

Classical Music Appreciation—Intermediate

Session 5 notes

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Tonight's agenda

Historical Periods, Round 3

Shostakovich, Symphony No. 5 [Modern period]

Golland: Meiso [Modern period; brass band]

Debussy, La Mer [Modern period]

Instrumentation, Round 3

Barber, Summer Music [wind quintet]

Henry VIII, Rose without a Thorn [brass quintet]

Dmitri Shostakovich (1906-1975) Symphony No. 5

Modern period



Historical context

The fifth symphony is very much a product of the time and political climate in which Shostakovich lived. The composer had enjoyed great success and fame since the publication, at age 19, of his first symphony. However, his continuous development as a composer put him on a collision course with the Stalin regime. The inevitable meltdown occurred in January of 1936, when Shostakovich was 29. Joseph Stalin attended a performance of Shostakovich's opera *Lady Macbeth*, and conspicuously walked out in anger after the third act. There was plenty to upset him—such as sexual explicitness, police portrayed as buffoons, dissonant music—but we can only guess at what exactly pushed him over the edge. On Stalin's instigation, *Lady Macbeth* was denounced in *Pravda*, and coinciding with the beginning of the Great Terror, Shostakovich was declared an “enemy of the people.”

Shostakovich had largely mastered Soviet doublethink and doublespeak, and he pretended to reform with the 1937 fifth symphony. (We know it was a pretense from letters discovered since his death.) He labeled the symphony “A Soviet artist's response to just criticism.” Yet much later, in 1973 and near death, he wrote this of the symphony:

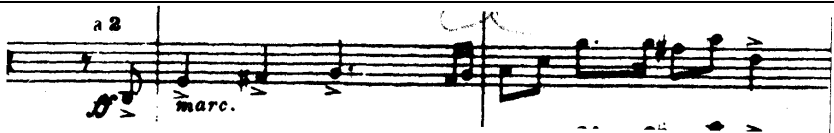

I think that it is clear to everyone what happens in the Fifth. The rejoicing is forced, created under threat, as in “Boris Godunov.” It’s as if someone were beating you with a stick and saying, “Your business is rejoicing, your business is rejoicing,” and you rise, shaky, and go marching off, muttering, “Our business is rejoicing, our business is rejoicing.” What kind of apotheosis is that? You have to be a complete oaf not to hear that.

Despite the conflicted thoughts and emotions behind it, the music of the symphony is of high artistic merit while being readily accessible, a combination that sustains the work as by far the most popular of Shostakovich’s entire output.

For more extensive insight into Shostakovich’s life and work, <http://www.therestisnoise.com/2004/05/shostakovich.html> is an excellent but fairly brief article by Alex Ross, music critic for *The New Yorker*.

The Music
Theme chart

First movement	
A ₁	

Fourth movement	
A	
B	

First movement

We'll outline the first movement in terms of sonata form, but the form is very free compared with a classical-era sonata-form movement. Shostakovich writes very extended themes that blur the tidy boundaries of the sonata-form template.

Russian musicians regard this movement as a “ballad” form, in which narrative sections alternate with lyrical and dramatic episodes. In light of what we have come to know about the composer, it is hardly unreasonable to interpret these episodes, with their strong contrasts, as representing a conflict between spontaneous impulse and external pressures.

<i>ref</i>	<i>time</i>	<i>structure</i>	<i>remarks</i>
[start]	0:00	exposition theme A ₁	this theme permeates the entire movement, forming the basis of much of the accompaniment to later material
[1]	0:29	theme A ₂	more lyrical in character
[9]	4:25	theme B	
[17]	7:40	development	
[32]	10:31	recapitulation A ₁	a very extended reprise of theme A ₁ , beginning in a different key from the exposition, and modulating as freely as a development section.
[36]	11:12	a huge climax	10 bars of forceful drama, announced in unison by most of the orchestra, punctuated by some equally forceful chords from the onlookers.
[39]+1	12:37	B	flute starts, and is echoed by horn in canon
[44]	14:38	coda	the basic rhythm of theme A ₁ underpins the coda throughout
[44]+1	14:43	A ₂ (inverted)	
[47]	15:59		notice the beautiful sound from the celesta on the rising chromatic runs

Second movement

Allegretto

[0:00] The second movement is basically in the form of a scherzo, although Shostakovich firmly eschews the constraints of the classical-era design by omitting the trio section in favor of a middle theme that retains much of the character of the opening. And even as

the middle theme tries to take over [57 1:45], the opening theme keeps butting in and arguing with it.

