition. Shostakovich formally studied at the Leningrad Conservatory until 1926.<sup>8</sup> He then continued his studies as a graduate student. Shostakovich distinguished himself early in his training. His composition teacher, Maximilian Steinberg, described Shostakovich as “unquestionably the most talented representative of Leningrad Conservatory’s young composers.”<sup>9</sup>

In mid-February of 1922, Shostakovich’s father unexpectedly fell ill. His sudden death two weeks later deeply affected Shostakovich. Laurel Fay describes Shostakovich’s reaction:

Dmitri’s mourning was expressed in music. In March, he completed Suite for Two Pianos, op. 6, which he dedicated to the memory of his father. The four-movement work, a memorial of affecting dignity and solemnity, was designed to be performed with his sister Mariya. They played the work together at private soirees in Petrograd musical circles and later at Dmitri’s debut at the Circle of Friends of Chamber Music, on 22 June 1923.<sup>10</sup>

Fay highlights three critical ideas: first, Shostakovich turned to a chamber genre for self-expression; second, the work had detectable personal significance; and last, Shostakovich initially intended this work for intimate gatherings. Thus, Shostakovich, early in his career, utilized the self-expressive and emotional capacity of chamber music to cope with challenges in his personal life. Moreover, this was not an isolated incident. In 1925, he

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<sup>7</sup> Fay, *Shostakovich: A Life*, 15.

<sup>8</sup> The Petrograd Conservatory was renamed Leningrad Conservatory in 1924, the year of Vladimir Lenin’s death, when St. Petersburg was renamed Leningrad.

<sup>9</sup> Fay, *Shostakovich: A Life*, 31.

<sup>10</sup> Fay, *Shostakovich: A Life*, 20-21.

dedicated an Octet in the memory of his friend Volodiyaa Kurchavov, who died in the Crimea in June of that year.<sup>11</sup>

In fact, Shostakovich's dedications were a hallmark of his more intimate chamber works throughout his career. For example, the first work Shostakovich composed after suffering from a heart attack in 1966 was the *Seven Romances on Poems by Alexander Blok* for soprano and piano trio, completed in 1967. He dedicated this piece to Galina Vishnevskaya, a soprano and the wife of his cellist friend Mstislav Rostropovich. According to Elizabeth Wilson, this work "occupies a special place in the vocal output for its quality of personal confession, ranging from the intimacy of 'Ophelia Song,' an involvement of Shostakovich's native city of St. Petersburg, stormy premonitions of destruction and concluding with a hymn to the therapeutic power of music."<sup>12</sup> Wilson points to a relation between Shostakovich's dedications and the personal expression of the pieces of themselves. Interestingly, in later, formally printed editions, the work was dedicated to the fiftieth anniversary of the 1917 Revolution instead of Galina. This altered dedication demonstrates how even works characterized by "personal confession" could be reframed to serve the Soviet regime's agenda.

By contrast, his First Symphony lacked the emotional depth of some of his early chamber works. Although the 1926 premiere of his First Symphony received positive feedback, a number of critics found fault with its slow movement. Its superficial consciousness disappointed music critic N.N. Strelnikov. Other critics echoed Strelnikov's appraisal of the third movement. Addressing the movement, critic M.M.

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<sup>11</sup> Fay, *Shostakovich: A Life*, 28.

<sup>12</sup> Elizabeth Wilson, *Shostakovich: A Life Remembered*, (Princeton: Princeton University Press: 1994), 445.

Sokolsky wrote, “Lyricism is not yet Shostakovich’s domain.”<sup>13</sup> The critics of the third movement found fault with the inexperience of an amateur. However, their criticism also suggests that Shostakovich did not exercise self-expression in the symphonic setting.

Shostakovich’s dedications of his early symphonies reflect their impersonal, propagandistic character. In comparison to his early chamber works that he intimately dedicated to lost loved ones and dear friends, Shostakovich impersonally dedicated his early symphonies to the Soviet regime. For example, in 1927, Shostakovich agreed to compose a symphonic (Symphony No. 2) work in honor of the ten-year anniversary of the 1917 Revolution for the Agitotdel (Propaganda Division) of the State Publishers’ Music Section.<sup>14</sup> Shostakovich published the work in 1927 under the title *To October, a Symphonic Dedication*, op 14. Biographer Michael Mishra notes, “Despite a structure that owes more to the proletarian mass spectacle than to the symphony, aspects of traditional symphonism can be detected, albeit modified to serve the work’s dramatic purpose.”<sup>15</sup> Likewise, Shostakovich described the Third Symphony, subtitled “The First of May” as expressing the “mood of a public holiday of peaceful construction” and honoring the international day of laborers.<sup>16</sup> Thus, from the start of his career, Shostakovich utilized the symphonic genre to express the values of the Soviet regime.

In the fall of 1930, Shostakovich embarked upon the opera that first propelled him into national stardom, but, eventually, plunged him into a chasm of ridicule. On choosing a libretto, Shostakovich wrote, “One shouldn’t write ‘in general’ about the Five Year Plan, ‘in general’ about socialist construction, one should write about living people, about

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<sup>13</sup> Fay, *Shostakovich: A Life*, 32.

<sup>14</sup> Fay, *Shostakovich: A Life*, 39.

<sup>15</sup> Michael Mishra, *A Shostakovich Companion*, (Westport: Praeger Publishers, 2008), 56.

<sup>16</sup> Mishra, *A Shostakovich Companion*, 64.

the builders of the Five-Year-Plan.”<sup>17</sup> Here, Shostakovich acknowledged the importance of reconciling the drama of the opera with the regime’s vision of Soviet people. Aware of the publicity the work would receive, Shostakovich recognized the importance of paying homage to Stalin’s recent, 1928 Five-Year-Plan, his first of many initiatives to collectivize industry and agriculture. Eventually, Shostakovich selected a libretto based on Nikolai Leskov’s 1864 story, *Lady MacBeth of the Mtsensk District*.

Because of the success enjoyed by Shostakovich as a consequence of his first opera *The Nose*, *Lady MacBeth* was met with high expectations. According to Fay, “Well before its premiere, extensive coverage in the press promoted the significance of the event for the Soviet opera.” Nikolai Myaskovsky, contemporary composer and oft opponent of Shostakovich’s work described the opera “stunningly wonderful”<sup>18</sup> after previewing an audition. *Lady MacBeth of the Mtsensk District* premiered on 22 January 1934 at the Maliy Opera Theater in Leningrad. The reception of *Lady MacBeth* was overwhelming celebratory. The *Krasnaya gazeta* predicted *Lady MacBeth* to become “one of the most beloved of the mass viewer.”<sup>19</sup>

The reception was so enthusiastic that Shostakovich planned to expand the work. He intended for this opera to serve as the first installation of a tetralogy akin to Wagner’s *Ring of Nibelungs*. Shostakovich wrote that the final installation would portray a “Soviet heroine, embracing collected features of women from the present and the future, from Larisa Reysner to Zhenya Romanko, the best female concrete worker on the Dneprostroy

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<sup>17</sup> Fay, *Shostakovich: A Life*, 67.

<sup>18</sup> Fay, *Shostakovich: A Life*, 75.

<sup>19</sup> Fay, *Shostakovich: A Life*, 76.

Project.<sup>20</sup> Thus, Shostakovich, fueled by the praise and glory the opera received, believed *Lady MacBeth* presented an opportunity to fulfill Soviet propaganda goals. However, Shostakovich never realized his vision.

In January of 1936, Stalin attended Shostakovich's *Lady Macbeth*.<sup>21</sup> Shortly after, on January 28, the *Pravda* published the article "Muddle Instead of Music."<sup>22</sup> One particularly infamous excerpt read as follows:

The young composer, instead of hearing serious criticism, which could have helped him in his future work, hears only enthusiastic compliments...To follow this "music" is most difficult; to remember it, impossible...The music quacks, grunts, and growls, and suffocates itself...The talented acting deserves gratitude, the wasted efforts – regret.<sup>23</sup>

The article menaced Shostakovich with cruel references to "grunts" and "quacks," and explicitly attacked his character when suggesting Shostakovich was too arrogant to hear beyond compliments. The phrase "could have helped him in his future work" suggested that Shostakovich might no longer have a compositional career. Moreover, the article was more than a critique; it was an indictment. The article later stated that Shostakovich made a "petty-bourgeois, formalist attempt to create originality through cheap clowning. It is a game of clever ingenuity that may end very badly."<sup>24</sup> At the time of the article's publication, the Soviet regime considered imperialism and formalism its two greatest

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<sup>20</sup> Fay, *Shostakovich: A Life*, 78.

<sup>21</sup> Peter Gutmann, "Shostakovich's Fifth Symphony—finding the cost of freedom." *Goldmine* 28.19 (2002): 61.

<sup>22</sup> Fay, Laurel, *Shostakovich: A Life*, 78.

<sup>23</sup> C.H. Loh, *Muddle Instead of Music*, in the Geo Cities Archives, [http://www.oocities.org/kuala\\_bear/articles/muddle.html](http://www.oocities.org/kuala_bear/articles/muddle.html).

<sup>24</sup> Geo Cities Archives.

enemies.<sup>25</sup> If one considers that the publication of the article was at the start of the Great Terror, the phrase “may end very badly” implicitly threatened Shostakovich’s life. The article charged him with crimes worthy of fatal penalization.

The *Pravda* publication greatly slowed the progress of his Fourth Symphony, which was well underway by 1936. According to Fay, “For Shostakovich, who was cast down overnight from the summit as the brightest star among young Soviet composers to the abyss as pernicious purveyor of cultural depravity, things would never be the same again.”<sup>26</sup> In 1936, the same year as the birth of his daughter, Shostakovich matched only a sixth of his usual earnings, likely a consequence of the *Pravda* article.<sup>27</sup> It is not coincidental that in January of 1936, the regime established an All-Union Committee for Artistic Affairs (eventually the USSR Ministry of Culture) to oversee all artistic organizations. At the time of its establishment, Kerzhenstev, a cultural official, publicly scolded Shostakovich. He suggested Shostakovich turn to the Soviet people for repertoire and encouraged him to abandon “sorry excuses for critics as Sollerinsky.”<sup>28</sup> The public singling out of Shostakovich demonstrates how closely the regime monitored him.

Shostakovich, already a target of the regime, was in a doubly perilous position: his music put him a precarious position and the Soviet Union viewed many of his friends and family as potential enemies of the state. In 1936, the regime arrested Shostakovich’s close friend Galina Serevryakova and a former lover Yelena Konstaninovskaya. By 1937, the Great Terror reached its peak. The arrest of his uncle and his brother-in-law, the exile

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<sup>25</sup> Volkov, Solomon, *Shostakovich and Stalin: the extraordinary relationship between the great composer and the brutal dictator*, 134.

<sup>26</sup> Fay, *Shostakovich: A Life*, 85.

<sup>27</sup> Fay, *Shostakovich: A Life* 88.

<sup>28</sup> Fay, *Shostakovich: A Life*, 89.

of his sister, Mariya, the sentencing of his mother-in-law to hard labor, and the execution of his dear friend Marshal Mikhail all occurred during 1937.<sup>29</sup> The number of close friends and family targeted by the regime demonstrates both his visibility and vulnerability. Although seemingly unrelated to Shostakovich and his music, the targeting of close friends and family made Shostakovich more visible in a highly policed society.

In this atmosphere of censure, the premiere of his Fourth Symphony, scheduled for December 11, 1936, never occurred. Isaak Gilkman, a close friend of Shostakovich, attended several rehearsals. He recounted how “rumors had been circulating in musical and more importantly, fringe circles, that, disregarding criticism, Shostakovich had written a devilishly difficult symphony, jam-packed with formalism.”<sup>30</sup> These rumors prompted Shostakovich to move directly to composing his Fifth, his restorative symphony.

Thus, Shostakovich’s Fifth Symphony did not only save his career, but also, perhaps, his life.<sup>31</sup> The Fifth Symphony premiered in November of 1937 in Leningrad.<sup>32</sup> The Fifth received exceptional reviews and propaganda-inspired interpretation, but Shostakovich—at least initially—did and said little to enlighten his audience as to the meaning of his work. Alexey Tolstoy, an honored recipient of three Stalin awards and a faithful member

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<sup>29</sup> Michael Mishra, *A Shostakovich Companion*, (Westport: Praeger Publishers, 2008), 104-105.

<sup>30</sup> Fay, *Shostakovich: A Life* 89.

<sup>31</sup> Richard Taruskin, “Public lies and unspeakable truths: Interpreting Shostakovich’s Fifth Symphony” in *Shostakovich Studies*, ed. David Fanning (University of Manchester, 2006), 29-30.

<sup>32</sup> Ian MacDonald, *The New Shostakovich*, (Boston: Northeastern University Press), 1990, 123.



of the Communist party,<sup>33</sup> wrote the most significant review of the Fifth.<sup>34</sup> Tolstoy's review played a critical role in restoring not only Shostakovich's popularity, but also his safety.

Tolstoy popularized the term "formation of a personality" to explicate the symphony's social significance and drama.<sup>35</sup> The most telling passage of his review reads as follows:

Here we have the 'Symphony of Socialism.' It begins with the Largo of the masses working underground, an accelerando corresponds to the subway system; the Allegro in turn symbolizes gigantic factory machinery and its victory over nature. The Adagio represents the synthesis of Soviet culture, science, and art. The Scherzo reflects the athletic life of happy inhabitants of the Union. As for the Finale, it is the image of the gratitude and the enthusiasm of the masses.<sup>36</sup>

Tolstoy's "Symphony of Socialism" interpretation protected Shostakovich from ridicule and made the Fifth impervious to regime targeting. His celebration of the work as an apt glorification of Socialism suggested Shostakovich freed himself of his Western, formalist tendencies. After breaking his silence, Shostakovich embraced Tolstoy's comprehension of the work and subtitled the work "My Creative Answer" for the Moscow premiere.<sup>37</sup> According to Taruskin, Tolstoy's review was "almost immediately bolstered by the composer's public testimony, amounting to a plea—not to say a demand—that the symphony be read as autobiography."<sup>38</sup> Although interpreting the symphony as autobiographical seems reasonable, Tolstoy's analysis seems ludicrous when considering

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<sup>33</sup> Liukkonen, P & Pesonen, A, "Aleksei Nikolaevich Tolstoi (1883-1945)" Books and Writers, <http://www.kirjasto.sci.fi/atolstoi.htm> (accessed May 6, 2013).

