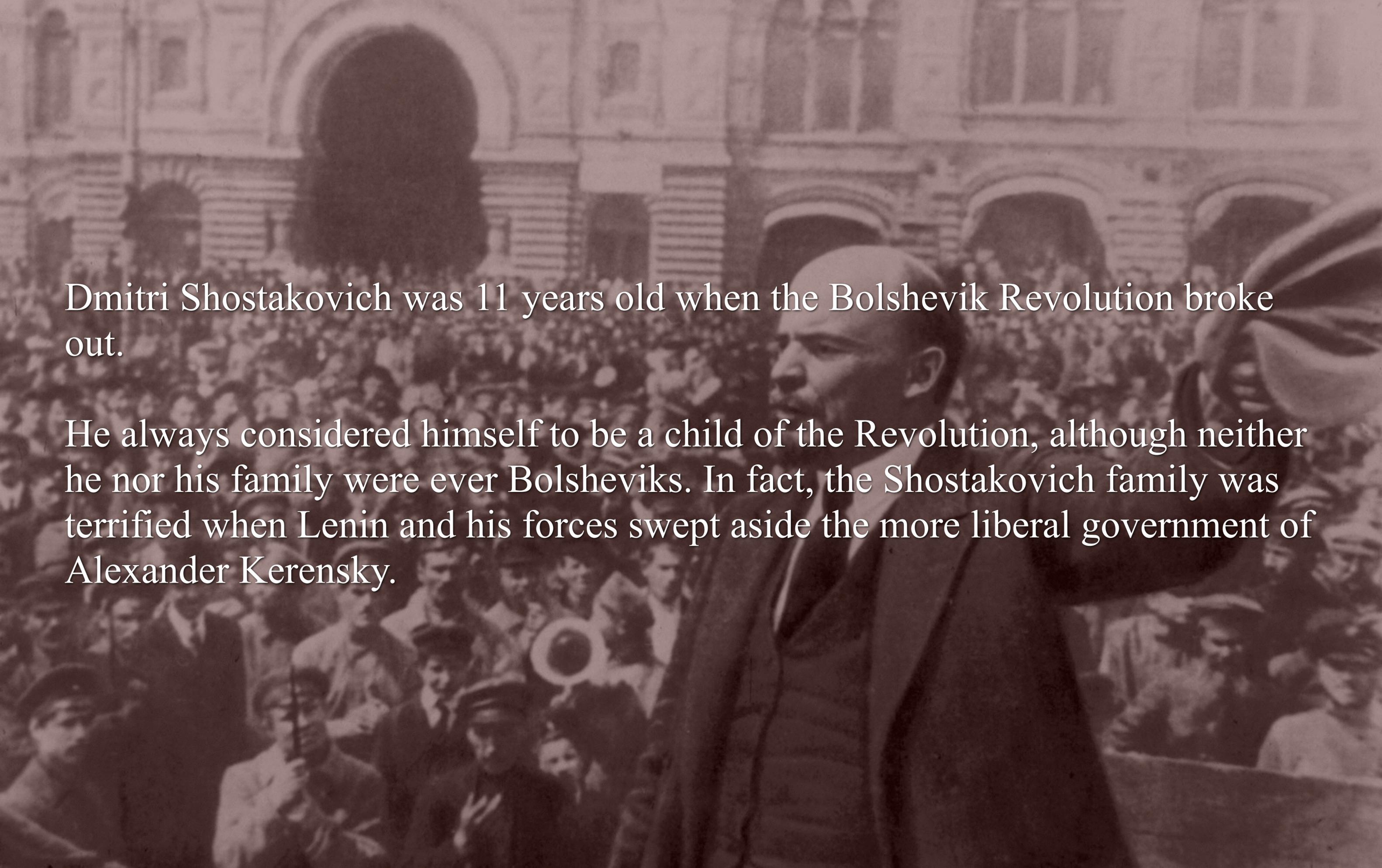


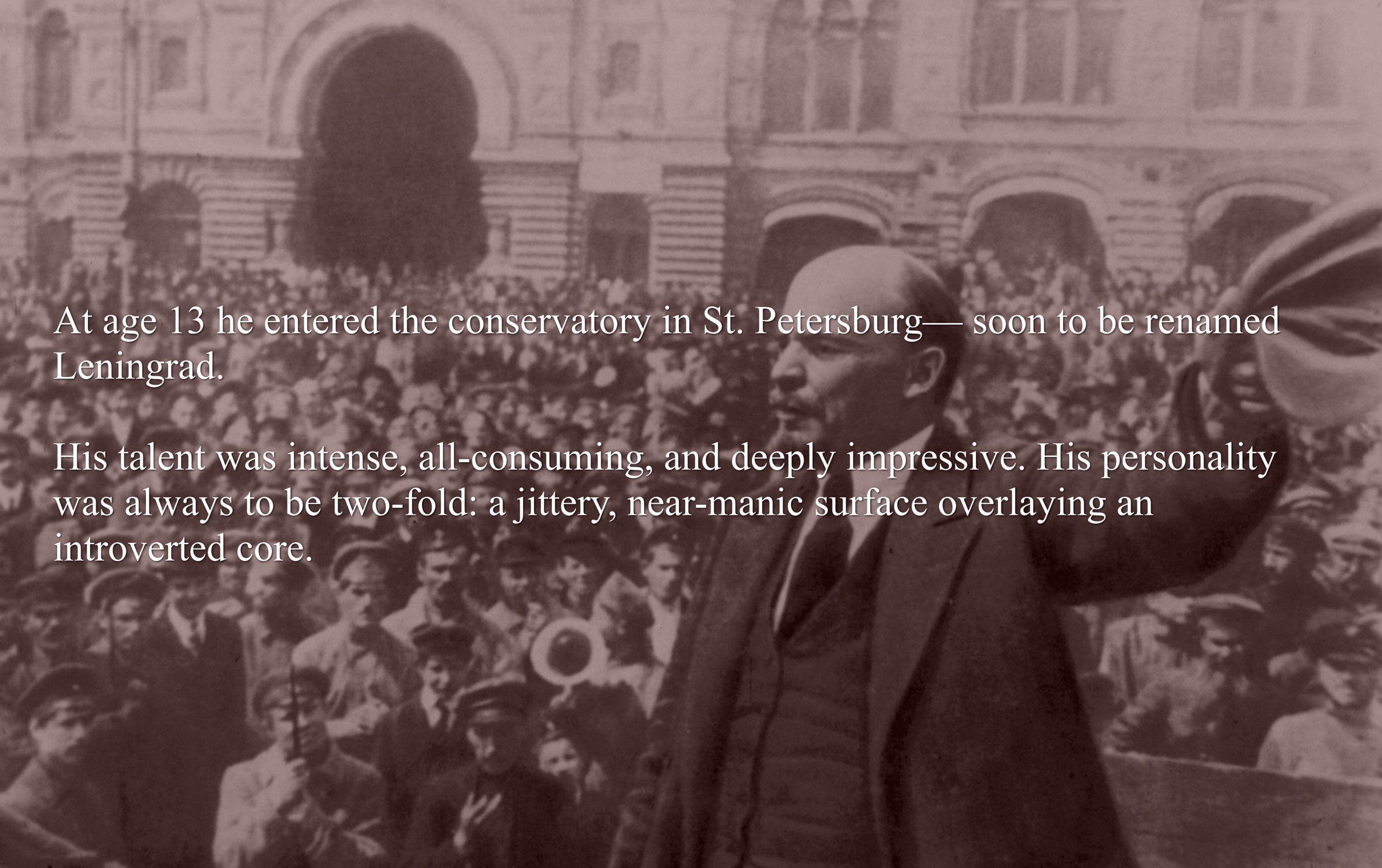
Music as Mirror

7 - The Music of Repression: Shostakovich and the 5th Symphony



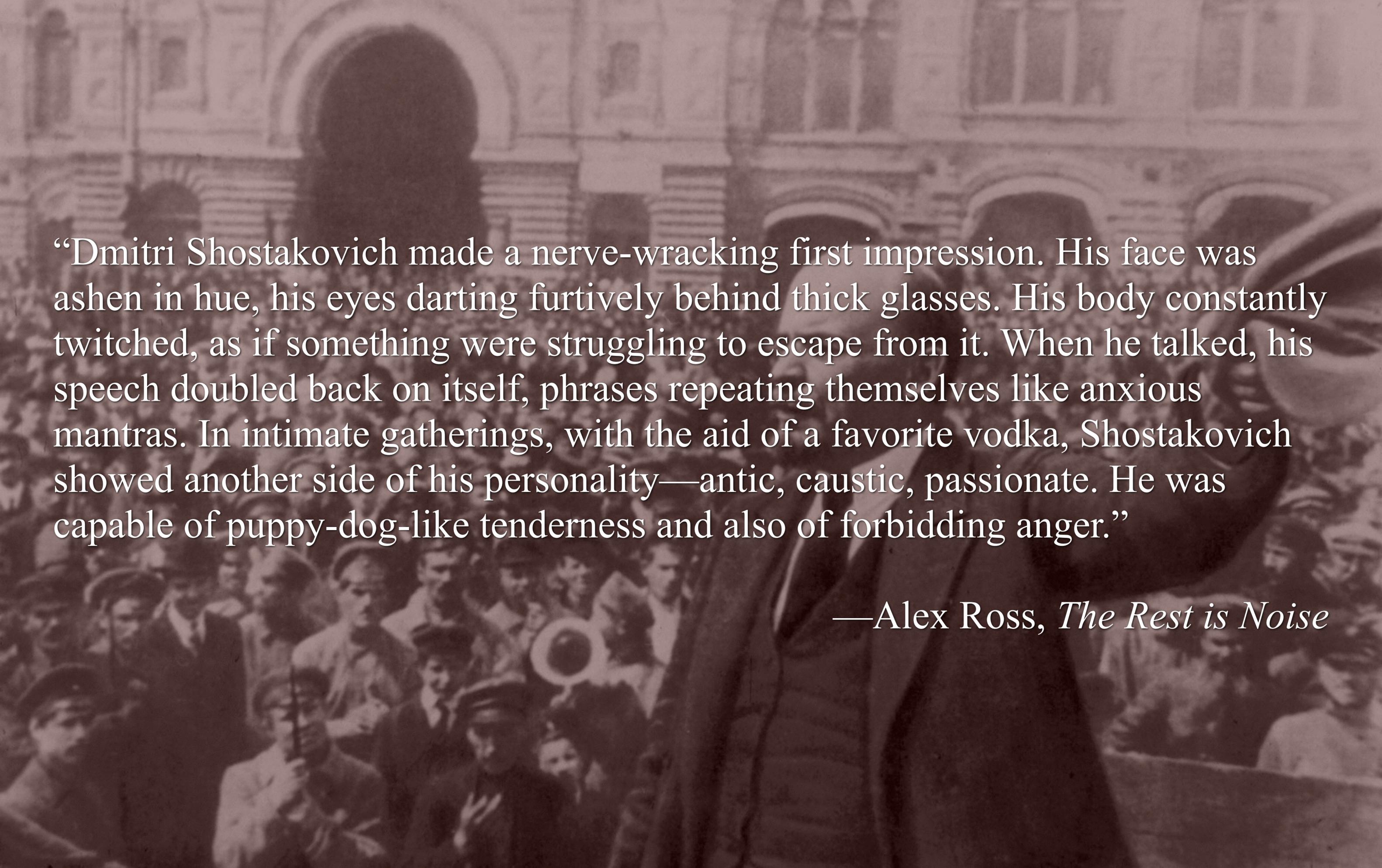
Dmitri Shostakovich was 11 years old when the Bolshevik Revolution broke out.

He always considered himself to be a child of the Revolution, although neither he nor his family were ever Bolsheviks. In fact, the Shostakovich family was terrified when Lenin and his forces swept aside the more liberal government of Alexander Kerensky.



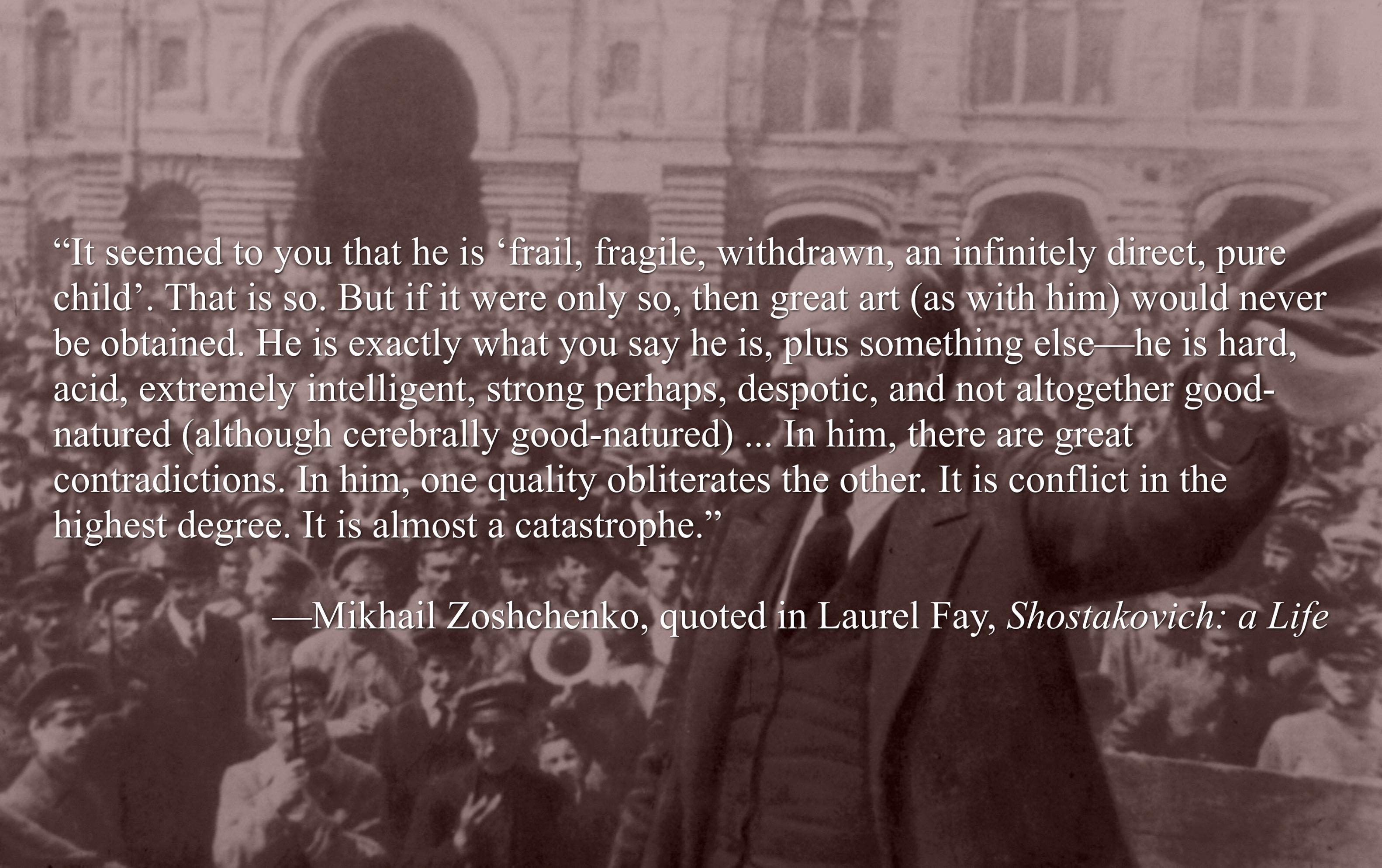
At age 13 he entered the conservatory in St. Petersburg— soon to be renamed Leningrad.

