



06|07 Season

Berkeley
Symphony
Orchestra

Shostakovich
Leningrad

December 14, 2006

Pärt
Shostakovich

Program Notes

Zellerbach Hall, UC Berkeley

BERKELEY SYMPHONY ORCHESTRA

2006–07 SEASON



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8:00 pm, Thursday, June 14, 2006

Zellerbach Hall

ARVO PÄRT

Summa for strings

Für Alina for piano

Arbos for eight brass instruments and percussion

DMITRI SHOSTAKOVICH

Symphony No. 7 in C major, Op. 60, "Leningrad"

- I. Allegretto
- II. Moderato (poco allegretto)
- III. Adagio attacca
- IV. Allegro non troppo

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Program Notes

Summa for strings

Für Alina for piano

Arbos for eight brass instruments and percussion

ARVO PÄRT (b. 1935)

Arvo Pärt was born on September 11, 1935, in Paide, Estonia. Summa was originally composed in 1977 for tenor and bass solo (or chorus) accompanied by six instruments; Pärt arranged it for four solo strings (in the unusual distribution of violin, 2 violas, and cello) in 1990 and then for conventional string quartet and string orchestra in 1991. Duration ca. 5:00.

Pärt composed the short piano work Für Alina in 1976. It received its premiere in Tallinn, Estonia on January 1, 1977. Duration ca. 2:15.

The chamber work Arbos was composed in 1977 for seven-part chamber vocal ensemble, then arranged for seven recorders and three triangles in 1981. Pärt arranged the work for brass and percussion in 1986, then revised the score in 2001. This arrangement is scored for 4 trumpets, 4 trombones, tubular bells, tam-tam, and timpani. Duration ca. 2:45.

Arvo Pärt is the leading Estonian composer of his generation, and indeed, one of the most popular contemporary composers in the European tradition. He graduated from the Tallinn Conservatory in 1963, having written a number of scores for films and plays while still a student. Estonia was part of the USSR in those days, and under Soviet rule he was mostly cut off from current artistic trends in the West. His early works are mostly

neo-classical in style, but he did manage to acquaint himself with the rudiments of serial technique. His orchestral work *Nekrolog* (1960–61) was the first serial composition in Estonia, and earned him a reprimand from the Soviet authorities for its Western “formalism.” Through the 1960s Pärt explored other techniques as well, including collage, and experimented with juxtaposing Modernist dissonance with neo-Baroque consonance.

From the late 1960s to 1976, Pärt experienced an artistic crisis. He felt that his earlier work had led him to a dead end—and his setting of a frankly Christian text (*Credo*, 1968) had brought him another official rebuke. It became clear to Pärt that early music offered a way out of his dilemma, and he intensified his study of music of the past. His Symphony No. 3, completed in 1971, is strongly influenced by Gregorian chant and early medieval polyphony. After completing that work, Pärt decided that he needed to “learn how to walk again as a composer” and he returned again to his studies.

In 1976, Pärt made a breakthrough: he had developed a new compositional style, which he called *tintinnabuli*, from the Latin for “little bells.” Simple structure: one voice, the principal melody, moves by step, circling around a central pitch. It is accompanied by a second voice (the “tintinnabuli” voice) that primarily consists of the notes of the tonic triad. The three works heard tonight all use the tintinnabuli style, and were written within the first year of Pärt’s use of the technique. Of this unique style, Pärt has said:

I have discovered that it is enough when a single note is beautifully played. This one note, or a silent beat, or a moment of silence, comforts me. I work with very few elements—with one voice, two voices. I build with primitive materials—with the triad, with one specific tonality. The three notes of a triad are like bells and that is why I call it “tintinnabulation.”

The tintinnabuli style was first adumbrated in the miniature piano piece, *Für Alina*. He later went on to codify the technique more elaborately, but *Für Alina* demonstrates the basic principles clearly enough. Over a sustained B in the bass, the right hand outlines a simple melody which moves mostly by step. Simultaneously with each note played by the right hand, the left hand plays the note in the tonic triad (B minor) closest to the melodic note but below it. Only once does the left hand stray from B minor: a few measures from the end, it pauses briefly on C sharp. In the context of a crystalline harmonic atmosphere of such purity, this small digression has the impact of a major departure; in his manuscript, Pärt marks the event with a drawing of a flower sprouting from the note.