<sup>34</sup> Stravinsky, Igor, *Poetics of Music*, (Cambridge: Harvard University Press: 1970), 153.

<sup>35</sup> Fay, 95.

<sup>36</sup> Stravinsky, *Poetics of Music*, 153.

<sup>37</sup> Fay, *Shostakovich: A Life*, 96.

<sup>38</sup> Taruskin, "Public lies and unspeakable truth: Interpreting Shostakovich's fifth symphony," 29.

the state of the Soviet Union. Between 1936 and 1938, the Soviet regime executed 1,000 people per day and sentenced anywhere from three to twelve million more Soviets to hard labor.<sup>39</sup> Thus, attributing “gratitude” or “enthusiasm” to “the masses” as Tolstoy did is farcical.

In 1939, Igor Stravinsky, a staunch anti-Soviet Russian living in America, ridiculed Tolstoy’s review. He considered the review “a consummate masterpiece of bad taste, mental infirmity, and complete disorientation in the recognition of the fundamental values of life.”<sup>40</sup> Today, there exists a great deal of scholarship on the Fifth and its meaning. Scholars continue to debate whether or not Shostakovich highly coded the Fifth with insurgency. Regardless of possible dual meanings, the Fifth Symphony and Tolstoy’s interpretation restored Shostakovich’s career and safety. Interestingly, during his year of reprieve following the Fifth’s warm embrace, Shostakovich turned to the string quartet.

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<sup>39</sup> Ekaterina Gracheva,, “Of Russian origin: Stalin’s Purges” Russiapedia, <http://russiapedia.rt.com/of-russian-origin/stalins-purges/>accessed April 20, 2013).

<sup>40</sup> Stravinsky, *Poetics of Music*, 155.

## Chapter II: Shostakovich's Turn to The String Quartet

The string quartet, like other chamber music, originates from domestic music making. Its emergence in the latter half of the eighteenth century originated from an amateur music making tradition dating back to consort ensembles and madrigals printed in part books in the sixteenth century.<sup>41</sup> String quartets, composed for two violins, viola, and cello, initially had a number of names such as “serenade,” “divertimento,” and “quartetto.” This instrumentation was likely a consequence of the string quartets closely related predecessor, a string consort.

According to musicologist Christine Bashford, the string quartet represented the “quintessential music of friends.” She writes that chamber music was intended “to be performed for its own sake and the enjoyment of its players(...) perhaps in the presence of a few listeners, perhaps not.”<sup>42</sup> Early depictions testify to the intimacy of early string quartet performance. Early portrayals depict musicians playing in a circle, with few, if any, audience members outside the intimate circle. Although it is clear that the quartet had an intimate social function among the elite, Christina Bashford notes, “Reconstructing this musical world is not easy” because of the “essentially private nature of quartet playing.”<sup>43</sup> Accordingly, the earliest string quartet performances lack documentation.

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<sup>41</sup> Christine Bashford, “The string quartet and society,” “The String Quartet in the Twentieth Century,” in *The Cambridge Companion to the String Quartet*. edit by Robin Stowell, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), 3.

<sup>42</sup> Bashford, “The string quartet and society,” 3.

<sup>43</sup> Bashford, “The string quartet and society,” 4.

Initially, wealth, education, and leisure characterized the social context of the quartet. Most often, the performers were men from aristocratic classes. Quartet performances were informal, intimate, concerts among friends. Though many amateur musicians performed the works, patrons also called upon professionally trained musicians. Quartets were not only popular for their enjoyment; they played an important social function. According to an anonymous article published in 1810 in the *Allgemeine musikalische Zeitung* (*General Music Journal*), "It is impossible to hate someone with whom you have once seriously made music; and those who in some winter season have of their own will freely joined together in playing quartets are good friends for the rest of their lives."<sup>44</sup> Thus, string quartet performers perceived quartets as bearing great social worth.

The genre itself widely varied in its infancy. The number of movements, style and texture differed from composer to composer, work to work.<sup>45</sup> Eighteenth-century composers regularly included fugal movements, complex polyphonic movements, and homophonic, gallant style movements. Though at the time of its conception, the genre varied musically, its context remained constant. According to Cliff Eisen, there is no evidence of public performance in Europe outside of London before the 19<sup>th</sup> century.<sup>46</sup>

The genre quickly became popular, and the string quartet transitioned from intimate private performances to public spaces. By the end of the eighteenth century, chamber concerts emerged in great numbers. Initially, these public concerts welcomed

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<sup>44</sup> Cliff Eisen, "String quartet," *Grove Music Online. Oxford Music Online*. Oxford University Press, accessed November 30, 2014, <http://www.oxfordmusiconline.com.ccl.idm.oclc.org/subscriber/article/grove/music/40899>.

<sup>45</sup> Eisen, "String quartet," *Grove Music Online*.

<sup>46</sup> Eisen, "String quartet," *Grove Music Online*.

amateur musicians performing a variety of chamber music, including, of course, the popular string quartet.<sup>47</sup> In Vienna, Berlin, and Paris, initiatives headed by Ignaz Schuppanzigh, Karl Möser, and Pierre Baillot Séances, respectively, resulted in the regular performance of quartet concerts. However, by the mid nineteenth-century, the public performance of chamber music reached formal concert halls. From 1830 onwards, the professionalization of the quartet resulted in countless quartet groups, including, but not limited to, the Quatuor Armingaud, the Gewandhaus Quartet, the Dresden String Quartet, the Hellmesberger Quartet, the Müller Quartet, the Trieste String Quartet, the Florentine String Quartet, the Joachim Quartet, and the Russian quartet ensembles attached to local branches of the imperial music societies.<sup>48</sup> However, aesthetic and contextual contradictions riddled the transfer to formal concert halls. To accommodate the changed context, sometimes, concert hall directors sometimes rearranged the audience members' chairs in hopes of recreating a sense of intimacy. In some instances, they placed the musicians in the center of the hall and the audience members around them.

Composers adapted as public performances of string quartets in large concert halls became more common. According to Bashford, to accommodate these public performances, composers fused “richly resonant writing, thicker textures, and bold gestures –vocabulary for larger spaces” with the subtle complexities that only performers may appreciate.<sup>49</sup> Haydn’s string quartet op. 74 demonstrates these musical developments

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<sup>47</sup> Bashford, “The string quartet and society,” 8.

<sup>48</sup> Eisen, “String quartet,” *Grove Music Online*.

<sup>49</sup> Bashford, “The string quartet and society,” 9.

with its bold character and richer, more orchestral-like sonorities.<sup>50</sup> Beethoven continued and expanded this style. His middle-period string quartets op. 59, demonstrate the increased scale incorporating elements such as expanded first movements, and augmented and slowed opening ideas recalled the style he cultivated beginning with his “Eroica” symphony.<sup>51</sup>

Interestingly, despite the nineteenth century being the “Age of Beethoven,” composers who followed Beethoven departed from his distinct quartet style. Rather, they ensured the string quartet retained its sense of intimacy despite its public performance. According to Antonio Baldassarre, “Even after 1830, intimacy remained a defining characteristic of chamber music, and to no branch did that apply more forcibly than the string quartet.”<sup>52</sup> Prolific quartet composers, such as Felix Mendelssohn, Ferdinand Ries, Bernhard Romberg, Carl Reissiger, and Louis Spohr, desired to move away from the Beethovenian quartet and re-establish the intimate character of the earlier string quartets. Their compositions departed from the dramatic symphonic gestures and instead catered to the small recital rooms of the middle-class.

In Russia, composers integrated elements of folk music into quartets.<sup>53</sup> Mikhail Glinka composed two quartets in 1824 and 1830. While in the classical tradition, these quartets recalled folk traditions. Anton Rubinstein composed ten quartets in the latter half of the nineteenth century. In his later quartets, Russian folk music more apparently influenced the form. Likewise, Nikolay Afanas'yev's twelve quartets incorporated national influences, with one even entitled “Volga” in A minor.

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<sup>50</sup> Eisen, et al. "String quartet," *Grove Music Online*.

<sup>51</sup> Antonio Baldassarre, "String quartet," *Grove Music Online*.

<sup>52</sup> Baldassarre, "String quartet." *Grove Music Online*.

<sup>53</sup> Paul Griffiths, "String quartet." *Grove Music Online*. *Oxford Music Online*.

The most important nineteenth century quartet composer in Russia was Alexander Borodin.<sup>54</sup> Borodin reconciled Beethoven's heavier, symphonic influences with the nationalistic style popular in Russian quartets. Two other influential figures, Alexander Glazunov and Sergei Taneyev, straddled the Tsarist and Soviet eras. According to Alan George, their string quartets "perhaps more than those of their illustrious predecessors (...) exerted the greater influence on the quartet writing of the Soviet period, through their demonstration of how to write idiomatically and resourcefully for four string instruments."<sup>55</sup> The next prolific quartet composer to come from Russia, or at the time, the Soviet Union, was Shostakovich.

At only seven years of age, Shostakovich regularly listened to chamber music sounding from his neighbor's home. Young Mitya sat for hours listening to the trios and quartets by Mozart, Haydn, Beethoven, Borodin and Tchaikovsky.<sup>56</sup> As an adult, Shostakovich lamented the lack of chamber works in the Soviet canon.<sup>57</sup> However, his chamber repertoire was relatively limited. By 1932, at thirty-two years of age, his chamber repertoire consisted only of student compositions: a single piano trio, three cello and piano works, two string octets, and two string quartets.<sup>58</sup>

Shostakovich acknowledged this gap in his repertoire on more than one occasion. In 1934, before the premier of *Lady MacBeth*, Shostakovich recognized: "I have a great gap in the area of concerto and chamber-oriented music...At the present time, I am

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<sup>54</sup> George, "The Soviet and Russian Quartet," 72.

<sup>55</sup> George, "The Soviet and Russian Quartet," 72.

<sup>56</sup> Fay, *Shostakovich: A Life*, 9.

<sup>57</sup> Fay, *Shostakovich: A Life*, 111.

<sup>58</sup> George, "The Soviet and Russian Quartet," 74.

focusing my creative energy precisely on these genres.”<sup>59</sup> For a composer as accomplished and acclaimed as Shostakovich, it is unusual that he lacked chamber work. Perhaps a consequence of his early praise as a symphonist, he seemingly abandoned chamber music after his formal training. Following the premier of his Fifth symphony in 1937, Shostakovich echoed himself: “And this is what I want to do —and I absolutely will do it—to write for our performers a series of chamber music.”<sup>60</sup> A year later, Shostakovich fulfilled his promise to contribute to the Soviet chamber repertoire and composed String Quartet No. 1 in C, Op. 49.

Upon the String Quartet No. 1’s completion, Shostakovich offered one explanation for the gap in his repertoire. On composing his String Quartet No. 1, he wrote, “The quartet is one of the most difficult musical genres.”<sup>61</sup> It is striking that Shostakovich, an accomplished composer of five symphonies, two operas, and three ballets, found the quartet to be of the most challenging. Although he did not expand on why he found the genre so challenging, interestingly, he confronted the challenge only after his reprieve following the Fifth. Shostakovich’s turn to quartets coincided with his renewed sense of security within the Soviet Union, both political and personal. As discussed in the previous chapter, the regime’s embrace of his Fifth Symphony saved Shostakovich’s reputation and, quite possibly, his life. Thus, an opportune time arose for Shostakovich to devote his creative and emotive energy into a genre that promised less scrutiny and more intimacy. The genre of the string quartet, intimate and egalitarian, was his escape.

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<sup>59</sup> Kuhn, *Shostakovich in Dialogue*, 16.

<sup>60</sup> Kuhn, *Shostakovich in Dialogue*, 16.

<sup>61</sup> Fay, *Shostakovich: A Life*, 110.



Shostakovich's turn to the string quartets is fascinating when considering his personal affairs and the oppressive climate in which he lived. According to Fay, "the success of his Fifth Symphony earned Shostakovich a creative reprieve, a respite from enormous pressure and stress."<sup>62</sup> Seemingly, his turn to the quartets, coinciding with a time of reprieve, suggests that Shostakovich saw the medium as an artistic outlet. During an era in which composers were so policed by the Soviet socialist regime, the symphony was the obvious avenue to pay proper tribute to the masses. By turning to the string quartet, it is possible Shostakovich was seeking a less scrutinized realm for creative expression.

In his article, "The String Quartet in the Twentieth Century," Kenneth Gloag expands on this point, articulating, "Whatever political connotations, it is clear Shostakovich viewed the string quartet as a viable medium for the construction and articulation of his own personal sound-world."<sup>63</sup> Gloag suggests that the quartets, unlike the symphonic arena, offer a more secure sonic environment for self-expression. Especially within the Soviet context, this is likely a consequence of the symphony representing the masses. Accordingly, the regime monitored this public and highly symbolic sphere. The quartet offered some immunity from scrutiny because it did not bear the same symbolic weight and was, consequently, of less importance to the regime.

The musical dynamic between the instruments is particularly interesting when considering the socio-political climate of the Soviet Union. The conversation between the

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<sup>62</sup> Fay, *Shostakovich: A Life*, 111.

<sup>63</sup> Kenneth Gloag, "The String Quartet in the Twentieth Century," in *The Cambridge Companion to the String Quartet*, ed., by Robin Stowell (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), 300.

instruments of the quartet lends to a sense of equality, democracy even. In her novel, *Music for Silenced Voices*<sup>64</sup>, Wendy Lesser expands on this metaphor:

If the full orchestra can be seen as a mass society in which the performers risk losing their individuality, while the solo recital represents an essentially narcissistic arrangement, then the string quartet might be viewed as an ideal society in which the musicians look to each other for guidance (...) And if the Athenian democracy represented by the string quartet was an impractical model that could never exist in the real world of politics... well so much the more reason for Shostakovich to seek it out in his private life and, and in his music.<sup>65</sup>

Lesser suggests that the string quartet's musical dynamic equates to a greater socio-political dynamic. Lesser proposes that the quartet genre offered more than an intimate space for composition; it also represented an idealized social realm that Shostakovich could not otherwise realize.

