Personal connections and introductory observations:

- We sometimes think of the composers as eons away from us, even the “modern ones”, but Shostakovich and my mother were born in the same year 1906 and he lived a composed through the mid-1970’s – after the Beatles era of the 1960’s.
- Talk about sources – Wide variety on line. I drew mostly on the first of the multiple Wikipedia entries and also on an undergraduate thesis that dealt with disparate ideas about Shos. political opinions as they were expressed in his music. and the book by Machlis on Contemporary Music that was recommended for the class’ reading.

Socialist Realism and Soviet Music: The Case of Dmitri Shostakovich
In Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for Graduation Honors
Michael Robert Tirman
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- I opened with the cartoon video – 1939 - This is Shostokovich’s music! Think of it when you are at the Philharmonic listening to the monumental 5th Symphony. Shostakovich, along with many other composers of the time wrote scores for films and cartoons – both for money and to avoid political controversy.
- See the cartoon at this link:
  Hey, Kids, It's Vinny Pookh Time! Cartoon Music From The U.S.S.R. ...

- Another video is on YouTube
"Dancing Dolls" - music Shostakovich cartoon - YouTube
  Feb 11, 2014 ... "Dancing Dolls" - an animated film on the music of Dmitri Shostakovich Tale of how toys come to entertain a sick girl. Dolls became her dance, ... http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=7iyq6Bmh4zU - 131k -

Biography: Now to the story of the composer:

- Shostakovich was born in St. Petersburg to parents, who were in the revolutionary underground and supported the 1917 Revolution. His mother was a professional pianist and he took lessons with her from the age of 8.
- A prodigy he started at the St Petersburg Conservatory at age 13 and studied with disciples of Rimsky-Korsakov. RK influenced Stravinsky who in turn influenced Shostakovich. He wrote his first symphony in 1925 at age 19 as graduation requirement. It made him famous.
- Shostakovich’s Enormous Output
  o 15 symphonies and six concerti.
  o chamber music-15 string quartets, a piano quintet, two piano trios, and two pieces for string octet.
  o piano - two solo sonatas, an early set of preludes, and a later set of 24 preludes and fugues.
three operas, several song cycles, ballets, and a substantial quantity of film music; music for cartoons

- After graduation he worked as a pianist and a composer. At that time in Russia, there was room for young, rising composers in Russia since Rachmaninoff, Stravinsky and others left Russia after the Revolution.

**Married Life:**
Let me take a brief interruption in the musical history to mention his marital and extra-curricular History: Married three times.

- His first wife was a physicist. They divorced 1935, but then remarried when Nina became pregnant with their first child. Galina was born in 1936 and Maxim in 1938. I noticed that he wrote the Fifth symphony in 1937 while he had a one year old and a pregnant wife. She died in 1954.
- Later, during the 1940s and fifties, Shostakovich had close relationships with two of his female pupils. He married his second wife a Komsomol activist, in 1956; the couple divorced three years later.
- In 1962 he married Irina Supinskaya. In a letter to a friend, he wrote "her only defect is that she is 27 years old. In all other respects she is splendid: clever, cheerful, straightforward and very likeable. This was the marriage that worked.

Back to the music:
Symphonies 2 and 3 followed the blockbuster First Symphony, but they weren’t particularly well received.

