

DMITRI SHOSTAKOVICH

Festive Overture, Op. 96

BORN: September 25, 1906, in Saint Petersburg

DIED: August 9, 1975, in Moscow

WORK COMPOSED: 1954

WORLD PREMIERE: November 6, 1954, in Moscow. Alexander Melik-Pashayev conducted the Bolshoi Theater Orchestra.

Initial fanfares reflect the patriotic occasion for which Shostakovich wrote this overture. They return near the end of work, combining with the lighter, running music that forms the main portion of the piece.

Dmitri Shostakovich was renowned for his extraordinary compositional facility. His *Festive Overture* gives an example of the ease with which he could conceive music.

In the autumn of 1954 the composer received an unexpected visit at his Moscow apartment from Vasily Neboľ'sin, an official at the Bolshoi Theater. A concert scheduled to take place in a few days' time coincided with the anniversary of the October Revolution that brought the Communist Party to power in 1917. During the Soviet era such anniversaries were customarily observed at the Bolshoi with the performance of a festive new composition. But unaccountably, nothing had been arranged for the approaching concert. Neboľ'sin therefore appealed, somewhat desperately, to Shostakovich.

The composer agreed to help and invited a visiting friend to sit and keep him company. "Then he starting composing," this companion remembered. "The speed at which he wrote was truly astounding. Moreover, when he wrote light music, he was able to talk, make jokes and compose simultaneously, like the legendary Mozart." In a matter of hours the score was ready. "Two days later, the rehearsal took place," recalled the friend who had watched Shostakovich write the piece. "I hurried down to the theater and heard this brilliant, effervescent work, with its vivacious energy spilling over like uncorked champagne."

Scored for 2 flutes and piccolo; 3 oboes; 3 clarinets; 2 bassoons and contrabassoon; 4 horns; 3 trumpets; 3 trombones; tuba; timpani and percussion; strings.

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