Not all scholars attribute his turn to the quartets to any biographical significance. For example, Alan George refutes the legitimacy of the quartets functioning as a reflection of Shostakovich's private persona. In fact, he claims Shostakovich "strongly opposed"<sup>66</sup> the idea that the symphonies and quartets represented a public and private persona, respectively. Katerina Clark, refers to Lesser's argument as a "cruder version of

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<sup>64</sup> Lesser's monograph is entirely devoted to the subject of Shostakovich's quartets' significant relation to the life of Shostakovich. Lesser, who identifies as a "non-musician," writes poetically about the quartets and their relation to his life. Despite Lesser's lack of musicological background, some critics have embraced the book. Lindsay Hansen concluded her positive review of the work stating, "Although this book does not serve as a single source of information about Shostakovich's life, it provides a strong framework for the quartets." Thus, the book may serve as useful tool in this investigation. Lindsay Hansen, "Music for Silenced Voices: Shostakovich and His Fifteen Quartets by Wendy Lesser," *Music Reference Services Quarterly* 4 (2011): 267.

<sup>65</sup> Lesser, *Music for Silenced Voices*, 42-43.

<sup>66</sup> George, "The Soviet and Russian Quartet," 74.

general tendency when writing about Shostakovich,”<sup>67</sup> the tendency to romanticize Shostakovich and assign meanings to works without, in Clark’s opinion, legitimate evidence. In her article, “Shostakovich’s Turn to the String Quartet and Debates about Social Realism,” Clark argues that his turn to the quartet cannot be understood as anything more than an attempt to compose new material within the loosely defined style of Socialist Realism. However, in the same breath, Clark concedes that the quartet was in fact a curious genre for Socialist Realism because the string quartet was not a genre that represented the masses. Rather, string quartets represent elitism that the communist revolution supplanted. Though this is seemingly contradictory to quartets’ symbolic egalitarianism, the elitism they represent stems from the affluent circles that originally played and enjoyed quartets. While the symphony represents a mass spectacle orchestrated by a czar, the string quartet represents a small group of more autonomous and affluent individuals.

Clark supports her argument not with the content of the music, nor the content of Shostakovich’s private life. Instead, she uses only his public statements about the quartets. In an era marked by its oppressive surveillance, however, public statements were constructed to place the composer within an acceptable political framework. Therefore, using his public statements about the quartets only serves to show how Shostakovich represented himself in the public sphere. As Fay notes, “Shostakovich made a point of speaking through his music, not about it. He was an intensely private person who guarded his personal life and feelings jealously.”<sup>68</sup> Following Fay’s argument, if the quartets are in fact a window into Shostakovich’s personal life, it is

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<sup>67</sup> Clark, “Shostakovich’s Turn to the String Quartet,” 573.

<sup>68</sup> Fay, *Shostakovich: A Life*, 1.

unlikely he would publicly confirm their autobiographic function.

Rather than argue for a perfect divide between the symphonic and chamber works' functions, this investigation assesses the significance of his turn to the quartets and how the genre's context allowed for liberal self-expression. Even scholars skeptical of the deeper meaning beneath the quartets do not deny their intimacy. For example, Alan George writes, "Yet the dedications on the quartets' scores do testify to an intimacy that is very much in the spirit of chamber music, since all are dedicated to personal acquaintances including his two wives."<sup>69</sup> Paralleling the dedications of his chamber works as a student at the Conservatory, his string quartet dedications to loved ones suggest their personal meaning for him.

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<sup>69</sup> George, "The Soviet and Russian Quartet," 75.

### Chapter III: String Quartet No. 1

Soon after the birth of his son in 1938, Shostakovich began composing String Quartet No. 1. At this time in the Soviet Union, ensemble performances were rare and had few listeners.<sup>70</sup> Despite the lack of public attention chamber music received, the Glazunov Quartet pestered Shostakovich to compose for them, so much so that when Shostakovich saw members of the Quartet, he would shout, “I will write it! I will write it!” and run away.<sup>71</sup> Although the Glazunov Quartet applied external pressure, Shostakovich’s desire to compose String Quartet No. 1 arose internally. Upon the quartet’s completion, he wrote, “I began to write it without special ideas and feelings, I thought that nothing would come of it (...) but then work on the quartet captivated me and I finished it rather quickly.”<sup>72</sup> Shostakovich’s reflections on the compositional process suggest he composed the quartet for personal fulfillment during his time of reprieve from the Soviet regime’s disdain.

Although Shostakovich’s Fifth Symphony temporarily absolved him from the regime’s disdain, he approached the public performance of String Quartet No. 1 with caution. He acknowledged the proximity of the quartet’s premiere to his celebrated Fifth Symphony and discouraged comparison, writing, “Don’t expect to find special depth in this, my first quartet opus. In mood it is joyful, merry, lyrical. I would call it ‘spring-like.’”<sup>73</sup> Thus, Shostakovich preempted critical attack by undermining the quartet’s

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<sup>70</sup> Kuhn, *Shostakovich in Dialogue*, 17.

<sup>71</sup> As quoted by Kuhn, *Shostakovich in Dialogue*, 17.

<sup>72</sup> As quoted by Lesser, *Music for Silenced Voices*, 40.

<sup>73</sup> As quoted by Fay, *Shostakovich: A life*, 112.

content. Further, he explicitly discouraged close listening by noting its lack of “special depth.”

The attention the First Quartet received testified to the spotlight Shostakovich endured following his Fifth Symphony. However, critical reception failed to actualize Shostakovich’s concerns of ridicule. Following its Leningrad premiere by the Glazunov Quartet in October 1938, Leonard Entelis’s review in newspaper *Sovetskoe iskusstvo*, (*Soviet Art*), contended that Shostakovich continued, “along the path noted in his Symphony and (...) the first movement’s tonal development is perfectly regular.”<sup>74</sup> After the November Moscow premiere performed by the Beethoven Quartet, Mikhail Pekelis’s review reaffirmed the positive reception. Pekelis ventured further and projected a program onto the work, understanding the quartet as “coming from childhood, even perhaps a children’s fairy tale.” He celebrated the finale, which demonstrated “cheerfulness,” establishing a “living reality, free from fantastic errors.”<sup>75</sup>

Other critics suggested a program more reflective of recent events in Shostakovich’s career. In March, 1939, Yosif Rīshkin proposed an alternative program to the quartet in *Sovetskya muzika*, a Soviet musical journal. Rīshkin felt the work represented a wandering pilgrim. He wrote, “The images of wandering are conventional—in their poetic aspect they represent the inner creative path of Shostakovich: rest, achieved after lengthy travels, the pure joy of consciousness after a mighty struggle with himself.”<sup>76</sup> Viktor Bobrovsky, a Soviet scholar of the Shostakovich’s quartets, suggested a similar understanding. He described the quartet as a

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<sup>74</sup> As quoted by Kuhn, *Shostakovich in Dialogue*, 23.

<sup>75</sup> As quoted by Kuhn, *Shostakovich in Dialogue*, 23.

<sup>76</sup> As quoted by Kuhn, *Shostakovich in Dialogue*, 24.

“kind of creative intermezzo, a respite after the agitation experienced in the sphere of heroic dramatic imagery.”<sup>77</sup>

Interestingly, after repeated performances, Entelis recanted his original, glowing review. He highlighted a number of troubling aspects of the quartet including the lack of a “a clearly formulated ending” to the first movement. He also noted the “sincere tunefulness of the music is destroyed by troubled intonations, recalling the character of the first movement of the Fifth Symphony.” However, he maintained that these troubling areas are redeemed by the finale’s “radiant optimism.”<sup>78</sup> Likewise, in a 1939 *Sovetskya muzika* article, Yuly Kremlyov found fault with the harmonies of the work. For example, he cited mm. 9-10 (Example 1) as the “sharpest, driest, most futile dissonances” and claimed the “[dissonances] are not only unprepared by the theme...they clearly oppose it...An appalling gap develops between the melody, the harmony and the overall unity of the work [creating] a liquidation of harmonic logic.”<sup>79</sup> Despite these critiques, the quartet failed to damage the sanctity of Shostakovich’s position within the Soviet Union following the Fifth Symphony. Perhaps because the genre of the string quartet generally received less interest, no severe repercussion resulted from the critiques. Seemingly, the initial heightened interest in the quartet stemmed more from his recent redemptive Fifth Symphony than in the quartet itself.

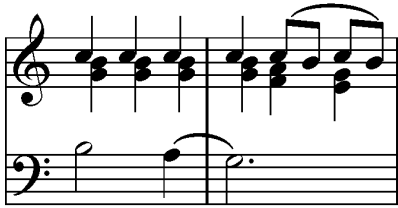
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<sup>77</sup> As quoted by Kuhn, *Shostakovich in Dialogue*, 26.

<sup>78</sup> As quoted by Kuhn, *Shostakovich in Dialogue*, 25.

<sup>79</sup> As quoted by Kuhn, *Shostakovich in Dialogue*, 25.

**Example 1.** *i. Moderato*, mm. 9-10. Yuly Kremlyov referred to these bars as the “sharpest, driest, most futile dissonances,” most likely in reference to the minor seconds.



Years later, Shostakovich provided insight into the quartet’s meaning. He wrote, “I tried to convey in it images of childhood, somewhat naïve, bright, spring-like moods.”<sup>80</sup> His suggested program supports monographer belief that the birth of his son and his professional reprieve colored the content of the quartet. She suggests that the birth of his son brought Shostakovich back to a state of youth. Furthermore, in a letter to Ivan Sollertinsky, Shostakovich wrote, “It didn’t turn out particularly well. But you know it is hard to compose well. One has to know how.”<sup>81</sup> According to Lesser, this letter supports the claim that he “purposely returned himself to a condition of not knowing how (...) If the string quartet gave Shostakovich a route back to his childhood, it also offered him an escape from his previous musical history.”<sup>82</sup> Upon closer inspection of the music, Lesser’s musings prove compelling. In many ways, the key he chose, the relative simplicity of the work, and the sweet impression with which the quartet leaves its listeners does suggest Shostakovich immersed himself in a genre in which he felt a sense of naiveté. In the following analysis, I will point to elements of Shostakovich’s first string quartet that suggest greater self-expression and reflection, his first quartet fulfilling an initial exploration of the genre.

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<sup>80</sup> As quoted by Fay, *Shostakovich: A life*, 112.

<sup>81</sup> As quoted by Lesser, *Music for Silenced Voices*, 40.

<sup>82</sup> Lesser, *Music for Silenced Voices*, 40-41.



*i. Moderato*

Upon first listening, the opening *Moderato* movement sounds like the simple quartet of a composer delving into a new genre. In C major, with regular rhythms and repetitive melodic gestures, the *Moderato* movement sets the stage for the seemingly unassuming quartet. However, as critic Kremlyov discovered, the complexity of the first movement lies in harmonic interest that the movement's sweet sound obscures (Ex. 3.1), citing mm. 9-10, most likely for the minor seconds. Shostakovich also deviates from standard form (Table 3.1). The structure of the first movement loosely adheres to sonata form. However, the structure dissolves as described below. Even the coda lacks a strong authentic cadence in the home key, a compositional device employed through the quartet.

**Table 3.1:** *i. Moderato*

	Exposition		Development	Recapitulation		Coda
	A	B	A'	A''	B'	
Measures	1-36	36-74	75-88	89-97	98-111	112-123
Key Areas	C	E b	No tonal center	C	A b , f	C

The opening theme is chorale-like in structure and sound. Motion occurs predominantly step-wise, a simple melodic contour that allows for modulation via linear motion. For example, one notes the ascending parallel 6/3 chords in bar 6, and again in the opening theme's restatement in measures 16 and 18 (Ex. 3.2). There is a simple sweetness to this gesture, and its repetition distracts from the increasingly disparate harmonies at which the gesture arrives. In the first theme's variation in mm. 15-28, a repetitive duplet figure from section B (second theme) seeps into the internal lines at m. 20 (Ex. 3.3). This not only previews the second theme, but also previews the texture that pervades much of the quartet's third movement. The self-referential quality of the quartet

helps create a sense of intimacy. Not only does the repetition of certain musical tropes lend a sense of familiarity, the reiterations confirm the quartet's distinct voice.

**Example 3.2.** Rising 6/3 Chords

The image displays two musical excerpts. The first excerpt, labeled 'm. 6', shows a piano accompaniment with a treble clef and a bass clef. The treble clef part features a series of six chords, each a 6/3 chord, with the root notes rising stepwise. The bass clef part provides a simple accompaniment. The second excerpt, labeled 'mm. 16-18', shows a similar piano accompaniment. The treble clef part features a series of six chords, each a 6/3 chord, with the root notes rising stepwise. The bass clef part provides a simple accompaniment.

The second theme (B) varies from the first in character, style, and texture. Unlike the full chorale texture of the first theme, B presents a thinner texture in which only three instruments sound simultaneously throughout most of the section. The ostinato duplet pattern revealed in A persists throughout much of B. However, its return lends it new meaning. The playful glissandos in the cello and light accompaniment in the violin makes the repetitive, staccato duplets bouncy and light, not persistent and grounding as in A. Section B begins firmly in its tonal center E-flat major with the first ten measures of the section alternating between I and V (mm. 37-46). However, overlapping, discordant scales destabilize the tonal center starting at m. 50 (Ex. 3.4a). The overlapping E-flat major scale and F-minor scale deviate from the firm tonal center established in the previous passage. Similar scales appear throughout the quartet, recurring in the second and fourth movements (Ex. 3.4b and Ex 3.4c). Although the variations of the idea are distinct from one another, the familiarity of the scales fosters the quartet's sense of intimacy.

**Example 3.3.** Recurring duplet figure

mm. 20-21

mm. 37-38

The first excerpt (mm. 20-21) shows a piano accompaniment with a treble clef and a key signature of one sharp (F#). The right hand plays a series of chords, while the left hand plays a rhythmic pattern of eighth notes. The second excerpt (mm. 37-38) shows a similar piano accompaniment, but with a key signature of one flat (Bb). The right hand is mostly silent, and the left hand plays a rhythmic pattern of eighth notes, with some notes marked 'glass'.

**Example 3.4.** Overlapping Scales throughout String Quartet No. 1

a. *i. Moderato* mm. 50-53, incomplete E-flat major scale and F minor scale

The notation shows a piano accompaniment with a treble clef and a key signature of two flats (Bb). The right hand plays a series of eighth notes, while the left hand plays a series of eighth notes. The scales are overlapping, with the right hand playing an incomplete E-flat major scale and the left hand playing an F minor scale.

b. *ii. Moderato* mm. 52-53, E-major scales, offset by a third

The notation shows a piano accompaniment with a treble clef and a key signature of three sharps (F#). The right hand plays a series of eighth notes, while the left hand plays a series of eighth notes. The scales are overlapping, with the right hand playing an E-major scale and the left hand playing an E-major scale offset by a third.

c. *iv. Allegro* mm. 75-77, D major scales, offset by a third

The notation shows a piano accompaniment with a treble clef and a key signature of two sharps (F#). The right hand plays a series of eighth notes, while the left hand plays a series of eighth notes. The scales are overlapping, with the right hand playing a D major scale and the left hand playing a D major scale offset by a third.