**A Turning Point**
Now comes the interesting part and a turning point in his career:

- Shostakovich wrote *Lady Macbeth of Mzensk* in 1934, a highly successful opera that ran for two years in Leningrad. It was filed with sex, adultery and violence. However, in 1936, an article in Pravda entitled "Muddle Instead of Music" decried the opera because it violated the Soviet government’s cultural policy. The policy, known as Socialist Realism, had a stranglehold on art, literature and music to the degree that artists who violated its tenets were exiled to the Gulag or even executed.
- Socialist Realism rejected what was called “formalism” - the absence of regularly perceived patterns in music. This means that to a listener’s ear, formalist music would be difficult to understand because it included uncommon harmonic patterns or instrumentation choices. To me that sounds like a fancy way of rejecting “modern music.”
- By contrast, Socialist Realism championed music that was accessible to all the people, was optimistic, featured folk melodies and had tunes you could whistle. Stalin wanted music and art that supported feelings of pride and nationalist loyalty toward the motherland.
- The Pravda article condemned Lady Macbeth as formalist, "coarse, primitive and vulgar". Two days before the article appeared a friend advised Shos. to attend the Bolshoi Theatre production of Lady Macbeth. When he arrived, he saw that Joseph Stalin and the Politburo were there. He watched Stalin shudder every time the brass and percussion played too loudly. Shostakovich was "white as a sheet" when he went to take his bow after the third act.
- Shostakovich fell from official favor. Consequently, his commissions began to fall off, and his income fell by about three quarters.
The Great Terror
- Shostakovich was not alone in being the target of government oppression. 1936 marked the beginning of the Great Terror, in which many of the composer's friends and relatives were imprisoned or killed: these included his patron Marshal Tukhachevsky (shot months after his arrest); his brother-in-law Vsevolod Frederiks his close friend Nikolai Zhilyayev (a musicologist who had taught Tukhachevsky; shot shortly after his arrest); his mother-in-law his friend the Marxist writer Galina Serebryakova (20 years in camps); his uncle Maxim Kostrykin (died); and his colleagues Boris Kornilov and Adrian Piotrovsky (executed).[21] His only consolation in this period was the birth of his daughter Galina in 1936; his son Maxim was born two years later.
- Shostakovich was appropriately frightened. He withdrew his Fourth Symphony before its first performance because he feared it would get him into more trouble since it was influenced by Mahler. He thought long and hard about the criticism he had received. That is when began to work on the 5th, that we shall hear on April 12th.

The 5th Symphony:
- The 5th Symphony was premiered in 1937, the same year that Shostakovich began teaching composition at the conservatory.
- Here is what Shostakovich wrote across the first page of the score: “Creative reply of a Soviet artist to just criticism”. Pravda praised the 5th. He was out of the doghouse at least for a while.
- The quote sounds as if Shostakovich accepted the criticism, but modern critics have disagreed about that.
- Some say critics said the symphony was written to conform to the dictates of Socialist Realism – music that is accessible to the “people”, form and harmonies that can be comprehended easily, emotions that are positive rather than depressed. They say that Shostakovich was able to prove to his country that he cared about the people, and wanted to compose music that was reflective of the needs of the Soviet Union.
- Others say that Shostakovich used this symphony to criticize the excesses of the Soviet regime and to lament the fate of those who had suffered under it.
- Solomon Volkov’s book Testimony is the origin of this second view. Volkov was a journalist who interviewed Shos. extensively. His writings are very controversial among Shos. scholars. In Testimony, Shos.is quoted as saying, “The rejoicing is forced, created under threat, as in Boris Godunov. It’s as if someone were beating you with a stick and saying, „Your business is rejoicing,” and you rise, shaky, and go marching off, muttering, „Our business is rejoicing, our business is rejoicing.”
- According to Volkov, this statement of the composer suggests that the Fifth is meant to be more of a challenge to Soviet authority rather than the apology the state wanted. Several Shostakovich scholars hypothesized that during the Largo movement, the oboe melody is representative of the innocent cries of the people abused by Stalin in the1930”s.

After the 5th Symphony
- Shostakovich gained great popularity in the US during WWII when the US and Russia were allies and when the Russians suffered greatly.
- His 7th Symphony – the Leningrad - was introduced by Toscanini in the US and was played
all over this country. That year he was even on the cover of Time magazine.

- The 7th was assumed to be a patriotic statement – commemorating the tremendous resistance that that city put up against the German invasion in 1942. However, Volkov says it was critical of the regime. Volkov: “The Leningrad Shostakovich reportedly had in mind was not the one that withstood the German siege. Rather, it was the one "that Stalin destroyed and Hitler merely finished off."