Für Alina marked the beginning of a new period for the reinvigorated Pärt. Among the tintinnabuli works that followed in 1977 is *Arbos*. The title refers to the hierarchy of elements in a tree—roots, trunk, and branches—which correspond to the division of the instrumental ensemble into three choirs. Structurally, the work is a mensuration canon; in adherence to this late-medieval contrapuntal technique the same melody is played in all three choirs, but at progressively slower tempos from upper voices to lower in the ratio 4:2:1. Each division also has a different tintinnabuli voice with a

different relationship to the melodic voice.

Summa (also from 1977) was originally a setting of the Credo from the Latin Mass for tenor and bass solo with six instruments. Pärt later made arrangements of the work for vocal ensemble and several instrumental combinations, including the version for string orchestra heard tonight. The work opens with the two violin parts alone for one measure, which in the vocal version accompanies the words “*Credo in unum Deum . . .*” or “I believe in one God.” The first violins carry the tintinnabuli voice outlining a G minor triad, and the seconds play a simple, mostly stepwise melody. In the second measure, the full ensemble enters, and after two more measures the texture drops back to two parts, this time using the lower strings. These alternations between full and sparse texture, and between treble and bass registers, continue throughout the piece, and are a large-scale analog to the small-scale patterns in the alternation between short and long notes on the local level. The overall impression is of an intricate set of interlocking elements that combine to make a satisfying whole.

Pärt and his family finally emigrated to the West in 1980. He settled briefly in Vienna, where he acquired Austrian citizenship, then moved to Berlin, where he still lives. Since coming to the West, he has composed mostly sacred music. Paul Hillier, an eminent choral conductor and champion of Pärt’s work, finds at the core of Pärt’s music a world “in which silence and death are creatively linked,”

reaffirm[ing] the spiritual basis of our existence, in all its frailty and potential beauty. Pärt uses the simplest of means—a single note, a triad, words—and with them creates an intense, vibrant music

that stands apart from the world, and beckons us to an inner quietness and an inner exaltation.*

Symphony No. 7 in C major, Op. 60, “Leningrad”

DMITRI SHOSTAKOVICH
(1906–1975)

Dmitri Dmitriyevich Shostakovich was born in St. Petersburg on September 25, 1906. He died in Moscow, on August 9, 1975. Shostakovich composed most of his seventh symphony in Leningrad (now St. Petersburg) while it was under siege by German forces in 1941. The date when he began work on the symphony is uncertain; the composer said that he initiated the work in response to the German invasion, but other evidence indicates that he may have already finished the first movement the previous year. He completed the second movement on September 17 and the third on September 29. Two days later, he and his family were evacuated to Moscow and later several hundred miles to the southeast to Kuibyshev (now Samara), where the Soviet government had temporarily relocated. Shostakovich finished the fourth and final movement on October 22—the completed score bears the dedication “To the City of Leningrad.” The work’s premiere was given by the Bolshoi Theater Orchestra, conducted by Samuil Abramovich Samosud, in Kuibyshev on March 5, 1942. The Moscow premiere followed a few weeks later, on March 29. Shortly thereafter, a microfilm of the score was flown to the West (via Tehran) and it received its European broadcast premiere in London on June 22 with Henry Wood and the London Philharmonic Orchestra.

*Pärt, Oxford University Press, 1997.

They repeated the performance at a Proms concert at the Royal Albert Hall, which was the work’s European concert premiere. The symphony was first heard in the Western Hemisphere in a radio broadcast by the NBC Symphony Orchestra under Arturo Toscanini on July 19. Only on August 9 was the symphony heard in the city that inspired it, performed by the Leningrad Radio Orchestra conducted by Karl Eliasberg. The work is scored for very large orchestra, encompassing 3 flutes (second doubling on alto flute, and third doubling on piccolo), 2 oboes, English horn, 3 clarinets, 2 bassoons, contrabassoon, 8 horns, 6 trumpets, 6 trombones, tuba, 5 timpani, triangle, snare drum, bass drum, cymbals, wood blocks, xylophone, 2 harps, piano, and strings (the composer specifies a minimum of 16 first violins, 16 second violins, 12 violas, 10 cellos, and 8 double basses). Duration ca. 78:00.