His talent was intense, all-consuming, and deeply impressive. His personality was always to be two-fold: a jittery, near-manic surface overlaying an introverted core.



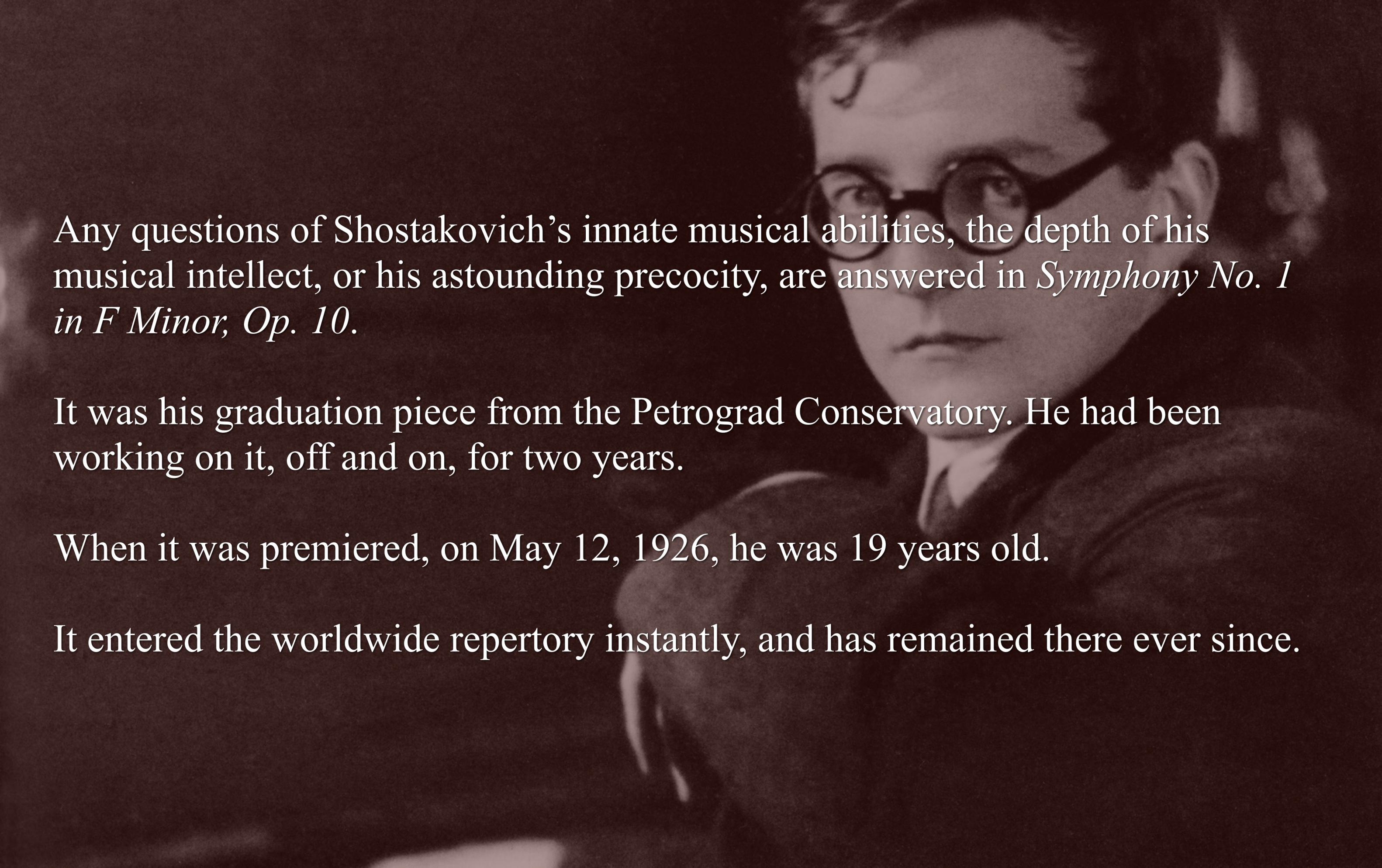
“Dmitri Shostakovich made a nerve-wracking first impression. His face was ashen in hue, his eyes darting furtively behind thick glasses. His body constantly twitched, as if something were struggling to escape from it. When he talked, his speech doubled back on itself, phrases repeating themselves like anxious mantras. In intimate gatherings, with the aid of a favorite vodka, Shostakovich showed another side of his personality—antic, caustic, passionate. He was capable of puppy-dog-like tenderness and also of forbidding anger.”