The ambiguous development and hasty recapitulation dissolve the sonata structure. First, harmonic irregularities obscure the re-transition from the development to the recapitulation. The harmonic instability beginning in the development persists through the beginning of the recapitulation (Ex 3.5). Throughout the development, linear chromaticism, specifically the linear movement of thirds created by the second violin and viola, destabilizes the E minor tonal center. The same linear chromaticism continues into the recapitulation. Linear motion in thirds almost immediately follows the arrival at C, obfuscating the arrival at the home-key. Further, at the onset of the recapitulation, the meter is still in that of the developmental section rather than the original  $\frac{3}{4}$ .

By m. 98, the C major material from the opening transforms into material from B in the key of A-flat major. Shostakovich returns to the home-key C major by first modulating to its relative minor, F minor in m. 104. The modulation back to C major occurs subtly: the V of f minor is C. The movement's sense of dissipation, rather than conclusion, stems from an ending that resonates almost as an extended half cadence in f minor. Shostakovich prolongs this fading: the twelve-bar coda lacks a cadence and instead reiterates the tonic, C major with decreasing dynamic volume. The final *morendo* marking underlines this slow dissolution.

Originally, this movement served as the Quartet's finale. In a letter to his friend Ivan Sollertinsky, Shostakovich wrote, "In the process of composition I regrouped mid-stream (...) the first movement became the last, the last the first."<sup>83</sup> Considering the critical acclaim the last movement received and the positive storyline it enabled, it is particularly interesting that Shostakovich originally composed the finale as the opening

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<sup>83</sup> A quoted by Lesser, *Music for Silenced Voices*, 40.

movement and vice versa. Would the critical reception have varied significantly had the inconclusive first movement served as the finale? Though it is impossible to know for certain, perhaps when Shostakovich realized the work would no longer be only for his own personal and artistic growth, he felt obligated to alter the quartet to construct a more appropriate story line. Whether or not this was his intention cannot be certain; however, had Shostakovich kept this movement as his last, the celebratory storyline of a lost wanderer finding his way could not have been imposed by critics. Conversely, a pessimistic storyline could have been imposed about a hero straying from greatness and wandering alone had Shostakovich kept the celebratory finale as his first movement and this movement as his last.

**Example 3.5** Liner reduction of *i. Moderato*, mm. 75-98

Development

Musical score for the Development section, measures 75-87. The score is written for two staves (treble and bass clef). Measure 75 is marked with a fermata. Measure 79 is also marked with a fermata. The notation includes various rhythmic values, accidentals, and dynamic markings. A handwritten "v" is present below the bass staff at the end of the section.

Recapitulation

Musical score for the Recapitulation section, measures 89-94. The score is written for two staves (treble and bass clef). Measure 89 is marked with a fermata. Measure 94 is also marked with a fermata. The notation includes various rhythmic values, accidentals, and dynamic markings.

*ii. Moderato*

The second movement is a twentieth-century style fugue in the key of a minor. The movement's form suits its personal character as it enables individual voices to engage in dialogue. In many ways, the second movement serves as a foil for the first. In the key of A minor, it lacks the sweet, yet nostalgic temperament of the first movement. Unlike the first movement, particularly in stark contrast to the opening theme, the second movement showcases individual voices with great clarity by featuring solos and moments of imitation.

**Table 3.2:** *ii. Moderato*

	Exposition	Development (B)	Counter-Exposition
Measures	1-41	41-62	63-85
Key Areas	a, b b	E	a

The viola begins the movement with a solo revealing the subject. When the cello enters, it does so with caution playing pizzicato descending fourths, a pattern that appears repetitively throughout the movement. When the first violin begins “an answer” in the key of B-flat minor, the second violin enters a beat later, establishing a fugal relationship between the two violins, with the countersubject in the second violin. The sense of intimate instrumental dialogue in this quartet is the strongest in this movement. Often, instrumental dialogue progress towards exciting phrases of thicker texture and building dynamics that seem to suggest concordance among the instruments. For example, mm. 33-34 and m. 55, both *fortissimo* with three instruments in the same rhythm, suggest the prior dialogues concluded in agreement.

The transition from B-flat minor to E major marks the arrival at the episode. Shostakovich accomplishes this modulation between disparate keys via linear motion

(Ex. 3.6). The change in character at the onset of the development cannot be attributed to the modal change alone. The triplet figure revitalizes the fugue. It is playful and responsive. The figure encourages liveliness between the instruments, as the figure bounces between instruments. Irregular glissandos within the triplet figure reinforce its lighthearted character. The episode recalls the rising, overlapping, and discordant scale figure from the exposition from the first movement (See Ex. 3.4b above). However, unlike the figure in the first movement that destabilizes the tonal center, the scales in the second movement underscores the tonal center of E major, preparing the natural return to A minor.

**Example 3.6.** Modulation to at the E Major, End of the Exposition, m. 41



The final entries of the subject are firmly in A minor. The texture is sparse throughout the counter-exposition. The subject is first in the viola, then restated in the first violin. The echoing, first between the cello and second violin and then between the cello and viola, demonstrates how Shostakovich harnesses the intimate character the genre enables. Played with pizzicato, the echoing is gentle, subtly bolstering the stark and somewhat dreary theme. Similar to the ending of the first movement, there is a sense of dissolution rather than conclusion. The lack of a leading tone in the final cadence weakens the ending, and the final pizzicato chord at the end seems like an afterthought.

Rather than forceful or assertive, the movement's gentle closure lends a quality of innocence. The timbre of the four string instruments enables the exploration of emotions and ideas ranging from intense to docile. In this movement, Shostakovich explores the softer emotive powers of the ensemble. This may be a reflection of his professional reprieve or the reflections on his own youth brought on by the birth of his son.

*iii. Allegro molto*

The third movement is a scherzo in the key of C-sharp minor. Despite the jovial implications of its form, the scherzo movement sounds far from good-humored. The movement is dark in character, muted in sound, broody in temperament, and like the two movements prior, ultimately unresolved.

**Table 3.3:** *iii. Allegro molto*

	Scherzo	Trio	Scherzo
Measures	1-72	73-157	158-202
Key Areas	c #	F #, g #	c #, F #, g #

There is a nearly menacing quality about the scherzo. The repetitive duplet figure that appeared in the first movement returns. However, it is not playful; instead, the figure's persistence lends the movement a sense of aimless rampancy. Driving the accelerated tempo, the duplet figure imparts a quality of tense breathlessness. Traveling from voice to voice, the continuity of the figure allows the scherzo to traverse several keys with abandon. Melodic gestures that surround the menacing duplet pattern recall, but deform, melodic gestures from prior movements, particularly those of the first movement.



Abandoning the duplet figure and using the common tone of C # allows for a smooth transition into the starkly contrasting trio section in F-sharp major. The trio recalls a texture similar to that of the chorale-like opening theme in the first movement. Though the trio remains primarily in F-sharp major, mm. 105-130 depart from the strict tonal center. Here, the melody transfers between instruments while chords moving slowly by linear motion in the other voices destabilizes the tonal center. (Ex. 3.7).

**Example 3.7.** Linear reduction of iii. *Allegro molto*, mm. 105-130,

The musical score for Example 3.7 is presented in two systems. The first system, labeled 'Cello Solo' and 'Viola Solo', spans measures 105 to 112. The second system, labeled 'Cello Solo', spans measures 117 to 130. The notation includes treble and bass clefs, a key signature of two sharps (F# and C#), and various musical notations such as notes, rests, and slurs. The score illustrates the linear reduction of the music, showing how the melody transfers between instruments while the chords move slowly by linear motion in the other voices, destabilizing the tonal center.

The return to the scherzo occurs in a manner similar to the transition into the trio: layers of the trio peel away, exposing the common tone g #, which immediately reestablishes the duplet figure. However, following the trio, it somehow lacks its menacing power of the first scherzo section. Its muteness now sounds more weak than haunting. The final scherzo mirrors the structure of the overall piece, with a miniature ABA spanning just over fifty bars of rapidly played music. The return to the trio texture

is brief (mm. 179-189). This compositional device lends the ending of the movement an intimate character of playfulness. However, the movement ends abruptly. The minor second figure that re-establishes the scherzo section at m. 190 dwindles. The dynamic marking sinks to pianissimo and rests of two and sometimes three beats separate the minor second duplet. Despite being the only movement thus far to incorporate a strong dominant seventh chord prior to the final chord at m. 197, the texture is so thin and the melody so sparse that the end sounds inconclusive. The detached minor second in the cello that ends the movement is a fittingly playful link between the third movement and the celebratory finale.

*iv. Allegro*

For the final movement, elements from the three prior movements combine to form an entirely new character. The final movement sounds self-assured, even rambunctious. In contrast to the nostalgic character of the first movement, the final movement expresses optimism.

**Table 3.4:** *iv. Allegro*

	Exposition		Development	Recapitulation		Coda
	A	B		A'	B'	
Measures	1-48	53-74	74-144	145-159	160-203	204-218
Key Areas	C	E b	f#	C	E, F, f#	C

The exposition reintroduces elements from each preceding movement. For example, the bass line in the very first measure recalls the playful descending fourths from the second movement (Ex. 3.8). Here, rather than supporting a bare fugal subject, the fourths underlay a rapid, cheerful duplet figure. The end of the exposition

incorporates major sixth glissandos recalling the second theme in the first movement (Ex. 3.9). Like their function in the opening movement, the glissandos underline moments of playfulness. The descending staccato notes follow the rising glissandos, lending the musical trope liveliness.

The development opens with a variation of the overlapping scale figure from the first and second movements (See Ex. 3.4 above). The variation of the idea here, with the repeated notes, lends the musical trope a sense of liveliness, and the clarity of the animated rising figure demonstrates a subtle playfulness. Later in the development, the second violin echoes the first in the same lighthearted way the viola echoed the violin in the development from the second movement (Ex. 3.10). This reference affirms how Shostakovich selectively recalls moments of cheer from even the more solemn movement. Further, repetitive minor second duplets in the development are reminiscent of the same pattern from the scherzo (Ex. 3.11). However, the new context redefines the once menacing figure as spirited. These instances of recollection of past musical ideas provide not only continuity to the quartet, but also highlight the most optimistic moments of the prior movements.

**Example 3.8.** Descending Fourths Recalled from the Second Movement

*ii. Moderato*, mm. 11-12

*iv. Allegro*, m. 1-2

**Example 3.9.** Glissandos Recalled from the First Movement

*i. Moderato, mm. 37-38*



*iv. Allegro, mm. 71-74*



**Example 3.10.** Imitation Recalled from the Second Movement,

*ii. Moderato, m. 50, Violin I and Viola*



*iv. Allegro, mm. 106-107, Violin I and II*

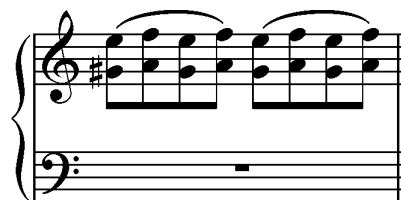


**Example 3.11.** Minor Second Duplets Recalled from the Third Movement

*iii. Allegro molto, m. 190*



*iv. Allegro, m. 119*



This celebratory finale ostensibly negates any sorrow of the prior movements. In examining the arc of the quartet, one notes how cheerful reflections on youth in the first movement gave way to more serious reflections in the following two. Because of its

quasi fugal form, the second movement resonates as a serious dialogue. The third movement sounds tempestuous, in comparison, because of its high speed and intense redundancy. However, in the fourth movement, by re-contextualizing musical tropes from previous movements, Shostakovich ends on a note of celebration. In his First String Quartet, Shostakovich seemingly only scratches at the surface of the great depth of emotions his later quartets convey. However, in his First Quartet, despite the unavoidable spotlight he endured following his Fifth Symphony, Shostakovich explores an intimate realm of music through playful dialogues and solemn reflections on youth.

## Chapter IV: String Quartet No. 8

In the half-century since its premiere in 1960, String Quartet No. 8 has been one of the most frequently programmed pieces of chamber music.<sup>84</sup> The popularity of the quartet only partially explains the extensive scholarship dedicated to it. More so than any other composition by Shostakovich, the quartet is self-referential. In public, Shostakovich dedicated this quartet, “To the memory of the victims of fascism and war.” In an interview two weeks prior to the quartet’s premiere, he expanded on this dedication, saying, “The terrors of the bombardment that the inhabitants of Dresden lived through, which we heard about in the words of the victims suggested the theme for the composition of the my Eighth quartet (...) I wrote the score of my new quartet in the space of a few days.”<sup>85</sup> The time Shostakovich spent in Dresden just prior to composing the quartet and its tragic character made this program logical. In private, however, Shostakovich dedicated the quartet to himself.

The same summer he composed his Eight Quartet, Shostakovich joined the communist party.<sup>86</sup> Two different tales explain the arbitrary timing of his invocation into the party. In one version, Shostakovich told Gilkman the invocation was a requisite for Shostakovich to assume the post of the head of the Union of Composers of the Russian Federation. However, friend and musicologist Lev Lebedinsky claims no such scheme existed and that actually, low-level party members obliged Shostakovich to sign the application while he was under the influence of alcohol. Regardless of which story is

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<sup>84</sup> Lesser, *Music for Silenced Voices*, 142.

<sup>85</sup> Quoted in Fay, *Shostakovich: A life*, 218.

<sup>86</sup> Fay, *Shostakovich: A life*, 216.

true, his invocation was the product of coercion, and both stories end with Shostakovich amidst mental meltdown.

