



DMITRI SHOSTAKOVICH
Fire Warden, Composer, Soccer Fan

SHOSTAKOVICH AND THE GUNS

His New Symphony Is "A Musical Interpretation of Russia At War"

Condensed from an article in
"Time"

On a recent Sunday afternoon the U.S. heard the proof of his assertion, but the proof was already 25 years old: Blood flowed like water and froze like ice on the steps of Petrograd's Winter Palace. Over bodies and frozen blood the Red Guards swept through the barricaded doors. By the time the final echoes of that historic assault had died, the last vestiges of Russia's old order had (in the Bolshevik phrase) been thrown on "the garbage heap of history." Russia of the Tsars, of Byzantine ritual, of mad monks

and Cossack whips, Russia of fatalistic chaos and fatalistic inaction, was now to be kneaded with the butts of rifles into the Russia of the proletariat, of modern industry, of determined socialistic dictatorship. The time was November, 1917, Year One of the Russian Revolution.

It was the year eleven in the life of a pale, slight, impressionable little bourgeois boy who clung to a servant's hand in the battle-littered streets of Petrograd. Said the servant: "This is the revolution, Mitya." Young Dmitri Dmitrievich Shostakovich only stared and clutched the servant's apron. But what he saw and heard he pondered in his precocious head.

And on a recent Sunday, a special NBC symphony orchestra under Toscanini gave the Western Hemisphere its first chance to hear what Shostakovich's Marxist muse, now 25 years older, has to say in his *Seventh Symphony*, his biggest, most ambitious orchestral work to date—the work that he wrote last year between tours of duty digging trenches in the outskirts of Leningrad and fire-watching on the roof of the Conservatory. It had already been heard by 5,000 enthusiastic listeners in the Royal Albert Hall, London.

Not since the first Manhattan performances of *Parsifal* (in 1903) had there been such a buzz of American anticipation over a piece of music. Toscanini had won the right to conduct it

after a polite battle royal with Leopold Stokowski, Artur Rodzinski, and Serge Koussevitzky.

Two months ago a little tin box, no more than five inches around, arrived in the U.S. In it were 100 feet of micro-film—the photographed score of the *Seventh Symphony*. It had been carried by 'plane from Kuibyshev to Teheran, by car from Teheran to Cairo, by 'plane from Cairo to New York.

The Music Described

Written for a mammoth orchestra, Shostakovich's *Seventh*, though it is no blatant battle piece, is a musical interpretation of Russia at war. In the strict sense, it is less a symphony than a symphonic suite. Like a great wounded snake, dragging its slow length, it uncoils for 80 minutes from the orchestra. There is little development of its bold, bald, four-square themes. There is no effort to

(Continued on next page)

WHEN guns speak, the muses keep silent, says an old Russian proverb. Last winter, as he listened to the roar of German artillery and watched the sputtering of German incendiaries from the roof of Leningrad's Conservatory of Music, Fire Warden Shostakovich snapped: "Here the muses speak together with the guns."

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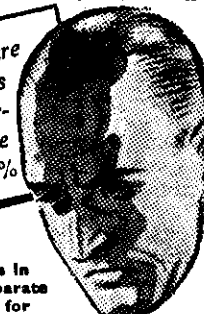
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