—Alex Ross, *The Rest is Noise*



“It seemed to you that he is ‘frail, fragile, withdrawn, an infinitely direct, pure child’. That is so. But if it were only so, then great art (as with him) would never be obtained. He is exactly what you say he is, plus something else—he is hard, acid, extremely intelligent, strong perhaps, despotic, and not altogether good-natured (although cerebrally good-natured) ... In him, there are great contradictions. In him, one quality obliterates the other. It is conflict in the highest degree. It is almost a catastrophe.”

—Mikhail Zoshchenko, quoted in Laurel Fay, *Shostakovich: a Life*

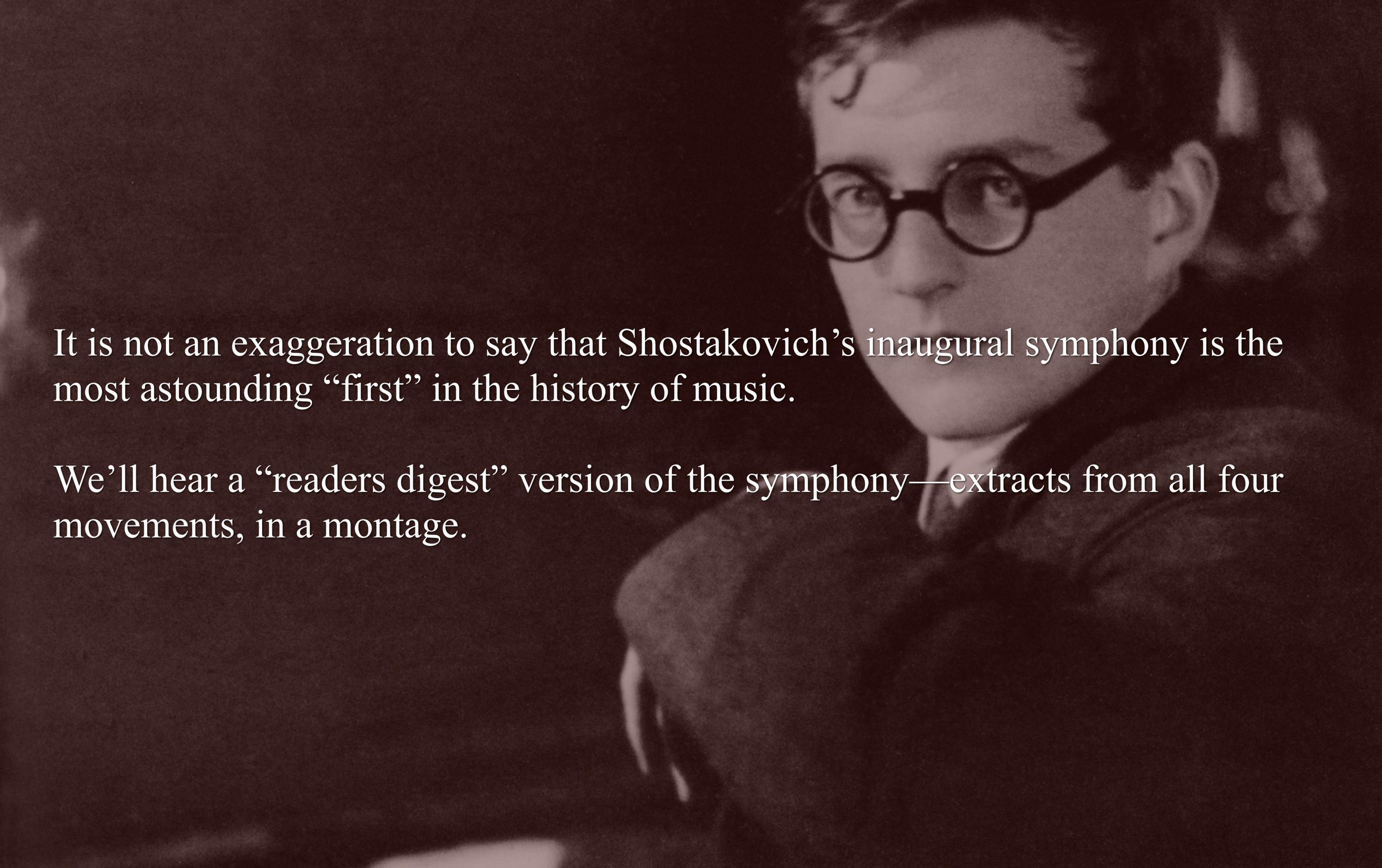


Any questions of Shostakovich's innate musical abilities, the depth of his musical intellect, or his astounding precocity, are answered in *Symphony No. 1 in F Minor, Op. 10*.

It was his graduation piece from the Petrograd Conservatory. He had been working on it, off and on, for two years.

When it was premiered, on May 12, 1926, he was 19 years old.

It entered the worldwide repertory instantly, and has remained there ever since.



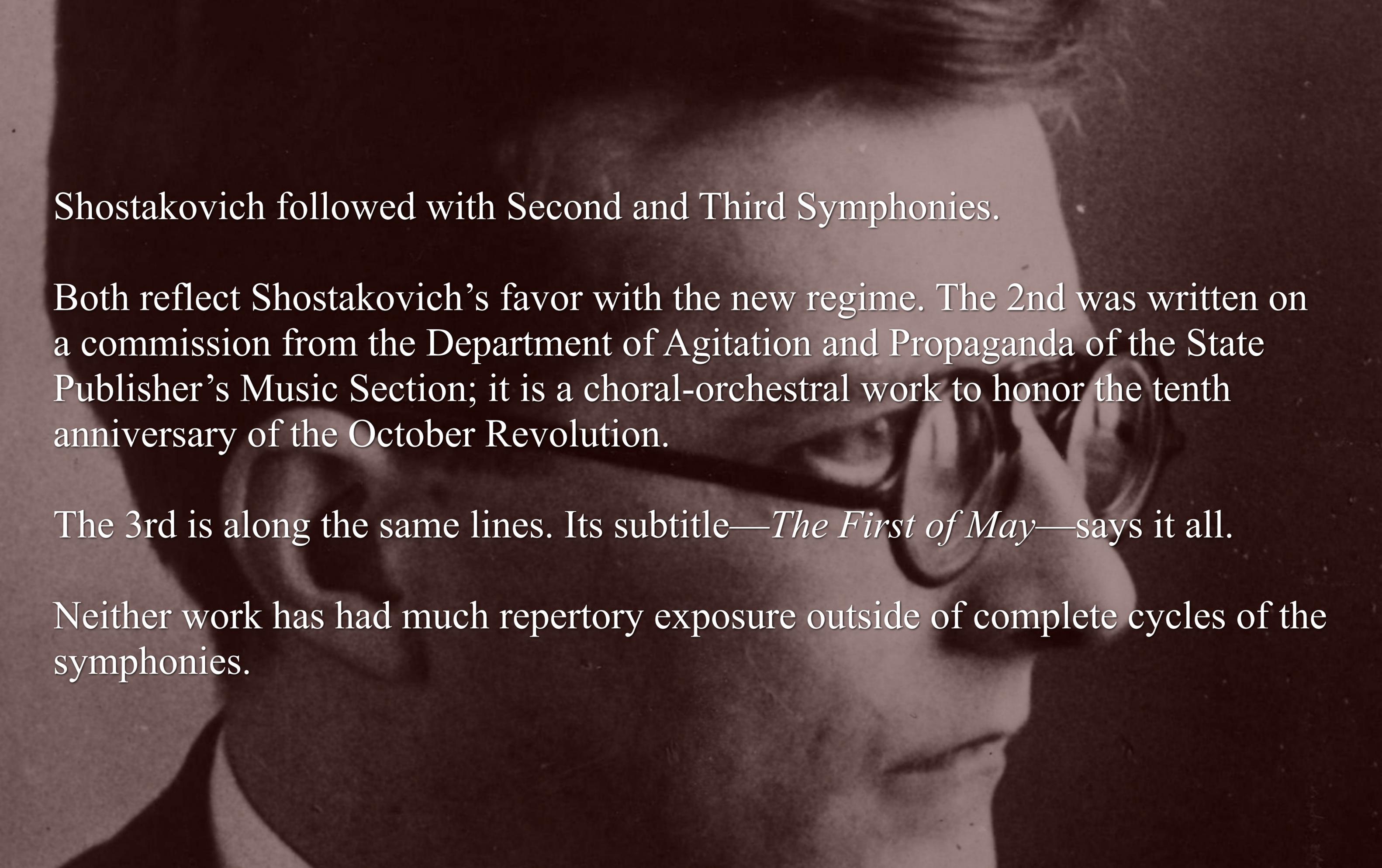
It is not an exaggeration to say that Shostakovich's inaugural symphony is the most astounding "first" in the history of music.