When the opening theme regains control [65 3:17], the bassoon and contra-bassoon take ownership for an extended display that rattles the rafters with the contra-bassoon's extremely low notes.

The oboe gives us a brief four-bar reprise of the middle theme [73+4 5:04] as we head into the short coda.

Third movement

Largo

Musically and emotionally, the slow movement is the nucleus of the work. Shostakovich himself was especially pleased with this movement. It is in large part elegiac and suggests itself as a night piece. Reflective lyricism expands into urgency and intensity, and eventually the character of a threnody, building to anguished protest and then, drained of passion, subsiding on a note of resignation.

The movement is built on just two thematic ideas, the first very extended as is typical of Shostakovich. Interestingly, the composer takes the unusual step of dividing the string section in an unconventional way: the violins are divided into three parts (two is usual); the violas into two (vs. the usual one), the cellos into two (vs. the usual one).

The following table calls out some highlights.

<i>ref</i>	<i>time</i>	<i>remarks</i>
[75]	0:00	
[79]	2:33	long flute solo/duet, accompanied only by harp
[81]+2	3:32	up to now everything has been calm and quiet. Now we embark on a gradual crescendo of surprising length and intensity that builds to a climax and then subsides.
[84]+1	5:10	the music has regained its earlier calm, and solo oboe announces a new theme
[87]	7:52	a surprisingly dark passage appears, with two clarinets (in their low register), bassoon and contra-bassoon the only participants. Low strings eventually join in, preserving the dark mood...
[88]+6	8:43	...but soon the violins get involved, adding a feeling of urgency and seriousness, as again we crescendo to...
[89]	9:05	...a big climax, that will be sustained for many a bar
[93]	11:25	calm has returned once more
[96]+1	13:25	a beautiful sound from unison harp and celesta

Fourth movement*Allegro non troppo*

At the symphony's premiere, Shostakovich described this movement as "the optimistic resolution of the tragically tense moments of the first movement." And indeed we can tell ourselves it sounds triumphant and rejoicing, but what are we to make of it in light of Shostakovich's later (1973) explanation? Also consider that Shostakovich's great friend Mstislav Rostropovich said of this movement "The end is irreparable tragedy. Stretched on the rack of the inquisition the victim still tries to smile in his pain. Anybody who thinks the finale is glorification is an idiot."

The structure of the movement is again rather free, but we'll map it in terms of sonata form, ill-fitting though that label is.

<i>ref</i>	<i>time</i>	<i>structure</i>	<i>remarks</i>
[97]	0:00	exposition A	announced by unison trumpets, trombones, and tuba
[108]	2:22	B	announced by solo trumpet
[113]	4:08	development	a very long development—one of the reasons why it's such a stretch to stick the sonata-form label on this movement
[121]	7:09	recapitulation/coda	this is a very lengthy coda-cum-recapitulation, the longest section of the movement. It is based on theme A—we hear nary a peep of theme B—but the whole thing sounds as if it's driving all the while towards the conclusion, rather than being a normal kind of recapitulation.
[131]	9:25	codetta	this is the coda of the coda. It's immediately clear to the listener that we've turned onto the home stretch here. After climbing up to the high A, the strings (in unison) will repeat that note 252 ¹ times, while the brass forcefully deliver the tune, which is an elongated variation on theme A.

¹ No, I didn't count them, but someone did, so I thought it would be nice to reward that effort by reusing its results here.