Thus, when Shostakovich composed String Quartet No. 8, he was in a state of anguish. In a letter written in July of 1960, Shostakovich wrote, “I wrote this ideologically flawed quartet, which is of no use to anybody. I start thinking that if some day I die, nobody is likely to write a work in memory of me, so I had better write one myself. The title page could carry the dedication ‘To the memory of the composer of this quartet’ (...) When I got home, I tried a couple of times to play through, but always ended up in tears.”<sup>87</sup> The readings of this letter vary. In Lesser’s opinion, there is a “dourly playful, complicatedly self-mocking, Samuel Beckett-like tone” in the letter.<sup>88</sup> She cites “if some day I die” as evidence for such a reading. Though there is dark humor in the letter, Shostakovich undeniably faced great distress at this time in his life. Lebedinsky has insisted the quartet was a suicide note, claiming that he had to confiscate sleeping pills from Shostakovich and hand them to Shostakovich’s son Maxim.<sup>89</sup> Maxim has repetitively denied this story, but does not deny the anguish his father endured. He recalls his father weeping when he was forced to join the party, this instance being only the second time he witnessed his father crying, the first following the death of Shostakovich’s wife, Nina.<sup>90</sup>

In his monograph devoted to the Eighth Quartet, David Fanning argues, “when he came to compose the Eighth String Quartet Shostakovich was for a variety of personal

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<sup>87</sup> Lesser, *Music for Silenced Voices*, 150.

<sup>88</sup> Lesser, *Music for Silenced Voices*, 150.

<sup>89</sup> Lesser, *Music for Silenced Voices*, 148.

<sup>90</sup> Interestingly, just earlier that year, Shostakovich composed his seventh quartet in her memory. This testifies to the personal outlet the quartets provided Shostakovich. Lesser, *Music for Silenced Voices*, 147.

and cultural reasons in urgent need of redefining and reasserting himself as an artist with an independent voice.”<sup>91</sup> Persistent self-suggestion dominates the quartet through quotation, allusion, and the DSCH motive (Ex. 4.1), a personal signature.<sup>92</sup> In an interview with Lesser, Conductor Kurt Sanderling reaffirmed this understanding decades after his relationship with Shostakovich. When Lesser asked him if he believed the public dedication could be sincere, he laughed and responded, “Ridiculous! What would the quotes and allusions to his earlier works be doing in a quartet dedicated to the victims of fascism?(...) the quotations emphasize that all this is dealing with himself.”<sup>93</sup> He also distinguished musical monograms like that of Bach’s and Schumann’s from the musical monogram Shostakovich used. Sanderling claimed that unlike other composers who use monograms as mere signatures, Shostakovich uses the monogram to signify the work is “dealing with himself. The D-S-C-H is more important to him, has more content for him.”<sup>94</sup>

**Example 4.1 D-S-C-H Motive**



Despite the pervasive self-suggestion in the work, critics initially embraced the quartet within the anti-fascism framework Shostakovich provided. In an *Izvestiya* article titled ‘A Bitter Reminiscence,’ published just after the work’s premiere in Moscow in October 1960, critic Matias Sokolsky praised the work. First, he asserted the speed with

<sup>91</sup> Fanning, *Shostakovich: String Quartet No. 8*, 46.

<sup>92</sup> The notes D, E-flat, C, B in German musical notation are D, Es, C, H, pronounced "De-Es-Ce-Ha." These four notes correspond to the bolded letters in **D**mitri **S**hostakowitsch, the German transliteration of his name.

<sup>93</sup> Lesser, *Music for Silenced Voices*, 149.

<sup>94</sup> Lesser, *Music for Silenced Voices*, 149.



which Shostakovich composed the work was “because its concept evidently had long since matured and lived in the composer’s creative consciousness, in whose art the theme against Fascism and war has always been pre-eminent and general.” He wrote about the quartet’s “depth and passion of experience” and its “fiery hatred for those who are guilty of the death of millions and millions of wholly innocent people, an anxiety for the fate of the world.”<sup>95</sup> With a Soviet-approved message, the quartet received the stamp of approval that ensured its celebration and regular programming. Critic Nikolay Martīnov, in his *Sovetskaya kul’tura* article “The Voice of the Heart,” also celebrated the work and its “deep sincerity.”<sup>96</sup>

Modern critical reception varies. Ian MacDonald, the first Western scholar to connect the quartet with Shostakovich’s induction into the party, celebrated the work not just for its biographical intrigue, but also its inherent quality. Taruskin, who as Fanning notes “otherwise delights in stigmatizing”<sup>97</sup> the opinions of MacDonald, agrees the content of the work is related to the induction. However, he disagrees about the quality of the work: “What it shows is that the need to communicate urgently and with specificity in an atmosphere of threat did shrink Shostakovich’s creative options.”<sup>98</sup> Here, Taruskin claims the quotations and obsessive use of the D-S-C-H motive indicate a lack of creativity. Considering immense productivity as a composer, however, it is unlikely that he relied on self-references solely because he was low on creative options. In addition, although the quartet does employ a mass of self-suggestive material, the manner in which Shostakovich crafts the quartet is unique. Shostakovich thoughtfully weaves reflections

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<sup>95</sup> As quoted by Fanning, *Shostakovich: String Quartet No. 8*, 152.

<sup>96</sup> As quoted by Fanning, *Shostakovich: String Quartet No. 8*, 154.

<sup>97</sup> Fanning, *Shostakovich: String Quartet No. 8*, 21.

<sup>98</sup> As quoted by Fanning, *Shostakovich: String Quartet No. 8*, 21.

and intense personal expression into a quartet that relates private yet explicable and relatable sorrow. With the invaluable aid of David Fanning's extensive research on the quotations and allusions in the quartet, the following analysis will focus on the significance of self-expression and self-reflection in the String Quartet No. 8.

*Largo: i, v*

The first and final movements of the quartet affirm the cyclic nature of the work: the arrival at the fifth movement nearly sounds like the return to the first. The movements' similarity extends beyond the character suggested by the soft dynamics and *Largo* tempo. Both movements utilize the same material. Further, both the first and fifth movements toy with expectation. The movements initially sound fugal but both dissolve into amorphousness. Amorphous in form but self-suggestive in content, they provide the self-asserting and cyclic framework for the Quartet as whole. The first and final movements of the Eighth Quartet serve as musical bookends.

This quartet marks only the second time Shostakovich begins with an entirely slow movement.<sup>99</sup> The first time was the *Largo* opening movement of his Sixth Symphony. The opening presents a fugal treatment of the DSCH motive. However, the most proximate classical form of the work is a Rondo, though the recurrences of the A refrain (see Table 4.1) sound unconvincing. The first quotation of the quartet appears in the opening, a reiteration of the opening from his First Symphony, identified by Fanning (Ex. 4.2)<sup>100</sup>. Quoting this symphonic first movement in a decelerated tempo allows

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<sup>99</sup> Fanning, *Shostakovich: String Quartet No. 8*, 49.

<sup>100</sup> Musical examples in this chapter are adapted from Fanning's monograph on the String Quartet No. 8.

Shostakovich to reveal the intimacy of the instrumental dialogue in the string quartet. The transfer of melodic line from the second violin to the first in mm. 18-19 is nearly seamless. In contrast to the symphonic setting of this passage, it resonates more as an individual's personal expression. Additionally, by beginning the quartet with a quotation from his First Symphony, Shostakovich suggests the quartet may chronologically survey his life and works.

**Table 4.1:** *i. Largo* Overview

A	B	A'	C	A''	B'	A'''
mm. 1-27	mm. 28-45	mm. 46-49	mm. 50-78	mm. 79-86	mm. 87-103	mm. 104-126
c	C	c	c, f	c	c, f#, g#	c

**Example 4.2** Allusion to Symphony No. 1 in *i. Largo*

*i. Largo*, mm. 16-23

Symphony No. 1, first movement, opening

Section B alludes to the second subject of the first movement in Tchaikovsky's Sixth Symphony *Pathétique*, an allusion Shostakovich himself identified in a letter to

Gilkman (Ex. 4.3).<sup>101</sup> Although the allusion is not obvious when looking at the score, the two passages are aurally similar. However, in comparison to Tchaikovsky's treatment of the subject, Shostakovich's treatment exposes the violin's line with greater clarity. Pedal points on c in the other three voices traverse the entire section and support the violin without overpowering. Tchaikovsky died just nine days after the premiere of his *Pathétique Symphony*. In choosing to quote this symphony, perhaps Shostakovich suggests the passage reflects on mortality and how his own art could memorialize him.

**Example 4.3** Allusion to Tchaikovsky's *Pathétique Symphony* in *i. Largo*

*i. Largo*, mm. 28-42



*Pathétique Symphony*, first movement, second subject



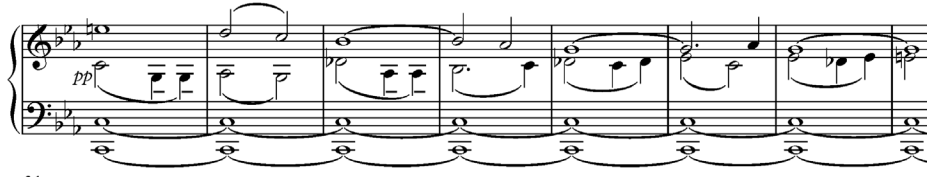
Section C reveals another motive that recurs in the movement. Interestingly, as Fanning notes, both the section as a whole but also, specifically, this prominent motive alludes to Shostakovich's Fifth Symphony (Ex. 4.4). Drawing from the first movement of his Fifth Symphony, Shostakovich alludes to the symphony that re-established his security as an artist in the Soviet Union. However, the context of the allusion is not optimistic. Rather, the numerous statements of the motive convey a sense of injurious obsession. The A section that links C and B' is brief, only eight bars in length. First, it

<sup>101</sup> Fanning, *Shostakovich: String Quartet No. 8*, 145.

(momentarily) re-establishes the home-key C minor. Further, its unison statement of the DSCH motive derivatives in all four voices (mm. 79-82) firmly recalls the opening material.

**Example 4.4** Allusion to Fifth Symphony in *i. Largo*

*i.*, *Largo*, mm. 55-62



Fifth Symphony, first movement, first subject



Recurring motive



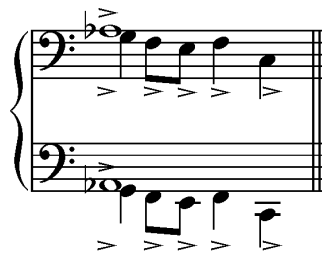
Beginning with the truncated A refrain at mm. 79-86, the movement seems to unravel. The B' section is the least harmonically stable portion of the movement, sliding between A minor and F-sharp minor, until arriving at the final recurrence of the A section at m. 104. The final recurrence still quotes his First Symphony, but also incorporates the motive from section C. Thus, in the final A section, Shostakovich combines the iteration of his personal monogram with allusions to two of his symphonies. Thus, he intertwines the artist with his art. In doing so, Shostakovich redefines the material not just in reference to their original contexts, but also their first appearances in this movement. The final statement of the Fifth Symphony motive ends with a prolonged G#, the enharmonic spelling of A b of the recurring motive (Ex. 4.4). This enables the *attacca* transition to the second movement, which is in the key of G-sharp minor.

Like the first movement, the final movement begins in a fugal-like form. However, Shostakovich maintains a quasi fugue form rather than moving to a form akin to the first movement's pseudo-rondo. The thematic material present in the first movement pervades the final: the DSCH reiterated even more numerous, the Fifth symphony allusion peppering the movement, and the First Symphony quotation stated clearly. Interestingly, an element absent in the first movement that permeates the final is an allusion to a figure that appears in *The Lady MacBeth of Mtsenk District* associated with sleeplessness, as identified by Fanning (Ex. 4.5).<sup>102</sup> Shostakovich seamlessly incorporates the allusion into the countersubject. By reusing the material from *Lady MacBeth* as the countersubject to the subject based on his personal monogram, perhaps Shostakovich conveys the conflicts he personally faced because of his craft. It is as if Shostakovich recreated the intense conflict that ensued following his opera *Lady MacBeth* by having his personal monogram and an allusion to the opera conflicting as subject and countersubject.

**Example 4.5** Allusion to Lady MacBeth in *v. Largo*



*The Lady MacBeth of Mtsensk District*, opening of Act 4,



<sup>102</sup> Fanning, *Shostakovich: String Quartet No. 8*, 124.

ii. *Allegro molto*

The second movement, furious in motion and brutal in dynamics, retroactively characterizes the first movement as an introduction. In a loose sonata form (Table 4.2), the movement contrasts the introductory movement in tenacity and strength. As the movement builds in intensity, the DSCH motive marks points of renewal. When the motive appears, an accompanying increase in dynamics and energy also ensues. Each peak in energy corresponds to a new section of the quartet. The effect is cumulative. Instead of the movement exhausting itself, it renews and grows in strength each time the DSCH motive appears.

**Table 4.2:** *ii. Allegro molto*

Exposition			Development	Recapitulation		
A	Trans.	B	Primarily DSCH	A'	Trans.	B'
mm. 1-125	mm. 76-125	mm. 126-155	mm. 156-232	mm. 233-288	mm. 289-323	mm. 334-349
g#, a	f#	c	Unstable	g#	Unstable	c, c#

The opening phrase sets the stage for the rest of the movement. The jarring *sforzando* chords produce a percussive assault that, along with the speed, redefines the dactylic motif from the first movement. These erratic, percussive jolts recall similar content from his Eighth Symphony (Ex. 4.6). Not only does this allusion continue the chronological survey of his works, it also reflects the conflicts Shostakovich faced as a Soviet composer. The tepid reception of Shostakovich's Eight Symphony eventually evolved into an eight-year ban. In explaining the cold reception, Fay quotes Soviet critic N.A. Timofeyev: "What is the reason for the somewhat chilly reception of Shostakovich Eighth Symphony? I think it is because these tremendous experiences, these suffering brought about by evil are not overcome, not vanquished. Instead they are, as it were,

replaced by a passacaglia and a pastorale.”<sup>103</sup> Thus, by quoting this symphony, Shostakovich alludes to another instance in his career when his work failed to align with the Soviet Agenda and negative repercussions ensued.

**Example 4.6** Allusion to the Eighth Symphony in *ii. Allegro Molto*

*ii. Allegro molto, mm. 1-4*

Eighth Symphony, third movement, opening

Harmonically, section A spends most of its time in G-sharp minor. However, an emphasis on A minor destabilizes the harmony. According to Fanning, this harmonic gesture was a favorite of Shostakovich’s and often emblematic of his appreciation and integration of Jewish folk music traditions.<sup>104</sup> In section A, and throughout the movement, the appearance of DSCH marks a point of renewal. Its first occurrence in m. 32 precedes a change in texture as well as change in key. Beginning at m. 95, the motive only sporadically reappears, but eventually the motive transforms into an ostinato pattern from mm. 118-125. The increased use of the monogram correlates with an increase in

<sup>103</sup> As quoted by Fay, *Shostakovich: A life*, 138.