We'll hear a "readers digest" version of the symphony—extracts from all four movements, in a montage.



Symphony No. 1 in F Minor, Op. 10

Mark Wigglesworth / Netherlands Radio Symphony



Shostakovich followed with Second and Third Symphonies.

Both reflect Shostakovich's favor with the new regime. The 2nd was written on a commission from the Department of Agitation and Propaganda of the State Publisher's Music Section; it is a choral-orchestral work to honor the tenth anniversary of the October Revolution.

The 3rd is along the same lines. Its subtitle—*The First of May*—says it all.

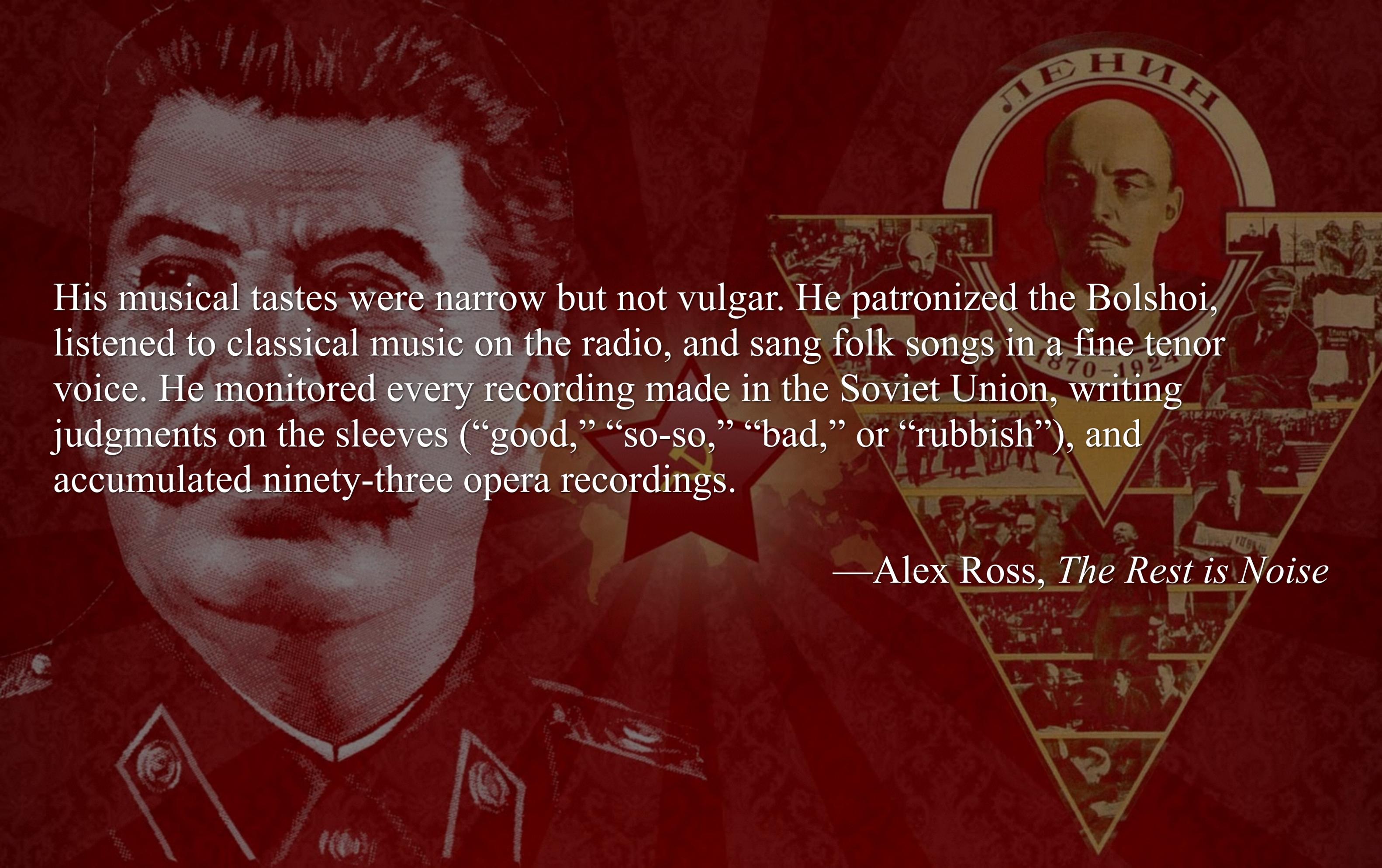
Neither work has had much repertory exposure outside of complete cycles of the symphonies.



Meanwhile, the Soviet Union had a new leader.

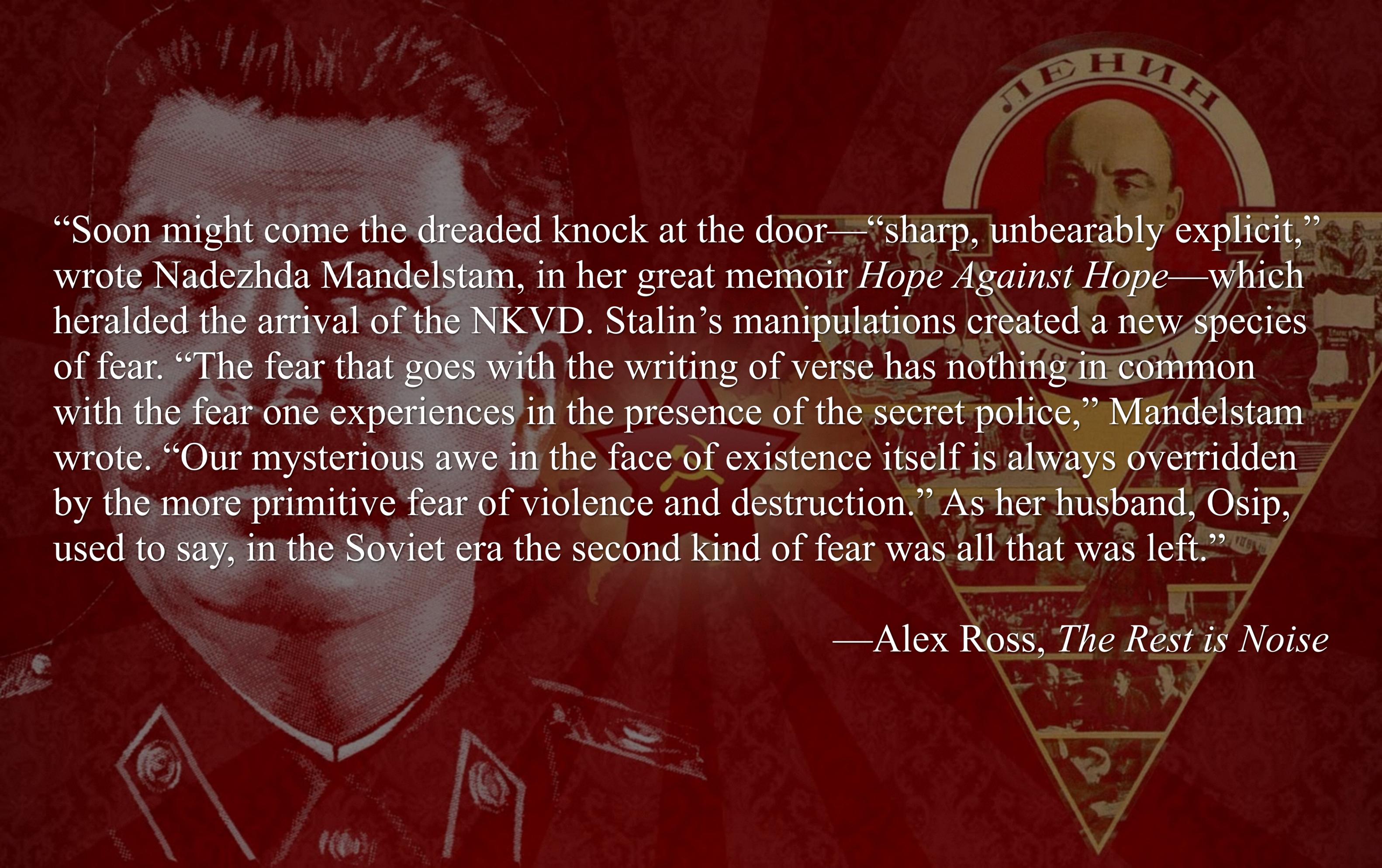
Joseph Stalin assumed power in 1929, and suddenly artists found themselves in a newly precarious position.