Looking back on the career of Dmitri Shostakovich in the centennial year of his birth, his place in music history might seem assured. In terms of performances, his works, especially his symphonies, enjoy a solid position in the orchestral repertoire. The second edition of the *New Grove Dictionary of Music and Musicians* (the standard English-language music reference work) confidently states that Shostakovich is “the greatest symphonist of the mid-20th century.” Yet during his lifetime, and during the decade or so following his death, his position was not nearly as unequivocal. His approachability, the factor which has contributed to his popularity today, was attacked by those who thought he sold out to popular taste. On the other hand, he was at times accused by the Soviet culture watchdogs as not popular enough, too interested in abstract music for its own sake, or, to use the dreaded term: “formalism.”

Not only his art, but his politics have come under intense scrutiny. As did any artist working for years under the Stalinist regime in the USSR, he had to walk a tightrope between self-expression and obedience to the state. He has been accused of being a Stalinist collaborator (he did bow to government pressure to affix his signature to several documents that condemned his fellow musicians and other worthy citizens), but his defenders claim that he was always a subversive at heart, and that his music contains hidden messages that mock the Soviet authorities.

In many respects, the Seventh Symphony represents a unique confluence between his striving for popular effect and his effort to be politically relevant. The circumstances of its origin could hardly be more dramatic: the composer, trapped in the city of his birth under siege, decides to write a stirring, patriotic work as a tribute to the city and its defenders. The situation was indeed dire. Stalin had signed a non-aggression pact with Hitler in August of 1939, and the Soviet Union felt safe from the Nazi Blitzkrieg that began rolling across Europe later that same year. In the summer of 1941, however, Hitler launched a full-scale invasion of the Soviet Union, and one of his armies made for Leningrad,* the second-largest city in the nation and the former capital of the czars. The German armies surrounded the city on September 8, cutting it off from the outside world. Rather than assault the city directly, Hitler's forces blockaded it in an attempt to starve it into submission. This siege lasted nearly 900 days, during which it is estimated that as much as a third of the population—one million people—perished due to fire,

*Since the fall of the Communist regime, Leningrad has reverted to the name it bore under Czarist rule: St. Petersburg.

starvation, cold, or artillery bombardment.

By the time he completed the symphony, however, Shostakovich was no longer in Leningrad. On October 1, less than a month after the onset of the siege, Shostakovich, his family, and many other artists and intellectuals were evacuated from the city to Moscow. As that city, too, came under threat from the German invasion, two weeks later he moved again. His new home was Kuibyshev (now Samara), hundreds of miles to the southeast, which had been chosen as the temporary capital of the USSR while Moscow was under attack. Here he finished his Seventh Symphony, and here it was given its first performance in March, 1942, by the Bolshoi Theater Orchestra, which had also been evacuated to the city.

Word of the new symphony quickly reached the West, and as the Soviets realized its value as a representation of the strength of the Russian spirit they went to great lengths to smuggle the score out of the country. A microfilm of Shostakovich's manuscript was made and flown to Tehran. From there, it followed a torturous course via land, air, and sea to the Soviet Union's European and American allies. The star conductors of the day fought bitterly over the right to premiere the already-famous work. Henry Wood triumphed in London, and after Leopold Stokowski convinced NBC to acquire the work for U.S. broadcast, Arturo Toscanini stepped in and took it for himself. The pre-concert publicity reached a fever pitch, climaxing in a major article in *Time* magazine, whose cover bore a fanciful painting of "Fireman Shostakovich" wearing a splendid brass helmet with a burning cityscape in the background.

