

Great Russian Symphonies, Vol.6 (2012)



Dmitry Shostakovich - Symphony No. 7 in C major, Op. 60 'Leningrad' 1 *Allegretto* 25:48
2 *Moderato (Poco allegretto)* 11:25 3 *Adagio* 18:04 4 *Allegro non troppo* 19:56
Royal Liverpool Philharmonic Orchestra Vasily Petrenko - conductor

It is impossible to deny the overwhelming impact Shostakovich's Symphony No. 7 had on its listeners in 1942. Written by Shostakovich after he had been transported out of his besieged hometown of Leningrad, the Seventh is a patriotic hymn to his city and country and a rallying cry to the foes of fascism. Its premiere in the U.S.S.R. was world news, and the securing its first performance rights in the West was contested by Toscanini, Stokowski, and Koussevitzky. Toscanini won, and the work was rapturously received and repeatedly performed. But even before the war had ended, the exalted position of the "Leningrad" Symphony had slipped, and commentators in the West derided it as pompous and prosaic. The symphony, rehabilitated from being a patriotic piece to being a subversive piece based on the purported testimony of Shostakovich, only later received regular performances in the West. The truth is that Shostakovich's Seventh is an enormous piece for a gargantuan orchestra set in four vast movements lasting more than 70 minutes in performances. Its opening *Allegretto*, nearly half an hour in length, has proud and determined C major themes at its start and close and a central section that takes a theme from Offenbach and turns it into a massive ostinato that overwhelms the C major themes with its brutal banality. This is followed by a haunted *Moderato* of plucked strings and screeching woodwinds and by a vast *Adagio* with stirring strings and bold brass. The closing *Allegro non troppo* returns to the monumental style of the opening movement with grand and glorious themes culminating in an interminable C major climax. The truth is that the Seventh is a work of banal themes and bombastic climaxes, but Shostakovich's imagination and discipline have fused the banal and bombastic into an overwhelming musical work. ---James Leonard, allmusic.com

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