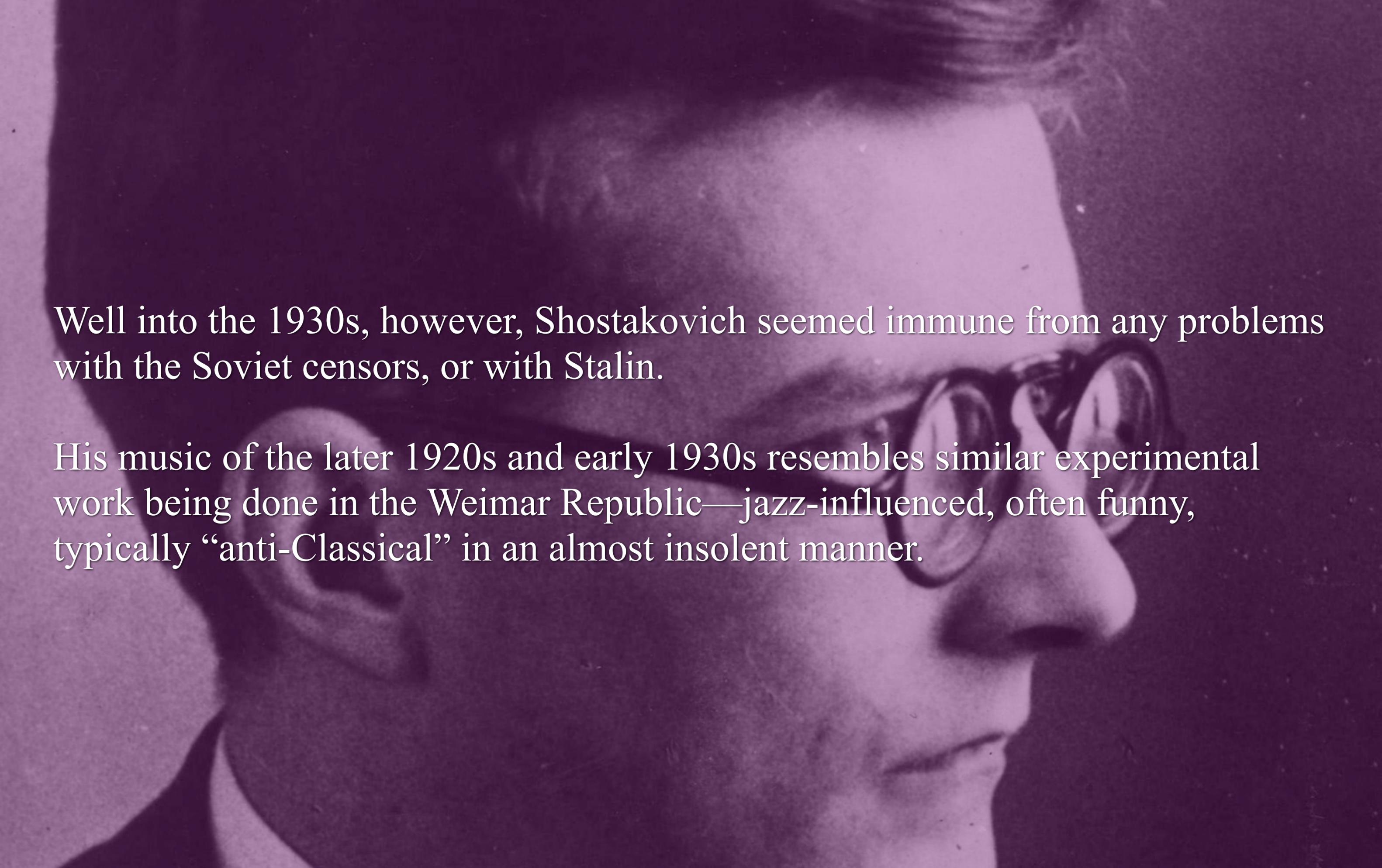
His musical tastes were narrow but not vulgar. He patronized the Bolshoi, listened to classical music on the radio, and sang folk songs in a fine tenor voice. He monitored every recording made in the Soviet Union, writing judgments on the sleeves (“good,” “so-so,” “bad,” or “rubbish”), and accumulated ninety-three opera recordings.

—Alex Ross, *The Rest is Noise*



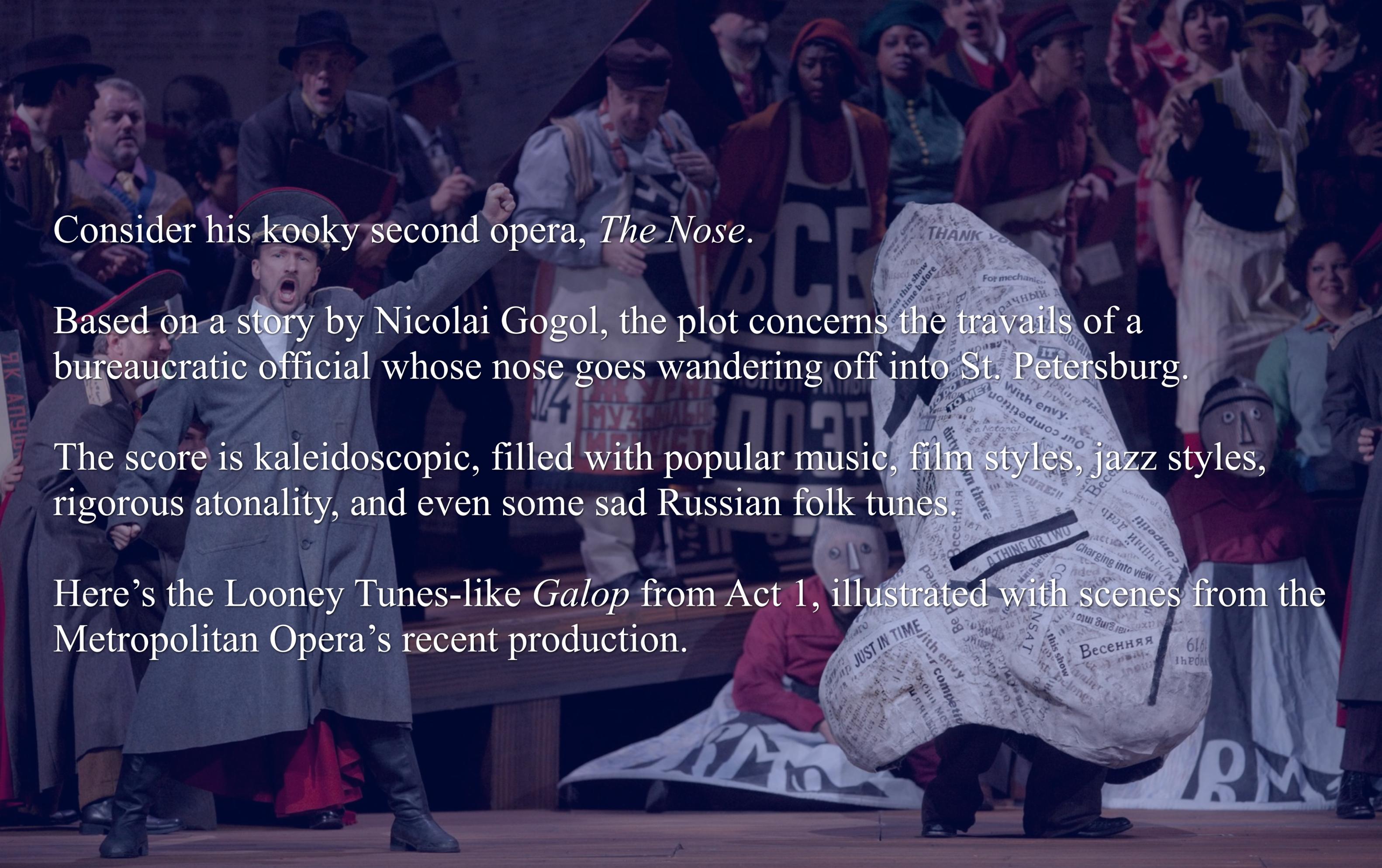
“Soon might come the dreaded knock at the door—“sharp, unbearably explicit,” wrote Nadezhda Mandelstam, in her great memoir *Hope Against Hope*—which heralded the arrival of the NKVD. Stalin’s manipulations created a new species of fear. “The fear that goes with the writing of verse has nothing in common with the fear one experiences in the presence of the secret police,” Mandelstam wrote. “Our mysterious awe in the face of existence itself is always overridden by the more primitive fear of violence and destruction.” As her husband, Osip, used to say, in the Soviet era the second kind of fear was all that was left.”

—Alex Ross, *The Rest is Noise*



Well into the 1930s, however, Shostakovich seemed immune from any problems with the Soviet censors, or with Stalin.

His music of the later 1920s and early 1930s resembles similar experimental work being done in the Weimar Republic—jazz-influenced, often funny, typically “anti-Classical” in an almost insolent manner.



Consider his kooky second opera, *The Nose*.

Based on a story by Nicolai Gogol, the plot concerns the travails of a bureaucratic official whose nose goes wandering off into St. Petersburg.

