

**DMITRI SHOSTAKOVICH**

**Symphony No. 10 in E minor, Op. 93**

**BORN:** September 25, 1906, in Saint Petersburg

**DIED:** August 9, 1975, in Moscow

**WORK COMPOSED:** 1953

**WORLD PREMIERE:** December 17, 1953, in Leningrad. Yevgeny Mravinsky conducted the Leningrad Philharmonic.

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The symphony begins with cellos and basses quietly sounding what seems a mournful chant. Its first three notes, a minor-key “do-re-mi” figure, form the basis for much of the symphony.

Those same three notes, now made savagely aggressive, form the main idea of the second movement.

The third movement opens with yet another transformation of the symphony’s signature “do-re-mi” figure. Shostakovich introduces his musical monogram, D-S-C-H, early on in the voices of by flutes and clarinets, repeatedly into the movement. Later, a horn repeatedly sounds a theme that spells out Elmira, the name of a favorite student. Near the end of the movement, the two names encoded in notes sound in close succession.

The restrained introduction that begins the finale culminates in brief bugle-call figures for the clarinet and flute. The energetic music that follows pauses only to reconsider material from the earlier movements, including the D-S-C-H motif.

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Dmitri Shostakovich was one of the leading symphonic composers of the last century. His 15 symphonies include light works but, more significantly, epic dramas played out in the language of orchestral music. His Tenth Symphony is among the latter.

Shostakovich lived and worked his entire adult life under Soviet communism, and he maintained an uneasy and ambivalent relationship with his nation’s rulers. His difficulties with Stalin’s regime bear tangentially on the Tenth Symphony. Twice during his career the composer was officially censured for offending Soviet musical taste. In 1936 the official Communist Party newspaper, *Pravda*, denounced his opera *Lady Macbeth of the Mtsensk District* as “musical chaos.” One week later a second *Pravda* review attacked his ballet *The Limpid Stream*. Shostakovich responded with a contrite apology, and his next major work, his Fifth Symphony, reverted to an accessible, conservative style.

Though this brought a reprieve, Shostakovich’s position was by no means secure. In 1948 the Central Committee of the Communist Party issued a resolution denouncing some of the country’s leading composers for the sin of “decadent formalism” (code for modern innovation). Shostakovich’s Ninth Symphony was specifically singled out for criticism. Once more the composer responded apologetically: “I again deviated in the direction of formalism and began to speak a language incomprehensible to the people. ... The Party is right, and I am deeply grateful ... for [its] criticism.” During the next five years he issued mostly film scores and patriotic cantatas written in a style that would satisfy even the most conservative bureaucrat.

With the death of Stalin, in March 1953, and the return of a more liberal climate, Shostakovich could again fully assert his creative personality. He did this with his Symphony No. 10, composed during the summer and autumn of that year. Today it is widely regarded as the finest of Shostakovich’s 15 symphonies.

The broad first movement, which accounts for almost half the symphony's length, reveals Shostakovich at the height of his inventive powers. Though his themes are remarkably concise, the composer is able to extract music of considerable substance and beauty from them, often by presenting the movement's signature melodic ideas in various contrapuntal combinations.

The second movement is a brief, highly concentrated *Allegro* with a wild and somewhat menacing character. By contrast, the *Allegretto* that follows offers a winsome intermezzo. Here Shostakovich incorporates a pair of musical monograms into the music. The first is the four-note motif D-S-C-H (spelled out in German musical nomenclature, which uses "Es" for the pitch E-flat and "H" for B-natural. The composer used this, his musical signature in many of his compositions.) The second, heard as a repeated horn call, spells the name "Elmira." This alludes to Elmira Nazirova, one of Shostakovich's students. The composer sent her numerous letters during the summer of 1953, when he was writing this symphony. He may have been in love with her, though his sentiments probably were not reciprocated.

Shostakovich prefaces the finale with a poignant introduction in slow tempo. The ensuing *Allegro* brings a musical whirlwind leading to a brilliant conclusion.

*Scored for 2 flutes and piccolo (the 2<sup>nd</sup> flute doubling 2<sup>nd</sup> piccolo); 3 oboes (the 3<sup>rd</sup> doubling English horn); 3 clarinets (the 3<sup>rd</sup> doubling E-flat clarinet); 3 bassoons (the 3<sup>rd</sup> doubling contrabassoon); 4 horns; 3 trumpets; 3 trombones; tuba; timpani and percussion; strings.*

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