The work had a great impact in America—after that first performance it

was performed a further 61 times during the 1942–43 season. Many listeners heard it as a stirring evocation of the heroic struggle of their new allies on the opposite side of the world. There is a sense that the symphony played a valuable role in swaying American public opinion in favor of the Soviet Union. It must be remembered that, from the time of the Bolshevik Revolution in 1917 up until the Nazi invasion of the USSR, the two countries had been bitter enemies.

How literally one is meant to take the "Leningrad" Symphony as a depiction of the events of 1941 has been a matter of debate ever since the work appeared. The issue has been compounded by contradictory statements made by (or attributed to) Shostakovich at different times over the succeeding decades, as well as by others in his circle. On the one hand, the composer claimed that he began writing the symphony in direct response to the German invasion of the USSR, but there is also some evidence that he might have composed the first movement as much as a year earlier. Shostakovich initially intended to give the individual movements descriptive names:

1. War
2. Memories
3. Our Country's Wide Spaces
4. Victory

In the end, however, he set this plan aside. In his later years, Shostakovich was quoted as saying that the symphony was not written solely about the havoc wrought by German armies, but also about the evils of the Stalinist regime:

The war brought much new sorrow and much destruction, but I have not forgotten the terrible prewar years. That is what all my symphonies . . . are about . . . Actually,

I have nothing against calling the Seventh the Leningrad Symphony, but it's not about Leningrad under siege, it's about the Leningrad that Stalin destroyed and that Hitler merely finished off.

Perhaps more telling is a remark he made to a friend, Flora Litvinova, on the occasion when he first played through the score for friends and colleagues:

Later, when Dmitri Dmitriyevich became used to me and began to trust me, he told me directly that the Seventh (and Fifth as well) are not only about fascism but about our system, in general about any totalitarianism.

The first movement presents the most vivid sonic imagery, and is the one most open to a narrative interpretation. It opens with a broad, unison melody in C major, striding purposely forward. This melody has been taken to represent the ordinary people of Russia, going about their daily business. Yet some commentators have a less sanguine view of the theme, hearing in its dissonant accompaniment and frequent shifts into the minor mode, something with more bite; Ian McDonald wrote in *The New Shostakovich*, "This, surely, is the studied simplicity of totalitarian poster-art—of the big, square-jawed smiths and lathe-workers, the ruddy-faced milkmaids and harvest-girls of Socialist Realism's 'radiant future.'" In other words, a satirical comment on the "forced happiness" (in Allin Gray's words) of the Soviet people.

The texture thins out, and an airy passage featuring the flutes against the low strings leads us to a new lyrical theme in G major, the dominant of C, presented in the violins. The new

theme is repeated in the oboe, then the oboe starts to alter the melody, adding a descending stepwise line. Thus far, the movement seems to be following the usual outline of a symphonic sonata-form movement, and this toying with the thematic material leads us to assume that we've entered the usual development section. But instead of the dramatic give-and-take normally associated with thematic development, we encounter a section in which all forward motion seems to be suspended—there is a sense of the proverbial calm before the storm. The strings take up the lyrical melody with the extended descending line, and bring that line to the fore. Over almost static harmony, the flute, then piccolo, then solo violin continue to noodle with the theme. Finally, the snare drum sets up a quiet repetitive rhythm, leading into the most famous part of the symphony.

A new march-like tune is introduced in octaves in the strings, in an unusually spare texture: short bow strokes (marked *secco*, or “dry”) in the first violins, plucked strings (*pizzicato*) in the cellos, and the second violins play with the wooden backs of their bows (*col legno*). Prominent in this new theme are two long descending lines, which we recognize as having been derived from the lyrical theme in the previous section of the movement. This tune is repeated, almost verbatim, 11 times, over the continuous accompaniment of the snare drum. Its instrumentation changes each time, spreading throughout the orchestra in a massive crescendo. (From the time the work appeared, the similarity of this passage to Maurice Ravel's *Boléro* has been noted.)