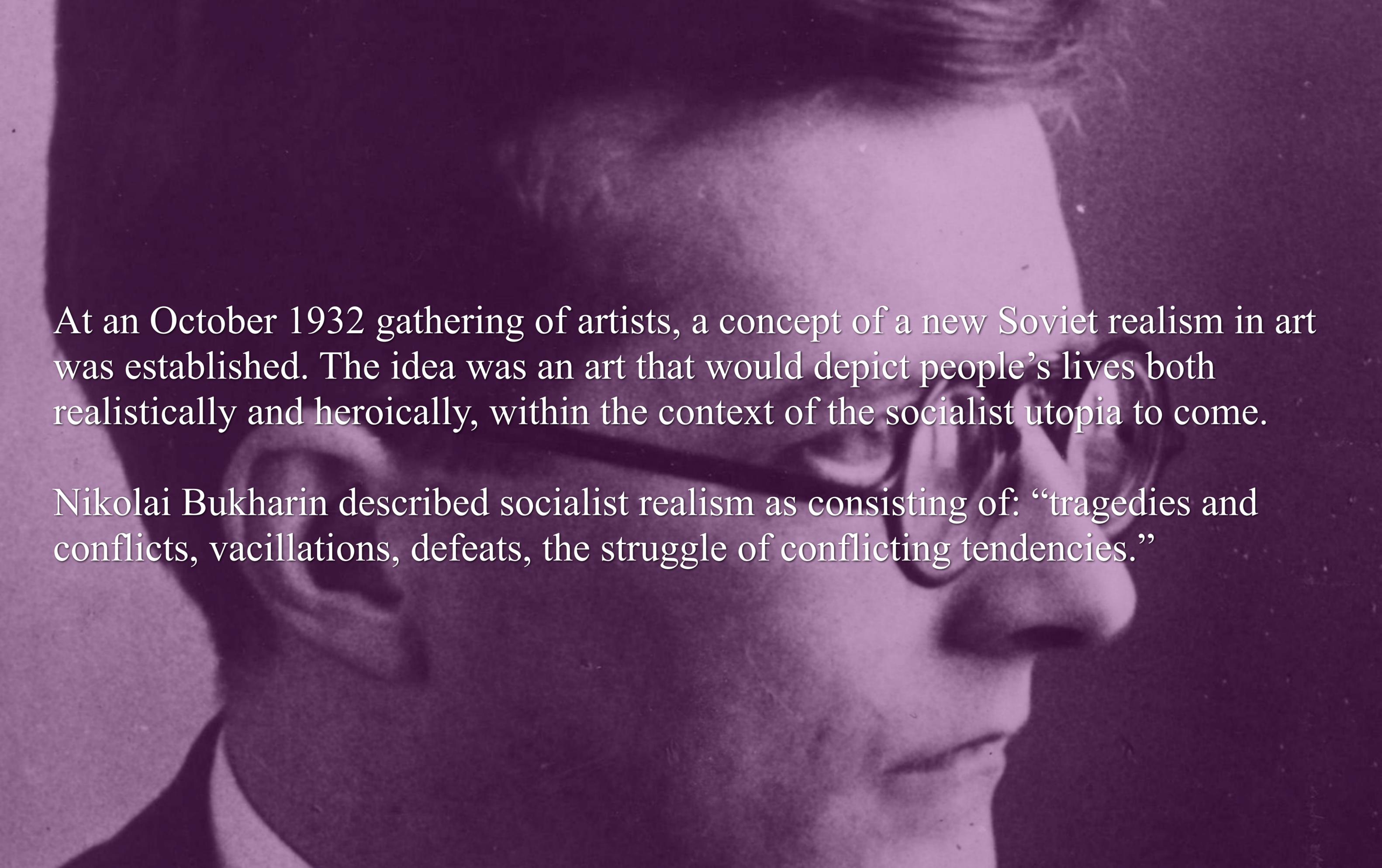
The score is kaleidoscopic, filled with popular music, film styles, jazz styles, rigorous atonality, and even some sad Russian folk tunes.

Here's the Looney Tunes-like *Galop* from Act 1, illustrated with scenes from the Metropolitan Opera's recent production.



The Nose: Galop

Valery Gergiev / Mariinsky Theater Orchestra



At an October 1932 gathering of artists, a concept of a new Soviet realism in art was established. The idea was an art that would depict people's lives both realistically and heroically, within the context of the socialist utopia to come.

Nikolai Bukharin described socialist realism as consisting of: “tragedies and conflicts, vacillations, defeats, the struggle of conflicting tendencies.”



Brava N

Thus Shostakovich arrived at the inspiration for *Lady Macbeth of Mtsensk*, which tells of a strong-willed woman in a droopy provincial town in Russia. Bored and fretful, Katerina gets into an extra-martial affair and joins with her lover in murdering both her husband and her father-in-law.

Eventually she is arrested and meets her end in a Siberian prison camp.



Lady Macbeth of Mtsensk

Eva-Maria Westbroek (Katrina) / Christopher Ventris (Sergei) / Mariss Jansons / Concertgebouw Orchestra



Brava NY

Act 1, Scene Three

Sergei—a clerk —has quickly spotted Katerina as a target for seduction. He enters her bedroom on a transparent pretext and what starts out as an attempted rape turns into a heated sexual encounter.



Brava N

Lady Macbeth had been playing for almost two years by January 26, 1936 when Joseph Stalin went to the Bolshoi Theater in Moscow for the performance.

Stalin walked out before it was over, taking his retinue with him.

Цена № в Москве 60 коп.
На станц. ж. д. и в провинции 70 к.

Российская Коммунистич

ПРАВДА

On January 28, an article titled “Muddle Instead of Music” appeared in *Pravda*.

“From the very first moment of the opera the listener is flabbergasted by the deliberately dissonant, muddled stream of sounds. Snatches of melody, embryos of a musical phrase drown, struggle free and disappear again in the din, the grinding, the squealing ... This is a game ... that may end very badly.”

Московский Губернский Комитет Р. К. П. В четверг, 29 мая, очередное заседание Губернского Комитета. Присутствие всех обязательно.

Привет венгерским рабочим*).

Товарищи! Бести, которые мы познаем от венгерских советских деятелей, заводяют нас восторгом и радостью, на все завоевания культуры, науки, техники капитализма, его пролетарская близость к психологии всякого трудящегося его авторитарный характер, расщепленности

гала им не помогать внутренней и внешней контр-революции, не наносить предательского удара в спину власти Советов, не расстраивать рядов Красной армии. Советская власть и при легализации меньшевиков, и при легализации эсеров совершенно определенно, ясно, точно заявила, что против эсеров-меньшевистских утти, продолжающих старую социал-колчаковскую политику, всесторонняя борьба будет продолжаться.

Меньшевики и эсеры знали об этом

РЕДАКЦИЯ
П
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Общ
ЕЖ

Цена № в Москве 60 коп.
На станд. ж. д. и в провинции 70 к.

Российская Коммунистич

ПРАВДА

“It would take some time for the full meaning and ramifications ... to sink in. Over the succeeding days and months the shock waves rippled steadily outward in Soviet culture. For Shostakovich, who was cast down overnight from the summit as the brightest star among young Soviet composers to the abyss as a pernicious purveyor of cultural depravity, things would never again be the same.”

Московский Губернский Комитет Р. К. П. В четверг, 29 мая, очередное заседание Губернского Комитета. Присутствие всех обязательно.

—Laurel Fay, *Shostakovich: A Lifge*

Привет венгерским рабочим*)

Товарищи! Бести, которые мы познаем от венгерских советских деятелей, заводяют нас восторгом и радостью. на все завоевания культуры, науки, техники капитализма, его пролетарская близость к психологии всякого трудящегося его авторитарный характер, расщепленности

гала им не помогать внутренней и внешней контр-революции, но в то же время не расстраивать рядов Красной армии. Советская власть и при легализации меньшевиков, и при легализации эсеров совершенно определенно, ясно, точно заявила, что против эсеров-меньшевистских утлий, продолжающих старую социал-колчаковскую политику, всесторонняя борьба будет продолжаться. Меншевики и эсеры знали об этом



“The climate in Stalin’s domain was turning chillier by the day; the commencement of the show trials in August signaled that the campaign against “formalism” in the arts was widening into purges and terror. Many close to Shostakovich or favorable to his cause were disappearing ... Shostakovich’s brother-in-law, mother-in-law, sister, and uncle were all imprisoned at around this time.

Of the artists and intellectuals who were pilloried as “enemies of the people” in the late thirties—Bukharin, Meyerhold, Mandelstam, Babel—Shostakovich was one of the few who lived to tell the tale.”

—Alex Ross, *The Rest is Noise*



In the wake of the *Pravda* article—and the torrent of negative, abusive, and scathing articles that followed throughout the Soviet press—Shostakovich was compelled to withdraw his Fourth Symphony, which the Leningrad Philharmonic had begun rehearsing in the autumn of 1936.