<sup>104</sup> Fanning, *Shostakovich: String Quartet No. 8*, 75.



intensity and energy, culminating in the arrival at B. Interestingly, Fanning notes here, this transition recalls Shostakovich's Seventh Quartet because of the similar aural quality of the sporadic chords, accented chords (Ex. 4.7). Shostakovich composed his Seventh Quartet just earlier that year and dedicated the work to the memory of his wife. The incorporation of an allusion to the Seventh Quartet in transition material parallels Shostakovich's recent struggles with change, familial and political.

**Example 4.7** Allusion to Quartet No. 7 in *ii. Allegro Molto*

*ii. Allegro molto*, mm. 114-115

Quartet No. 7, third movement

The entrance of section B, marked *fff* and in the key of C minor is the arrival point of the increasing intensity. In section B, Shostakovich references the finale of his Piano Trio No. 2 (Ex., 4.8).<sup>105</sup> Shostakovich dedicated his 1944 trio to the death of his close friend, Ivan Sollersinsky. His consecutive references to chamber works memorializing the most significant people in his life attests to the personal expression the Eighth Quartet. Interestingly, though contrasting in sonic character, this section mimics the structure of

<sup>105</sup> Fanning, *Shostakovich: String Quartet No. 8*, 80.

the B section from the first movement in that the repetition of the arpeggiated C minor chord in the lower two voices functions as a pedal on c.

**Example 4.8** Allusion to Piano Trio No. 2 in *ii. Allegro molto*

*ii. Allegro molto*, mm. 126-129

The musical score for Example 4.8 is a piano trio arrangement of the second theme from the finale of Piano Trio No. 2. It is in C minor, 3/4 time, and consists of four measures. The upper voice (treble clef) features a melodic line with triplets, marked *fff* *molto espress.*. The lower two voices (bass clef) play a 'pedal' of arpeggiated C minor chords, marked *ff* *fff* *molto espress.*. The key signature has two flats, and the time signature is 3/4.

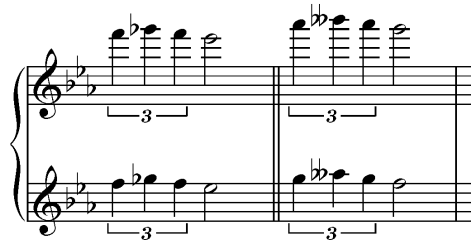
Piano Trio No. 2, finale, second theme

The musical score for Piano Trio No. 2, finale, second theme is in C major, 3/4 time, and consists of four measures. The upper voice (treble clef) features a melodic line with triplets, marked *fff* *molto espress.*. The lower two voices (bass clef) play a 'pedal' of arpeggiated C major chords, marked *ff* *fff* *molto espress.*. The key signature has two sharps, and the time signature is 3/4.

The development initially recalls material from A, but chromatically devolves into a harmonically unstable obsession with the DSCH motif. Amidst arguably the most turbulent passage in the entirety of the quartet, Shostakovich dwells on his monogram. Perhaps, the fury displayed in this section depicts the fury Shostakovich internalized over his party entrance. Also in the development, Shostakovich introduces a menacing four-note figure (Ex. 4.9). The high register and repetition of the figure characterize the development as even more frantic than the exposition. However, the arrival at the recapitulation does not relieve listeners. The A' section, too, incorporates this figure. By

intertwining material from the development and the recapitulation, Shostakovich denies listeners the expected relief of the recapitulation. Instead, he conveys the inescapability of his own personal torment since his invocation by reiterating the menacing triplet figure. Further, this blending of thematic material underlines the cyclical construction of the quartet.

**Example 4.9** Recurring triplet figure in *ii. Allegro molto*, m. 182 and m. 311, violins I and II



The end of the movement confirms its erratic character. Linear movement to C-sharp minor recalls the half-step harmonic relationship at the beginning of the movement between G-sharp minor and A minor. The emphasis on C-sharp minor suggests the final theme either will return to the key in which the movement began, or prepare for the next movement's harmony. However, the modulation serves neither purpose. The pattern abruptly ends at the height of a crescendo. After a bar of rest with a fermata, the third movement begins in the key of G minor, a tritone away from the previous harmony. While a sense of incompleteness may be expected considering the *attaca* style, the movement's ending extends beyond inconclusive. It is disjoint. The lack of a cadence followed by the only bar of rest in the entire movement suits the erratic temperament of the movement.

*iii. Allegretto*

The third movement is a Scherzo in the key of G minor. The sixteen-bar introduction, almost exclusively in the first violin, foreshadows the barren texture of the third movement. The waltz bass line created by the dialogue between the cello and viola is often so quiet it is nearly undetectable. The third movement is not flagrant or abrasive like the second. Instead, the movement draws the listener in, encouraging a closer listening.

**Table 4.3:** *iii. Allegretto*

Scherzo			Trio 1	Trans.	Scherzo			Trio 1
A	B	A	mm.	mm. 151-	A	B	A	mm.
mm.	mm.	mm.102-	117-150	189	mm.	mm.	mm.	260-
1-66	67- 101	116			190- 225	226- 243	244- 259	301

Though the movement opens with a *fff* marking, the Scherzo that follows the introduction is decidedly subtle. Throughout the movement, the DSCH motif reappears slightly altered to DDSCH, the additional D now accounting for Dmitriyevich in his full name, Dmitrii Dmitrievich Shostakovich (Ex. 4.10). Section A of Scherzo 1 remains firmly in g minor with an emphasis on the flat super-tonic, recalling the melody of the A section in the second movement. Likewise, in the B section of Scherzo 1, in the key of C minor, D-flat is equally emphasized. Here, again, the cyclical nature of the quartet surfaces. Additionally, as Fanning indicated, the Scherzo’s main theme alludes to Saint-Saën’s *Danse macabre* (Ex. 4.11). By alluding to this work, Shostakovich seemingly satirizes his own depressive state of aguish. In his frantic letter to Gilkman in the summer of 1960, Shostakovich referred to the quartet as a “pseudo-tragedy” but, as mentioned earlier, he also confessed he could not get through the work without breaking down into

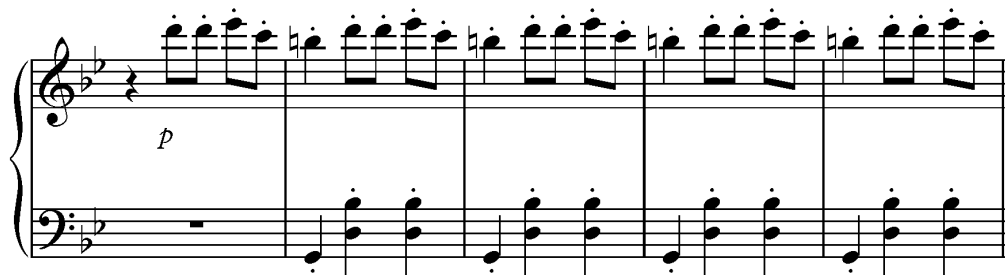
tears.<sup>106</sup> Thus, Shostakovich felt conflicted, seemingly both distressed and mocking his own distress. In an essay on Gogol’s dark satires on society, Pushkin coined the idea “laughter through tears.” Perhaps, elements of Shostakovich’s Eighth String Quartet channel this Russian literary style.

**Example 4.10** D-D-S-C-H Motive, *iii. Allegretto*, mm. 1-2

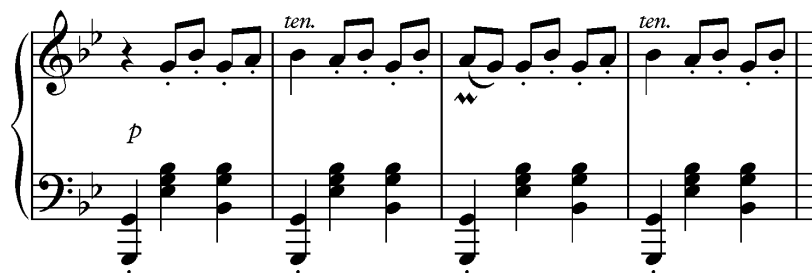


**Example 4.11** Allusion to Saint-Saën’s *Danse macabre* in *iii. Allegretto*

*iii. Allegretto*, mm. 20-24



*Danse macabre* main theme



The subsequent trio has a foreboding quality. Statements of the original DSCH motif pepper the trio, their appearance without accompaniment. Here, Fanning identifies another self-reference: mm. 140-146 leading up to the transition material at m. 152

<sup>106</sup> Fanning, *Shostakovich: String Quartet No. 8*, 146.

quotes the opening of Shostakovich's First Cello Concerto (Ex. 4.12).<sup>107</sup> Written for longtime friend Rostropovich, the First Cello Concerto enjoyed tremendous international critical reception after its 1959 premiere. Interestingly, as biographer Fay notes, few celebratory critics noticed the source of the motive that dominates the concerto's first movement: a quotation of "Procession to Execution" from in 1948 film *The Young Guard*.<sup>108</sup> Thus, in this very dark quartet, such an allusion is fitting.

**Example 4.12** Allusion to Cello Concerto No. 1 in *iii. Allegretto*

*iii. Allegretto*, mm. 140-146

Cello Concerto No. 1, first movement, opening

*iv. Largo*

Imposing a structure onto the fourth movement seems arbitrary. Fanning has proposed a series of what he referred to as "outbursts" and ariosos, the outbursts separating different quotations. As the majority of this movement is self-referential material or allusions to others works, I have reconstructed an outline of the movement

<sup>107</sup> Fanning, *Shostakovich: String Quartet No. 8*, 96.

<sup>108</sup> Fay, *Shostakovich: A life*, 213.

similar Fanning's (Table 4.4).<sup>109</sup> My analysis will relay the significance of the quotations and allusions he identified.

**Table 4.4:** Reconstruction of Fanning's Fourth Movement Overview

Outburst	Arioso 1	Outburst	Arioso 2	Transition	Arioso 3	Outburst
mm. 1-27	mm. 28-61	mm. 62-74	mm. 75-103	mm. 104-132	mm. 133-160	mm. 161-187
<i>The Young Guard</i>	<i>Lady Macbeth</i>	<i>The Young Guard</i>	Revolutionary Song	Eleventh Symphony	<i>Lady Macbeth</i>	<i>The Young Guard</i>

Interestingly, critics and audiences have historically reduced these outbursts to onomatopoeias that confirmed Shostakovich's public dedication to the victims of fascism: bombs dropping.<sup>110</sup> Even after his letter to Gilkman surfaced, the onomatopoeic understanding continued, only tailored to the new program: vicious party members' knocks on Shostakovich's door. However, as Fanning has noted, these interpretations do not acknowledge the source of this material: Shostakovich's 1948 film score to *The Young Guard* (Ex. 4.13). The original motif served as the basis for the movement known as 'Death of the Heroes.'<sup>111</sup> The allusion is in triple octaves, which emphasizes its significance. Interestingly, the reference to 'Death of the Heroes' compliments his public dedication to victims of fascism. However, at the end of the allusion, Shostakovich subtly incorporates his personal motif as a transition to the arioso using the final note of the transposed signature tied into the opening bar of the arioso. By signing his name at the end of the allusion, it is as if Shostakovich identifies himself as a fallen hero.

<sup>109</sup> Fanning, *Shostakovich: String Quartet No. 8*, 104.

<sup>110</sup> Fanning, *Shostakovich: String Quartet No. 8*, 105.

<sup>111</sup> Fanning, *Shostakovich: String Quartet No. 8*, 108.

**Example 4.13** Allusion to *The Young Guard*, “Death of the Heroes”

*iv. Largo*, mm. 62-66 (outburst 2)

Musical score for Example 4.13, left side. It shows a piano accompaniment in D major, 4/4 time. The right hand has a melodic line of quarter notes with a slur and a *pp sempre* dynamic. The left hand has a bass line with a *pp cresc.* dynamic, followed by a *ff* fortissimo section with chords marked with asterisks and accents.

“Death of the Heroes,” opening

Musical score for Example 4.13, right side. It shows the opening of “Death of the Heroes” in D minor, 3/4 time. The right hand has a melodic line of quarter notes with a *p* dynamic. The left hand has a bass line with a *p* dynamic, featuring a half note followed by quarter notes.

The allusion in the first arioso comes from an interlude in his opera *Lady MacBeth* following the scene in which Katerina murders her father (Ex. 4.14). The regime attacked the opera for its vulgarity, among other sins. By alluding to such a violent scene during a moment of relative tenderness in the quartet, Shostakovich redefines the allusion’s meaning. The allusion is very subtle, however. The motion is similar, but not exact. The similarity can be better heard, than seen in the scores. The re-contextualization seemingly reflects on why the regime tormented Shostakovich over the opera. Interestingly, in the following arioso, Shostakovich quotes the revolutionary song *Zamuchen tyazholoy nevoeley*, meaning *Tormented by Harsh Captivity* (Ex. 4.15). This arioso, sandwiched between two ariosos that allude to *Lady MacBeth*, suggests that as a member of the communist party, Shostakovich felt imprisoned by his persecutors, his torment exemplified by the *Lady MacBeth* controversy.

Katerina’s song from Act IV of *Lady Macbeth* (Ex. 4.17). This song corresponds to Katerina greeting Sergey while she is still ignorant of his waning interest in her. Again, Shostakovich’s re-contextualization of material for which the regime so severely penalized him underlines the absurdity of the ridicule while also solemnly reflecting on



**Example 4.14** Allusion to *Lady Macbeth of Mtsensk District* in *iv. Largo*, arioso 1

*iv. Largo*, mm. 28-43

*Lady Macbeth of Mtsensk District*, Interlude between scenes 4 and 5

**Example 4.15** Allusion to Revolutionary song, *Zamuchen tyaholoy nevoley* in *iv. Largo*

*iv. Largo*, mm. 75-104, arioso 2

*Zamuchen tyaholoy nevoley* melody

Za - mu-chem tya-zho loy-ne - vo - ley, ty slav-no-yu smer-t'yu po chil... vbor'

be za na-rod-no-ye de\_\_\_ lo\_\_\_ ty go-lo-vu chest no-slo zhil

[Tormented by harsh captivity, You died a glorious death, In the struggle for the people's cause, You laid down your life with honor]

the negative repercussions he endured. Further, Shostakovich quotes an instance of dramatic irony in the opera. When Katerina sings, “At last! I have not seen you all day!” she does not know Sergey is losing interest, but the audience does. However, in the context of the quartet, this instance assumes a darker irony. It is as if Shostakovich sarcastically greets his induction into the communist party while feeling as though his life is ending because of it.