The overall effect is of an inundation, a flood that begins with a trickle and swells to enormous size,

overwhelming everything in its path. Indeed, in one of his writings Shostakovich referred to the passage as “The Invasion.” The nature of the tune itself may provide a clue to the identity of the invaders: it bears a strong resemblance to the aria “Da geh' ich zu Maxim” from Franz Lehár's operetta, *The Merry Widow*, which was believed to have been one of Hitler's favorites. (The theme may be familiar today because the Hungarian composer, Béla Bartók, starving in exile in New York during World War II, worked it into his *Concerto for Orchestra* of 1943. Writing soon after the “Leningrad” Symphony frenzy, he obviously felt that the attention lavished on Shostakovich's work was unwarranted, and made a grotesque parody of the tune, accompanying it with the musical equivalent of Bronx cheers and derisive laughter.)

After 12 statements of the tune, a true development section begins. Shostakovich plunges suddenly into a remote (minor) key, starts to vary the tune and supplies it with ever more agitated accompaniment. If there is a passage in the symphony that represents warfare, this is it. All builds to a violent climax, leading to the recapitulation of the first theme, now in C minor and colored by a sense of tragedy. The lyrical theme is recapitulated as well, in the solo bassoon, but in a metrically and harmonically broken form that is the very epitome of despair. In a quiet coda, the opening theme is heard once again, now poignantly, but the snare drum rhythm intrudes with fragments of the “invasion” theme, leaving the movement to close on an unsettled note.

The three remaining movements lend themselves far less well to any sort of narrative interpretation. Though it bears no title other than its tempo marking, the composer characterized

the second movement at various times as “scherzo” and “lyric intermezzo.” The latter name applies to the opening and closing sections, which frame an interlude whose triple meter and comical melodic outbursts (bordering on circus music) mark it as classic scherzo material. The first of the lyric sections opens with a tiptoeing line heard first in the second violins; for a moment, it seems that the first violins will answer in strict canon, but soon any contrapuntal discipline is thrown out the window and the strings treat the thematic material freely. A new melody, accompanied by the strings in an almost Latin beat, is introduced by the oboe and taken up by the English horn, then answered by a related tune in the cellos. The opening theme returns to round off the first section.

The central scherzo, like the outer sections of the movement, takes the form ABA'. Its principal melody is played by the E-flat, or “piccolo” clarinet, in a high register. Then, a contrasting, assertive duple meter theme is heard in the brass before the scherzo melody returns, this time played by all the winds. The closing section of the movement brings back the melodic ideas from the first section, now orchestrated differently. This time the tune heard over a Latin beat is played by the bass clarinet, accompanied by harps.

Shostakovich begins the third movement by juxtaposing two contrasting textures: the first, marked “Adagio,” employs block chords in the winds and harps to create a Stravinskian sonority. In the second (labeled “Largo”), an impassioned melody in the violins soars above a minimal accompaniment. These two textures alternate twice before making way for a third, in which a solo flute plays an affecting melody above soft strings. Perhaps this was the passage

Shostakovich was thinking of when he reportedly commented that the movement was inspired by the city of Leningrad as it appeared at twilight. After a brief allusion to the Largo violin theme, we are plunged headlong into a more serious, fretful section. The tension builds, recalling the violent music from the first movement, finally reaching a climax when it is combined with the melody from the wind chords at the opening of the movement. Calm is eventually restored, and the movement ends with variants of the two opening themes presented in alternation as they were at the beginning.

Continuing straight on from the third movement without a break, the finale begins ominously, with a wide-ranging, chromatically tinged violin melody over a drumroll in the timpani. From this seed, the movement grows in one long crescendo not only in volume, but in rhythmic activity, orchestration, and wealth of thematic ideas. Gestures of a martial character, such as trumpet calls and percussion cadences, remind us that this symphony was conceived in wartime, and that the day has yet to be won. The tumult dies down, and a darkly eloquent passage for strings and low winds (initially) brings to mind the sacrifices of those who made the victory possible. Another long crescendo begins, this one culminating in a more frankly celebratory passage. Yet the ending of this work is not the triumph of pure light over darkness—oddly dissonant notes and chromaticisms inflect the final chords, leaving the impression of a joyless victory. The sad irony of Shostakovich's situation was that victory meant that the Russian people were free from the tyrant, Hitler—only to return to being ruled by the tyrant, Stalin.

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