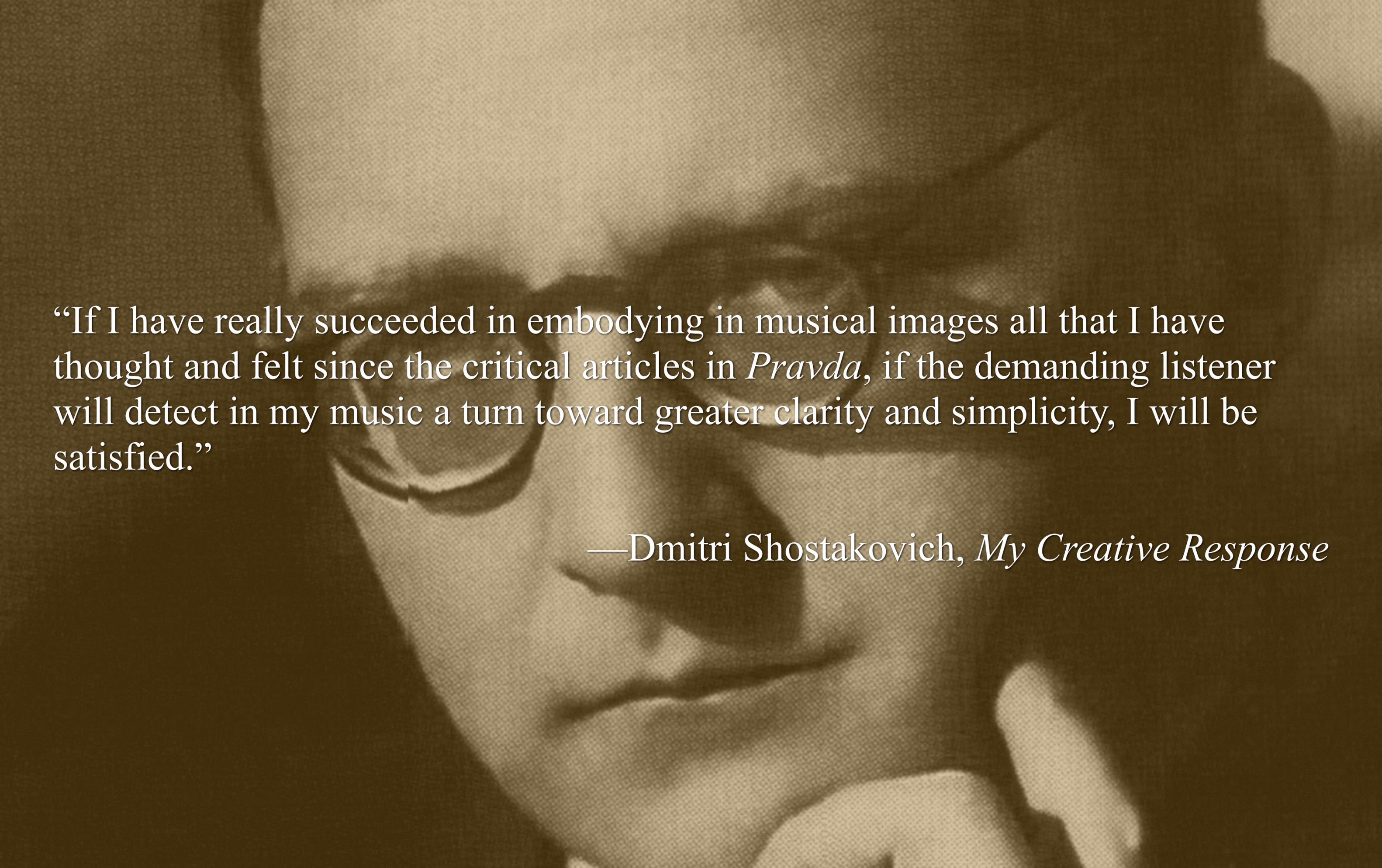
The work was not given its premiere until 1961.



No new works of any substance followed for almost two years.

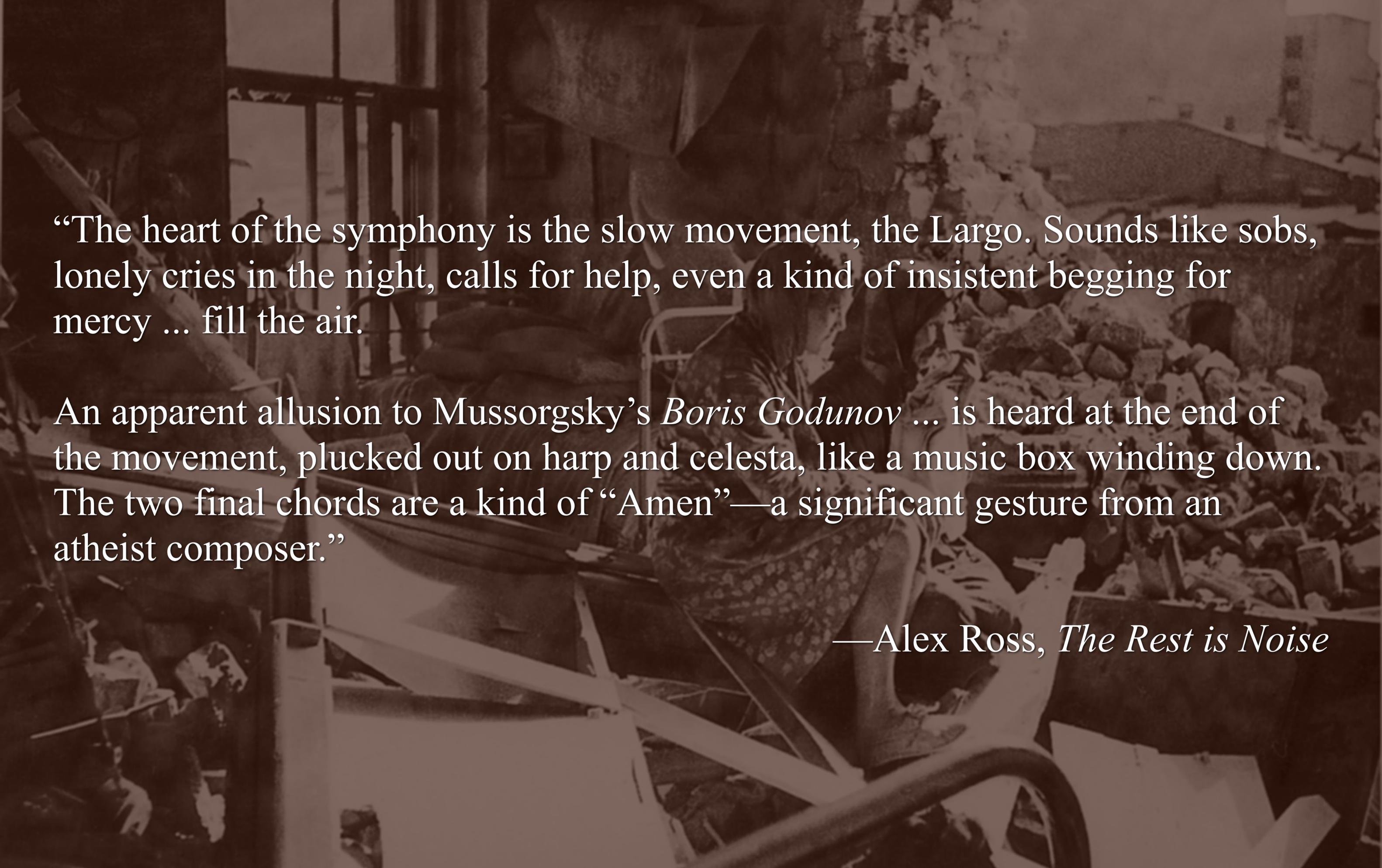


Then on November 21, 1937 in the Great Hall of the Leningrad Philharmonic, Shostakovich's Fifth Symphony received its premiere.



“If I have really succeeded in embodying in musical images all that I have thought and felt since the critical articles in *Pravda*, if the demanding listener will detect in my music a turn toward greater clarity and simplicity, I will be satisfied.”

—Dmitri Shostakovich, *My Creative Response*



“The heart of the symphony is the slow movement, the Largo. Sounds like sobs, lonely cries in the night, calls for help, even a kind of insistent begging for mercy ... fill the air.

An apparent allusion to Mussorgsky’s *Boris Godunov* ... is heard at the end of the movement, plucked out on harp and celesta, like a music box winding down. The two final chords are a kind of “Amen”—a significant gesture from an atheist composer.”