John Golland (1942-1993) (England) Meiso

Brass band (Modern Period)



John Golland made his living primarily as a teacher in his home town in greater Manchester, but spent a sizeable period out of teaching, during which he concentrated on composing and conducting brass bands. In his early twenties he took up the euphonium and joined a local brass band, having learned piano, violin, and recorder in his childhood through teen years.

Meiso was the result of a commission from the Black Dyke Mills band for their highly successful Japanese tour of 1990. Meiso—which means "contemplation"—takes the unusual and original form of a duet for tenor horn (which you'll recall is actually, anatomically speaking, an *alto* saxhorn) and baritone (that's a baritone² saxhorn, not a singer). Dedicated to the two soloists featured on the recording we'll hear³, it is cast in an aptly meditative mood by a composer whose music speaks with conviction and passion.

The opening is based on two ideas: the upper instruments depict the bells of the Shinto temple calling its followers to gather for Meiso, and the lower instruments play out a Shinto chant which was introduced to Golland by a Japanese friend, Masaru Kawasaki. The work features long intertwined melodic lines from the soloists, which has them beautifully showing off the full range of their instruments. The band provides soft, sustained and infinitely sympathetic accompaniment throughout.

² Just as a "tenor" horn is actually an alto instrument, the baritone (oddly, never referred to as a "baritone horn") is actually a *tenor* instrument. How confusing.

³ Sandy Smith, tenor horn; Peter Christian, baritone, with the Black Dyke Mills Band conducted by David King.

Claude Debussy (1862-1918) (France) *La Mer*

Modern period



Historical context

Debussy was strongly influenced by the Impressionist movement in the art world, his circle of friends being Impressionist artists and poets as well as musicians. He had revolutionized classical music with his 1894 composition *Prelude a l'Après Midi d'un Faune*. In 1905 with *La Mer*, which he described as “three symphonic sketches,” he did it again. Pushing past classical tonality, harmony, and rhythm to new heights of fluidity, he brought ambiguity and freedom to keys, harmonies, and even bar-lines. Yet at the same time, Debussy’s work is still unmistakably *music*. It stirs the soul on a visceral level. There is none of the blatant dissonance and raucousness that we expect to hear in so-called “modern” music. However, that said, we must acknowledge that the listeners of the time, especially the critics (why does it always take critics so much longer to catch on than regular people?) received the work much less favorably—some with outright hostility—than their present-day counterparts.

It seems that Debussy had ambitions to compose a symphony, but *La Mer* is the closest he came. He had earlier (1880) made a two-piano sketch for a more conventional symphony, but that effort never saw the light of day in its originally intended form.

Debussy composed *La Mer* between 1903 and 1905. He wrote to his friend André Messager (himself a composer) in 1903 that he was at work on the three symphonic movements, and spoke of his lifelong fascination with the sea:

I have always retained a passionate love for her [the sea]. You will say that the ocean does not exactly wash the Burgundian hillsides...and my seascapes might be studio landscapes; but I have an endless store of memories and, to my mind, they are worth more than the reality, whose beauty often deadens thought.”

It seems Debussy was alluding to his limited actual contact with the sea, that being confined to a couple of channel crossings and some seaside vacations.

After beginning the sketching of the work in Burgundy, Debussy completed it in Jersey (um, that’s the *Channel Island* Jersey, not the state of New Jersey) and Eastbourne (on the south coast of England), where he had ample opportunity to study his subject in all its moods. The work was premiered shortly after its completion, in October 1905, in Paris.

The music

Viewed as a whole, *La Mer* is built on a distinctly symphonic pattern. The turbulent outer movements display the force and direction of large-scale symphonic sections, while the middle movement is scherzo-like by contrast. The melodic shapes that seem gradually to come into focus in the dim light of the first movement recur in the third movement, giving the work a feeling of satisfying integration.