**More trouble:**
- In 1948 Shostakovich along with many other composers were again denounced for formalism and it was demanded that they only write "proletarian" music, or music for the masses. The accused composers, including Shostakovich, were summoned to the Central Committee to make public apologies.
- Shostakovich made a statement supporting the government’s ”stern but paternal solicitude for us Soviet artists,” and urged “work – arduous creative, joyous work on new compositions that will find their path to the heart of the Soviet people – This will be a fitting response to the Resolution of the Central Committee.”
- Most of Shostakovich's works were banned, and his family had privileges withdrawn. It was reported that at this time "he waited for his arrest at night out on the landing by the lift, so that at least his family wouldn't be disturbed."
- Nonetheless, he continued to be a loyal citizen. He was one of the few leading artists who never left Russia – after all Stravinsky, Prokofieff, Diaghilev, Rachmaninoff and many more were emigres.
- He was rehabilitated in 1949 because Stalin wanted to send artistic representation to a cultural conference in NY. However, he was forced to make statements condemning Stravinsky’s writing and saying other things that he didn’t believe. His relationship with Stravinsky was strained before that. "Stravinsky the composer I worship. Stravinsky the thinker I despise."
- Stalin's death in 1953 was the biggest step towards Shostakovich's rehabilitation as a creative artist. He wrote the Tenth Symphony, whose intent is still being debated. Volkov said the violent second movement is intended as a musical portrait of Stalin himself. The Symphony ranks alongside the Fifth and Seventh as one of his most popular works.

**Post Stalin Era:**
- There were exuberant moments in Shostakovich’s life. His music was played as the theme music for the 1980 summer Olympics and another composition was played during the torch lighting at the 2004 summer Olympics in Athens.
- In the post Stalin era he did make political statements, both through his music and with other protesters.
  - In his Thirteenth Symphony in 1962 Shostakovich incorporated poems by Yevgeny Yevtushenko, which commemorates a massacre of 33,771 Ukrainian Jews during the Second World War. Opinions are divided how great a risk this was: the poem had been published in Soviet media, and was not banned, but it remained controversial. Yevtushenko was forced to publish a statement saying that Russians and gypsies were also murdered by the Nazis at Babi Yar.
  - In 1965 Shostakovich joined other artist and intellectuals in defense of poet Joseph Brodsky, who was sentenced to five years of exile and hard labor. The sentence was commuted, and Brodsky returned to Leningrad. Shostakovich also joined distinguished
signed a letter to Leonid Brezhnev asking not to rehabilitate Stalin

- In later life, Shostakovich suffered from chronic ill health, but he resisted giving up cigarettes and vodka. Beginning in 1958 he suffered from a condition that particularly affected his right hand and forced him to give up piano playing. He also suffered heart attacks the following year and again in 1971, and several falls in which he broke both his legs; in 1967 he wrote in a letter: "Target achieved so far: 75% (right leg broken, left leg broken, right hand defective). All I need to do now is wreck the left hand and then 100% of my extremities will be out of order." I guess he had a sense of humor.
- The Fourteenth Symphony of 1969 (a song cycle was based on poems with the theme of death, a theme which preoccupied him in his later years) featured twelve-tone themes and dense polyphony, a far cry from his earlier, politically correct compositions.

**Final years:**
- Shostakovich died of lung cancer on 9 August 1975
- He was survived by his third wife, Irina; his daughter, Galina; and his son, Maxim, a pianist and conductor who was the first performer of some of his father's works.
- Shostakovich's music shows the influence of many of the composers he most admired: Bach in his fugues and passacaglias; Beethoven in the late quartets; Mahler in the symphonies and Berg in his use of musical codes and quotations. Among Russian composers, he particularly admired Modest Mussorgsky. The influence of Russian church and folk music is very evident in his works for unaccompanied choir written in the 1950s.

**Conclusion:**
To me Shostakovich seemed like a trapped man, whose only wish was to be left alone, to the peace of his own art and to the tragic destiny to which he, like most of his countrymen, has been forced to resign himself.

_Nicholas Nabokov on meeting Shostakovich in 1949 in New York_
Source: N. Nabokov, *Old Friends*

I did not include the Nabokov quote in my oral presentation. This transcript has been slightly altered from the talk.