—Alex Ross, *The Rest is Noise*





Symphony No. 5 in D Minor: IV

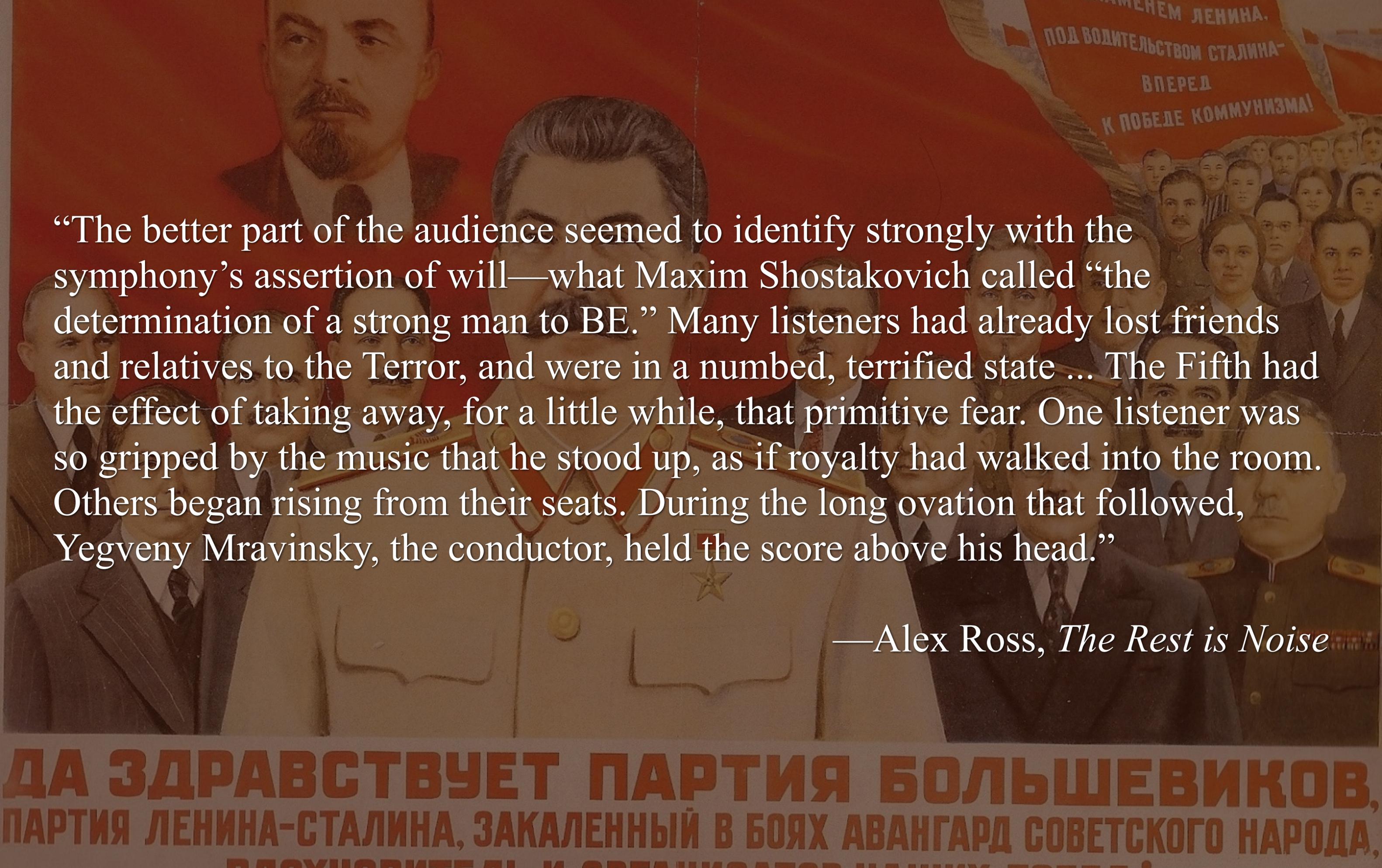
Michael Tilson Thomas / San Francisco Symphony



“The brutalism of the Finale caused confusion and consternation amongst listeners. Some opponents of Stalin’s regime took it as a sign that Shostakovich had joined the ranks of the conformists ... On the other side, some officials believed that Shostakovich was defying *Pravda*’s wise counsel.”

—Alex Ross, *The Rest is Noise*

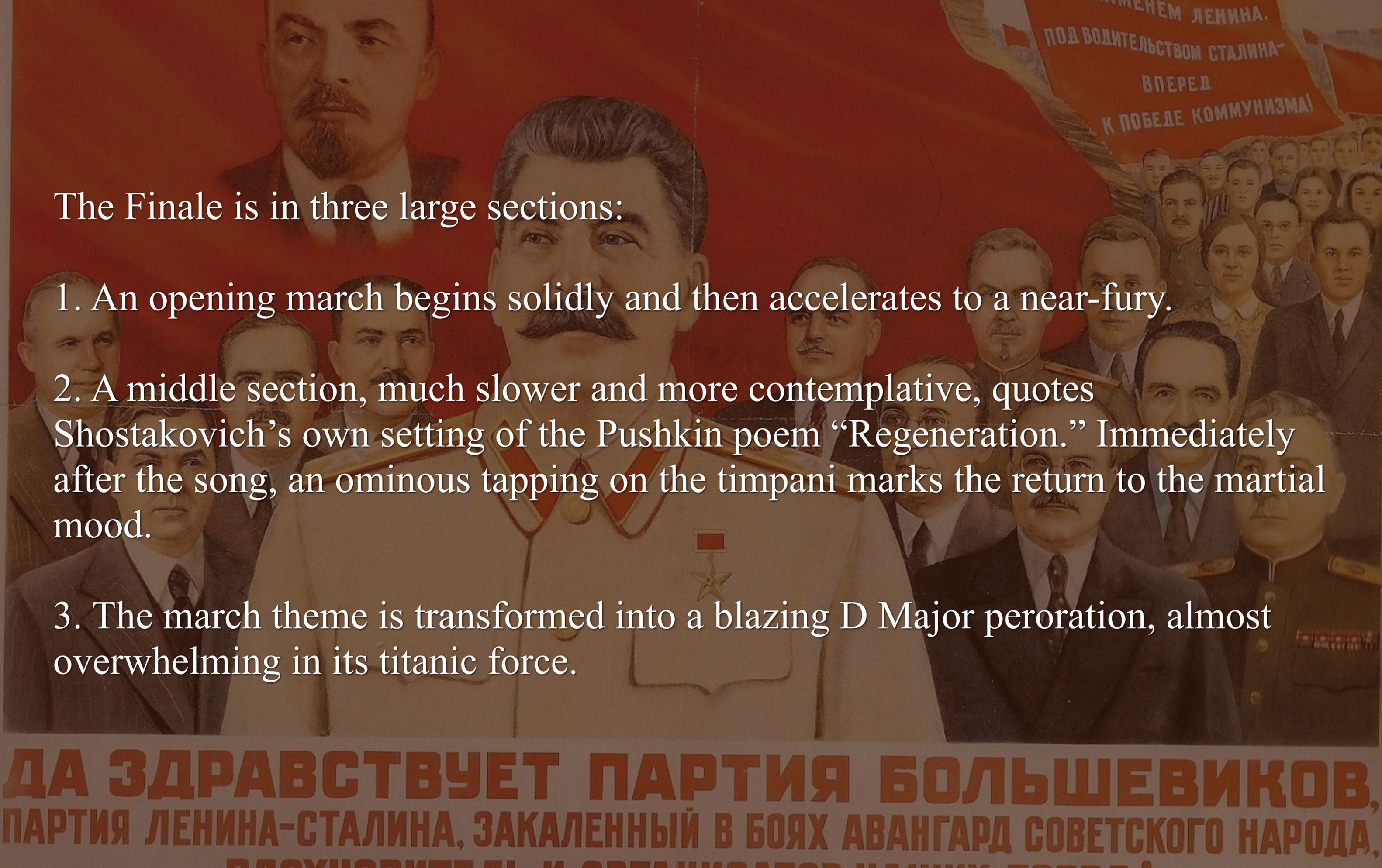
**ДА ЗДРАВСТВУЕТ ПАРТИЯ БОЛЬШЕВИКОВ,
ПАРТИЯ ЛЕНИНА-СТАЛИНА, ЗАКАЛЕННЫЙ В БОЯХ АВАНГАРД СОВЕТСКОГО НАРОДА,
ВОДУШНИК И ОРГАНИЗАТОР НАШЕЙ ЖИЗНИ!**



“The better part of the audience seemed to identify strongly with the symphony’s assertion of will—what Maxim Shostakovich called “the determination of a strong man to BE.” Many listeners had already lost friends and relatives to the Terror, and were in a numbed, terrified state ... The Fifth had the effect of taking away, for a little while, that primitive fear. One listener was so gripped by the music that he stood up, as if royalty had walked into the room. Others began rising from their seats. During the long ovation that followed, Yegveny Mravinsky, the conductor, held the score above his head.”

—Alex Ross, *The Rest is Noise*

**ДА ЗДРАВСТВУЕТ ПАРТИЯ БОЛЬШЕВИКОВ,
ПАРТИЯ ЛЕНИНА-СТАЛИНА, ЗАКАЛЕННЫЙ В БОЯХ АВАНГАРД СОВЕТСКОГО НАРОДА,
ВОДУШНИК И ОРГАНИЗАТОР НАШЕЙ ГОСУДАРСТВЕННОЙ И КУЛЬТУРНОЙ ЖИЗНИ!**



The Finale is in three large sections:

1. An opening march begins solidly and then accelerates to a near-fury.

2. A middle section, much slower and more contemplative, quotes Shostakovich's own setting of the Pushkin poem "Regeneration." Immediately after the song, an ominous tapping on the timpani marks the return to the martial mood.

3. The march theme is transformed into a blazing D Major peroration, almost overwhelming in its titanic force.



Soviet propaganda posters accompany the performance, which is without any labels—they're really not necessary.

The posters span Soviet life from the 1930s to the 1960s; some celebrate the space program.

**ДА ЗДРАВСТВУЕТ ПАРТИЯ БОЛЬШЕВИКОВ,
ПАРТИЯ ЛЕНИНА-СТАЛИНА, ЗАКАЛЕННЫЙ В БОЯХ АВАНГАРД СОВЕТСКОГО НАРОДА,
ВОДУШНИК И ОРГАНИЗАТОР НАШИХ ПОБЕД!**