**Example 4.16** Allusion to Symphony No. 11 in *iv. Largo*

*iv. Largo*, mm. 117-131, transition



Symphony No. 11, third movement



The final outburst ends in two statements of the DSCH motifs. The final B tied to the starting note of the fifth movement seamlessly connects the two movements. When the fifth movement begins, it is so similar to the first that it sounds as if the quartet has begun all over again. This intense cyclical character affords the quartet a quality of captivity. The oppressive redundancy of the monogram motive and the work’s overwhelmingly negative essence fashions a quartet that represents the turmoil Shostakovich bore following his party entry. Thus, in a testament to the string quartet’s capacity for greater personal expression, Shostakovich furiously composed his Eighth

String Quartet in just three days to create an aural world that paralleled his internal anguish.

**Example 4.17** Allusion to *The Lady Macbeth of Mtsensk District* in *iv. Largo*, arioso 3

*iv. Largo*, mm. 133-159, arioso 3  
*p dolce*

The image shows two systems of piano accompaniment for a piece in 3/4 time, marked *p dolce*. The first system includes dynamic markings *[pp]* in both the treble and bass staves. The music features a steady eighth-note bass line and a more complex, flowing treble line with many ties and slurs.

*The Lady Macbeth of Mtsensk District*, Act 4

The image shows a vocal line with Russian lyrics and piano accompaniment. The key signature has three sharps (F#, C#, G#) and the time signature is 3/4. The lyrics are: "Se-ryo - zha, kho-ro-shiy moy! Na-ko-nets - to! Ved' tse-liy den' sto-boy ne vi - de-las Se - ryo - zha". The piano accompaniment consists of a steady eighth-note bass line and a treble line with chords and some melodic fragments.

[Seryozha, my dearest! At last! I have not seen you all day, Seryozha]

## Chapter V: String Quartet No. 15

In the spring of 1974, Shostakovich knew his death was near. Suffering from lung cancer and debilitating pain in his hands related to an unknown neurological disorder, Shostakovich endured a rapid decline in health. When Mstislav Rostropovich, a life-long friend and fellow composer, received permission to emigrate with his family, Shostakovich wept and lamented, “In whose hands are you leaving me to die?”<sup>112</sup> The same spring, Shostakovich composed his final quartet, String Quartet No. 15 in E-flat minor.

Late in his life, Shostakovich faced unique challenges as a Soviet artist in a changing socio-political climate. Shostakovich, a witness, victim, and survivor of Stalinist-era censorship and terror, differed from the rising generation of Soviet artists. Alien to their blatant protests and bold experimentation, Shostakovich appeared outdated, and, in the worst cases, in support of Brezhnev’s ideals. Since his 1960 party invocation, Shostakovich’s signature increasingly appeared on government documents, deepening the division between him and the new generation of artists. For example, *Pravda* published a letter, “He Disgraces the Calling of Citizen” denouncing Soviet nuclear physicist Andrey Sakharov for “anti-Soviet” comment. Among the party signatures at the end of the letter was Shostakovich’s, marking Shostakovich not only as a non-resistor but a persecutor. In response, Lydia Chukovskaya distributed a samizdat<sup>113</sup> letter in which she wrote, “Shostakovich’s signature on the protest of musicians against Sakharov demonstrates

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<sup>112</sup> Lesser, *Music for Silenced Voices*, 259.

<sup>113</sup> A samizdat letter refers to an open letter “distributed through samizdat,” a system for publishing and disseminating of forbidden or subversive literature in the Soviet Union. Fay, *Shostakovich: A life*, 278.

irrefutably that the Pushkinian question has been resolved forever: genius and villainy are compatible.”<sup>114</sup> Humiliation of this vein continued. At a 1973 Composer’s Union performance, actor Yuri Lyubimov refused to shake Shostakovich’s hand because of the signature.<sup>115</sup> Shostakovich identified with his reputation. He saw himself in the fictional Dr. Ragin in Chekhov’s “Ward No. 6,” claiming, “it seems I am reading memoirs about myself.”<sup>116</sup> Described by Fay as “a non-resister to evil by constitution and conviction,” Dr. Ragin reveals the villainous qualities Shostakovich now saw in himself. In reference to the Sakharov letter, Shostakovich told his physician, “I won’t forgive myself for it until the grave.”<sup>117</sup>

Compounded with his social demise, Shostakovich’s physical deterioration caused tremendous pain. The neurological disorder and cancer confirmed in Shostakovich the little time he had left. When a member of the Beethoven Quartet passed away just an hour after rehearsal of String Quartet No. 15,<sup>118</sup> Shostakovich insisted another group premiere the quartet, as he might not still be around by the time the Beethoven Quartet could replace their violinist. Shostakovich’s Fifteenth Quartet, with six continuous, *Adagio* movements titled “Elegy,” “Serenade,” “Intermezzo,” “Nocturne,” “Funeral March,” and “Epilogue,” lacks a dedication, the first since his Sixth. However, with or without dedication, the quartet explicitly communicates a dialogue about death. Shostakovich, acutely aware of his hasty deterioration, composed

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<sup>114</sup> Fay, *Shostakovich: A life*, 278.

<sup>115</sup> Lesser, *Music for Silenced Voices*, 256.

<sup>116</sup> Fay, *Shostakovich: A life*, 279.

<sup>117</sup> Fay, *Shostakovich: A life*, 278.

<sup>118</sup> Lesser, *Music for Silenced Voices*, 256.

this quartet as an abstract articulation of the morbidity, solitude, and grief he endured at the end of his life.

### *Elegy*

The opening movement, the longest of the six, is remarkably, if not painfully, repetitive. During rehearsal with the Beethoven Quartet, Shostakovich told the Beethoven Quartet, “Play it so that flies drop dead mid-air, and the audience starts leaving the hall from sheer boredom.”<sup>119</sup> The *Elegy*, over twelve minutes long in many performances, derives almost all of its melodic and rhythmic material from the opening seven bars of music (Ex. 5.1). The movement is loosely fugal in that the exposition begins with statements of a subject. The most prominent feature of the movement is the haunting motive that permeates the entire movement. The motive alternates between two forms: dactylic and anapestic (see below). It is so prevalent that one expects nearly all sustained notes to give way to the motive (as they often do).

#### **Example 5.1** *Elegy* mm. 1-6

Adagio ♩ = 80

*p*

Dactylic Anapestic

The exposition, the opening fifty-two bars, roots the movement firmly in the key of E-flat minor. The relentless reiterations and fragmentations of the opening theme foreshadow not just the content of the first movement, but also the character of the

<sup>119</sup> Lesser, *Music for Silenced Voices*, 262.

quartet as a whole. The redundancy of this movement suggests both the inescapability of death and the solitude Shostakovich faced in his last years. In a time of pain, both physical and emotional, the quartet does not deny the harsh reality of a painful end. Instead, its redundancy lends the quartet a meditative quality. However, there are moments of sweetness. For instance, the C-major middle section, mm. 51-96, sounds as though Shostakovich briefly and affectionately escapes to a fond memory. Shostakovich achieves a beautiful and subtle modulation to C major. First, a violin solo arrives at C natural via chromatic motion and, then, iterations of the main motive on C-natural confirm the modulation. (Ex. 5.2). A rising arpeggio figure, first appearing in m. 54, is essentially the only new material used in the section and bolsters the section's hopeful character. Rather than the fixed, unrelenting quality of the main motive, this rising figure attains upward momentum that suggests fleeting moments of positivity.

**Example 5.2** Modulation to C major, *Elegy*, mm. 45-52



After six measures of reprieve in C major (mm. 53-58), the sustained C in the second violin, viola, and cello surrenders to the dactylic motive from the exposition. The motive reminds the listener that this optimistic digression is nothing more than, a parenthetical positivity amidst despair. Following the statement of this motive, the C major section fails to re-establish its once hopeful character. Instead, fragments of the opening gradually re-establish dominancy over the movement. Measures 85-91 locally tonicize E

minor by incorporating F-sharps in viola and spelling E minor chords in the cello. In mm. 91-96, the reiteration of its leading tone, D #, or the enharmonic equivalent of E b, allows modulation back to the home key. The firm return to the home key and use of opening material affirms the cyclical nature of quartet.

The remainder of the movement consists almost entirely of reiterations of the subject. In mm. 101-102 and again in mm. 105-106, a slight variation from the original motive appears (Example 5.3). Though the variation is seemingly insignificant, it is aurally obtrusive. The manner in which it stands out speaks to the deeply meditative quality of the movement. Even the slightest variation of content sounds disruptive. Further, variants of the rising figure introduced in the C-major section pepper the final segment of the *Elegy* (Ex. 5.4). The once optimistic gesture, now suffocated by the relentless repetition of the opening motive, suggests forced resignation to death. Further, by recycling a motive from the middle section, Shostakovich retroactively muddles the distinction between the optimistic moments in the quartet and its otherwise solemn character.

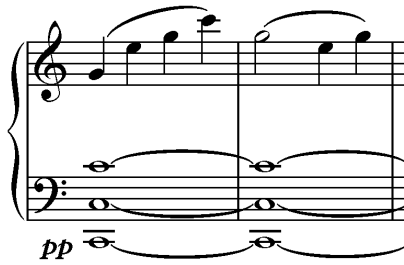
**Example 5.3** Variation of main motive in *Elegy*

*Elegy*, mm. 101-102  
 tenuto



**Example 5.4** Recurring rising figure in *Elegy*

*Elegy*, mm. 54-55



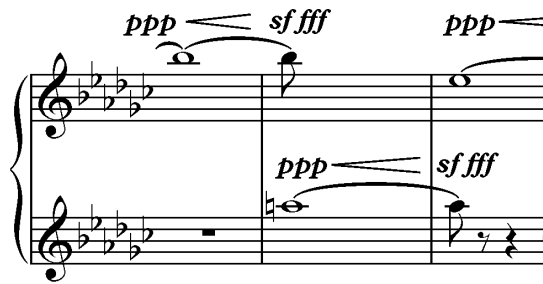
*Elegy*, mm. 157-158, mm. 177-179



*Serenade*

The *Serenade*, beginning on the B-flat sustained from the previous movement, contrasts the first movement in substance and character. In contrast to the firmly tonal *Elegy*, *Serenade* adheres closer to an atonal twelve-tone construction. The opening gesture (Ex. 5.5) traverses all twelve tones, establishing a radical departure from the strict tonality of the first movement. This technical divergence supports the emotive divergence: unlike the thoughtful meditation of the first movement, the second movement reflects the anxious thoughts racing through the mind of a man approaching death. The movement confesses fear and upset in its sudden dynamic shifts and atonality.

**Example 5.5** *Serenade* opening figure, mm. 1-3



Throughout the movement, abrasive dynamics shape the distressed character of the movement. In the introduction, the repetition of *ppp* swelling to *sf fff* elicits anxiety. The repetition of this figure nearly numbs the listener to its effects. However, just as the listener learns to negotiate the discomfort caused by the opening idea, *fortissimo* pizzicato chords jolt the listener. This dark refrain appears again at mm. 19-27 and mm. 90-101. The multiple appearances of these chords underline how the movement, despite its constant motion, only spins in place. Unlike the first movement, the redundancy in this movement is antithetical to meditative. Instead, it is abrasive with its sudden change in texture and dynamics. The impossibility of escaping the discomfort caused by the movement parallels the inability to negotiate with death.

The texture of the piece is also a source of anxiety. For example, the cello line between the first and second statements of the morbid chorus in *fortissimo* is uncomfortably barren (Ex. 5.6). Not only is the line exposed as a solo, the line itself consists of discontinuous side-by-side eighth notes. The eighth notes recall a disfigured variant of the motive most prevalent in the first movement. By marring the first movement's motive, Shostakovich redefines its meaning. While the motive was once emblematic of resignation to death and meditation at the end of one's life, the motive's barren and disconnected treatment in the second movement suggests disquiet.

**Example 5.6** *Serenade* first cello solo, mm. 14-18



Similar material appears after the second refrain, but evolves into the bass line for the “true” *Serenade* (mm. 37-88) with the melody carried by the first violin. The soft, staccato eighth note accompaniment constructed by the cello, viola, and second violin supports the eerie melody in the first violin. Although the accompaniment mimics the sonic quality of a lute, a historically conventional accompaniment of a serenade, the atonal melody in the violin detracts from the serenade character. Instead, the eight-measure melody in the violin serves as the basis for much of the content in the remainder of the movement thus affirming the immobility of the quartet (Ex. 5.7). By peppering the remainder of the movement with this content, Shostakovich fashions a movement of recycled material without suggesting a fugal structure. Thus, the repetitions seemingly function as an emotive tool rather than a structural device. Ultimately, the movement sounds as if it is going to begin again. A cello solo recalling the opening solo follows the final statement of *fortissimo* chords at m. 121. However, the solo never resolves. Instead, the final A-flat ties to the first measure of the *Intermezzo*.

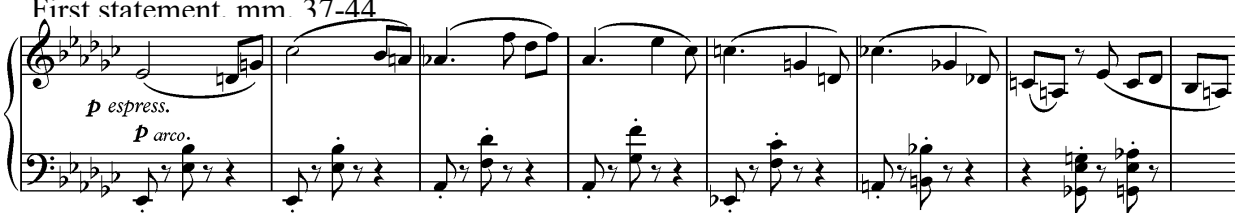
*Intermezzo*

As suggested by the title, the third movement serves as little more than a bridge between the second and fourth movements. Unlike the five other substantial movements, the *Intermezzo* could not stand alone. Not two minutes in length, the *Intermezzo* disguises its tempo marking, identical to that of the two prior movements, through its cadenza-like


material in the first violin. The *Intermezzo* links the second and fourth movements by interspersing material from both movements amidst the cadenza-like material. Fortissimo chords recalling those of the second movement interrupt the cadenza at m. 7 and mark its end at m. 14. However, the chords drop in dynamic level. The gentle, *piano* iteration of these chords in m. 16 commences the transition to the *Nocturne*. Solo melodic material moving from instrument to instrument prepares the listeners for the relatively peaceful movement to come.

**Example 5.7** Recycling of melodic content in *Serenade*

First statement mm. 37-44




Fragments: mm. 48-50



mm. 77-78



Complete re-statement, mm. 108-114



*Nocturne*

The fourth movement, as the title suggests, recalls the nocturnes of the nineteenth century, both in its texture and its atmosphere. Warmth characterizes this movement. Unlike the painful repetitiveness of the first movement or the tense barren soundscape of the second, the clarity of the melody and its continuous support from the arpeggiated

chords in the cello and second violin lends the movement a tender quality lacking in the movements prior. However, amidst the tenderness, there is eeriness to the movement as well, a function both of its place within the quartet dealing with death and its unstable harmony.

In the opening theme, the clear accompaniment provided by arpeggiated chords suggests a character akin to that of a Chopin piano nocturne. Like many of the Chopin nocturnes, this movement combines solemnity with tenderness. Loosely in the key of E-flat minor, the opening theme consists of arpeggios in contrary motion in the second violin and the cello. Their motion, rather than creating a sense of momentum, confirms the immobility of the quartet. Their constant motion suggests not advancement but, instead, endless concentric circles. The harmony confirms this stasis. The arpeggios explore few harmonies over the twenty-one-measure opening theme, primarily reiterating the tonic, flat supertonic, and leading tone. However, unlike past movements, the stillness of the opening theme lends the movement a sense of warmth, not resignation or anxiety as in the first and second movements, respectively.

In the middle section (mm. 21-48), the warmth established in the opening section couples with a glow of eeriness—an eeriness that, according to Lesser, may represent “a Leningrad summer twilight.”<sup>120</sup> In this section, allusions to the *Elegy* surface. In m. 27, the second violin mentions a fragment from the first movement (Ex. 5.8). Again, in mm. 34-38, the violin plays a melody that alludes to the main motive from the first movement (Ex. 5.9). By referencing material from the opening movement, Shostakovich suggests moments of solemn meditation during one of his final nights in the “Leningrad summer

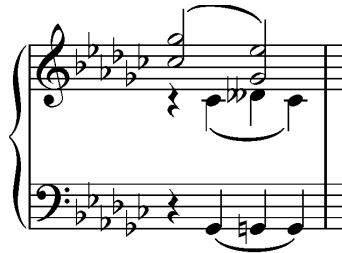
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<sup>120</sup> Lesser, *Music for Silenced Voices*, 265.

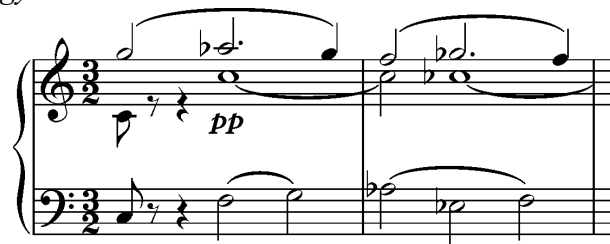
twilight.” However, unlike the motive’s original context marked by belabored recurrence, the idea sounds like gentle echoes. This different treatment of the motive characterizes the *Nocturne* as more peaceful.

**Example 5.8** Allusion minor second motion from *Elegy*

*Nocturne* m. 27



*Elegy* mm. 62-63

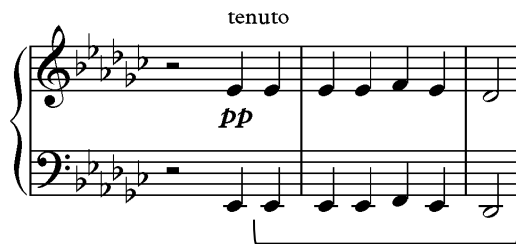


**Example 5.9** Allusion varied main motive from *Elegy*

*Nocturne* m. 34-38



*Elegy* mm. 101-102



Measures 41-47 constitute the climax of the movement (Ex. 5.10). Although this phrase is not dynamically climatic, there is a sense that the movement exists to frame this six-bar passage. The only phrase lacking arpeggios, it sounds as if it is on a musical pedestal. Arpeggios gradually disappear in the measures leading up to the passage and slowly resume following the passage. When the Chopin-like nocturne material returns, an ethereal glow cast by the previous passage subtly alters the meaning of the material.

Lesser's understanding of the movement suggests that this gentle climax of the piece may be the final glow of a Leningrad twilight.

The end of the movement foreshadows the movement to come. Shostakovich introduces the funeral march rhythm (Ex. 5.11). However, his treatment of the gesture does not betray the gentle character of the movement. Instead, the sparse voicing weakens the daunting and oppressive effect of the funeral march gesture. The pizzicato performance indication of the funeral march amidst final iterations of the arpeggio figures suggests an image of the ending night. The funeral, heard only distantly but ominously, marks the break of day.

**Example 5.10** Climax of *Nocturne*, mm. 41-47

The musical score for Example 5.10 shows the climax of the Nocturne, measures 41-47. It is written for piano in G minor, 3/4 time. The score consists of two staves. The right hand begins with a piano (pp) dynamic and features a series of arpeggiated chords. The left hand provides a harmonic accompaniment. The score includes a crescendo (cresc.) marking and a tenuto (ten.) marking. The piece concludes with a final piano (pp) dynamic.

**Example 5.11** Introduction of funeral march theme, *Nocturne* mm. 69-70

The musical score for Example 5.11 shows the introduction of the funeral march theme in the Nocturne, measures 69-70. It is written for piano in G minor, 3/4 time. The score consists of two staves. The right hand features a pizzicato (pizz.) performance indication and a series of chords. The left hand provides a harmonic accompaniment. The score includes a forte (f) dynamic and a vibrato (molto vibr.) marking.

Even in the absence of the title, the *Funeral March* clearly embodies a march to death. The only movement with a marked slower metronome marking (quarter note = 60), the movement explicates a deep sorrow, not by the dying, but for the dead. The opening gesture awakens listeners from the trance into which the fourth movement lulled

them. Reiterations of the abrasive, *forte* march theme affirm the change in character from the *Nocturne*. Consisting almost entirely of solos punctuated by the unison march figure with which the movement begins, the movement exposes Shostakovich's pain and his acknowledgement of his imminent death. The march theme, *forte*, abrasive, and aurally percussive, nearly creates the drumming at an execution.

The archetypal march rhythm permeates the solos. The first solo, mm. 4-11 in the viola, resembles a fugal subject. However, instead of following a fugal form, a reiteration of the march trope punctuates the end of the solo. The cello plays the second solo. Beginning similarly to the viola's solo, the solo devolves into its own unique idea. Climbing by fourths, the cello reaches an uncharacteristically high register. The unusually high register and length of the cello's solo, expanding into twelve bars, adds tension. The strain releases at the arrival of the familiar march theme on the dominant at m. 25. Interestingly, the harmonic movement of the march theme in the opening is exceedingly standard (Ex. 5.12). The structure of the harmony reflects the rigidity of the movement's opening and the image of a funeral march stiffly and solemnly travelling the streets of Leningrad.

However, after the statement of the main theme on the dominant, the movement gradually dissolves into the *Epilogue*. The violin solo, mm. 27-33, ends with a variant of the march theme on C minor. The violin solo that follows is incomplete and transfers to the cello. The incompleteness of these ideas suggest the dissolution of the funeral procession as members of the funeral party gradually wander away. Further, tense pauses in the music add to the anxiety of the movement's dissolution. When the march resumes at m. 44, it loses steam and instead gives way to a pizzicato melody in the cello. The way



in which the *Funeral March* slowly fades away mirrors the way in which the march approaches at the end of the Nocturne. At the end of the *Funeral March*, the march theme decreases in dynamics, suggesting the fading away of the funeral procession. By aurally suggesting the approach and fading away of the funeral procession, Shostakovich suggests he is watching his own funeral procession pass him.

**Example 5.12** Harmonic progression of march theme in *Funeral March*

*Funeral March* march theme, mm. 1-3, 11-13, and 25-27

Adagio molto  $\text{♩} = 60$

Harmonic reduction of the march theme

i iv V<sup>7</sup>

*Epilogue*

Aptly named, the *Epilogue* recounts the events of the prior movements.

Interestingly, the material from the *Intermezzo* dominates the movement: thirty-second notes that recall the *Intermezzo* punctuate the recollections of melodic content from the other movements. Just as it functioned as a bridge between the second and fourth movements, fragments of the *Intermezzo* bridge content from various movements in its final movement. After the first iteration of the *Intermezzo* material, the main motive from the *Elegy* returns (Ex, 5.13). Then, chords that quote the *Serenade* decorate the second

iteration of *Intermezzo* material (Ex. 5.14). This chronological survey of prior movements not only constructs a cyclical structure in the quartet, it also suggests a final reflection for Shostakovich.

**Example 5.13** Return of main motive from *Elegy*

*Epilogue*, mm 10-11

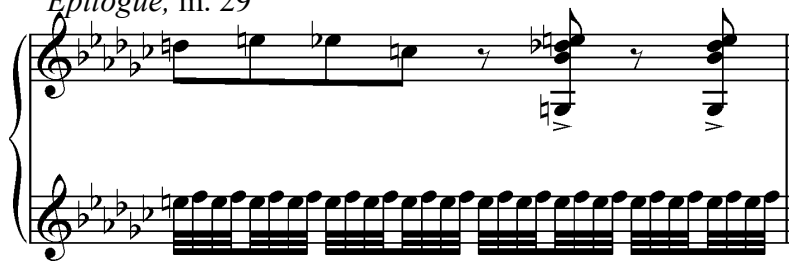


*Elegy*, mm 1-2

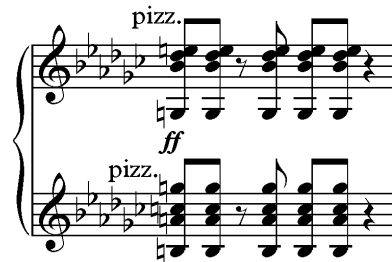


**Example 5.14** Restatement of chords from *Serenade*

*Epilogue*, m. 29



*Serenade*, m. 13



Following this ornate variant of the *Intermezzo* material, another passage of recollection couples content from the *Elegy* and *Nocturne*. The rising figure, the minor third variant, appears here referring to the *Elegy* (Ex. 5.15). Repetition of fourths lends the passage a character similar to the melodic passages in the *Nocturne* (Example 5.16). The combination depicts a conflict between his solemn meditation on obligation to death

and his tender reflections on life. The first Adagio molto passage, mm. 47-58, recalls the *Funeral March* (Ex. 5.17). By including this allusion next, Shostakovich suggests the former dialogue resolved on obligation to death.

**Example 5.15** Restatement of rising figure from *Elegy*

*Epilogue*, mm. 32-33

*Elegy*, mm. 157-158, mm. 177-179

**Example 5.16** Restatement of rising fourths from *Nocturne*

*Epilogue*, mm. 45-46

rit.

*Nocturne*, mm 46-47

ten.

pp

**Example 5.17** Allusion to *Funeral march* figure

*Epilogue*, mm. 47  
**Adagio molto** ♩=60  
pizz.  
*f*  
con sord.  
*p*

*Funeral March*, mm. 1-3-48  
**Adagio molto** ♩=60  
*f espress.*  
*f espress.*

As the movement progresses, the spacing narrows between *Intermezzo* iterations and recollections of the other movement. The thirty-second note barriers between the moments of reflection abbreviate to two and one bar ideas as the reflections on past movements thin in texture and truncate in length. The final recollection, mm. 85 -97, ends in a way that anticipates beginning at the *Elegy* once more (Ex 5.18). Thus, Shostakovich affirms the cyclical structure of the movement through the quartet's final measure.

**Example 5.18** End of *Epilogue*, mm. 95-97

*morendo*  
*morendo*

## Conclusion

Despite the widespread interest in Shostakovich the composer, it often feels Shostakovich the individual remains obscure. Winston Churchill once said Russia is “a riddle, wrapped in a mystery, inside an enigma; but perhaps there is a key.”

Shostakovich, too, seems to be a riddle, wrapped in a mystery, inside an enigma. This thesis proposes his string quartets as the keys to understanding Shostakovich. String Quartets No. 1, No. 8, and No. 15, composed at the beginning, middle, and end of his illustrious career, demonstrate longitudinally how Shostakovich turned to the string quartet as a medium for self-expression. And in these musical representations of himself, Shostakovich reveals his nearly life-long obsession with his own mortality.

Following the birth of his son, Shostakovich composed a string quartet that betrays his own desire for the impossibility of restored youth. The seemingly simple quartet reverts Shostakovich back to naiveté. However, the quartet’s sense of wandering reflects the endless and futile path towards restored youth. After the intense censure he endured following *Lady Macbeth*, Shostakovich could never again enjoy the innocence of the untarnished success of a composer. Although the celebratory finale of the quartet suggests his journey is successful, the fact that the finale originally served as the opening movement refutes this claim. Had the celebratory movement opened the quartet as Shostakovich originally intended, the quartet would reflect a journey that begins with optimism and ends with aimless wandering.

String Quartets No. 8 and No. 15 confront death in distinct ways. String Quartet No. 8 reveals how a part of Shostakovich’s spirit died when he entered the communist

party. To confront this loss, Shostakovich immortalized his pre-party self through constant self-quotations and signatures that suggest self-obsession. This quartet reveals a different element of Shostakovich's character: conceit. Perhaps, in an atmosphere of ruthless scrutiny, Shostakovich's survival depended on self-elevation. By promoting himself to an iconic level, Shostakovich retained his distinctiveness in an aural world of his own construction. In contrast, his final String Quartet deals not with his symbolic death, but with his very literal and impending death. Shostakovich reveals weakness and fear in his Fifteenth String Quartet. The redundancy of the string quartet does not convey self-obsession as it did in his Eighth. Instead, the redundancy of String Quartet No. 15 is like the repetitive ringing of one's hands, expressing not just worry, but also weariness.

Perhaps as a result of the tense atmosphere in which he lived, Shostakovich was consumed by his own mortality. He turned to the string quartet as medium for self-expression following the first instance in which his life was in peril, after the *Pravda* incident. From then forward, he systematically used the quartet to memorialize friends, lovers, and most of all, himself. In his First, Eighth, and Fifteenth String Quartet, Shostakovich assumes both the role of the subject and the countersubject, the mourner and the mourned.

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