At least one observer has offered the view that the entire work can be considered as a single sonata-form design, with the middle movement being the development section. It's an interesting complementary way to view the piece, not without merit, although the middle movement's thematic material is original, rather than derived from the first movement.

Debussy gave each of the movements descriptive subtitles, which evolved somewhat during the gestation of the piece. As is so common with program and mood music, the composer warns us not to take these titles too literally, and that they do not refer to explicitly pictorial events, rather to the overall impression and mood. Debussy's friend, the composer Erik Satie⁴, joked in response that, of the first movement (*From dawn until noon on the sea*), he "liked the whole thing, but especially the part from 10:30 to 10:45."

⁴ I wonder if Satie's name shares the same root as "satire." Unlikely of course, but it's fun to speculate.

Theme Chart

First movement	
A ₁ (motto)	Handwritten musical notation for A1 (motto) on a treble clef staff. The key signature has two sharps (F# and C#). The melody consists of a series of eighth and quarter notes, with a long slur over the first five notes.
A ₂	Handwritten musical notation for A2 on a treble clef staff. The key signature has two flats (Bb and Eb). The melody consists of a series of eighth and quarter notes.
B	Handwritten musical notation for B on a treble clef staff. The key signature has two flats. The melody features several triplet markings over groups of three notes.
C	Handwritten musical notation for C on a treble clef staff. The key signature has two flats. The melody features several triplet markings over groups of three notes.
D	Handwritten musical notation for D on a treble clef staff. The key signature has two flats. The melody consists of a series of eighth and quarter notes with various accidentals.
E	Handwritten musical notation for E on a treble clef staff. The key signature has two flats. The melody consists of a series of eighth and quarter notes.
F	Handwritten musical notation for F on a treble clef staff. The time signature is 6/4. The melody consists of a series of quarter and eighth notes with various accidentals.

Second movement	
A	
B	
C	
Third movement	
A	

Map

The notation [n] denotes a rehearsal number in the score. [n]+i or [n]-i indicate a number of bars before or after the rehearsal number. Timings are relative to Telarc recording CD-80071, the Saint Louis Symphony Orchestra conducted by Leonard Slatkin.

First movement*From dawn until noon on the sea*

<i>ref</i>	<i>time</i>	<i>structure</i>	<i>remarks</i>
[start]	0:00	introduction	in spite of Debussy's warning not to take his subtitles too literally, the opening passage up to [3] comes across as a beautiful sound picture of the unfolding dawn.
[start]+5	0:24	A ₁	introduced by oboe. This is the motto theme. ⁵
[1]	0:39	B	introduced by English horn and muted trumpet
[3]-2	1:33	C	flutes and clarinets
[3]	1:40	D	horns
[9]-2	4:32	new section, based on E	interestingly the first eight bars of this section are carried by the cellos, divided into four parts, and Debussy is particular in pointing out that there had better be 16 of them (which is more than most orchestras normally carry these days) This new section is introduced by a derivative of theme A ₁ . A new tune (of sorts) emerges, based on the rhythm illustrated in theme E. This rhythm pervades this middle section either as melody or accompaniment.
[12]	6:06	B	we're starting to wind down now, as we hear theme B from English horn and muted trumpet, just like at the beginning. But there's still time for...
[13]+3	7:00	F	...another new tune, introduced by English horn and 2 cellos
[14]-4	7:30		listen to the flutes here. It sounds like they're off the beat, but Debussy has them playing 4 beats in the bar against the melody's 6.
[15]-1	8:17	A ₂	this variation on A ₁ aptly anticipates a closing, in contrast to the expectant flavor of A ₁ itself

Second movement*Play of the waves*

The bulk of this movement is constructed from melodic fragments rather than recognizable whistleable melodies, illustrating the ever-changing play of light on the changing face of the sea, and the choppy nature of the waves. In spite of the fragmentary nature of the melodic material, Debussy expertly crafts a movement with overall unity and sense of direction.

⁵ A "motto theme" is one that appears in all movements, giving the work a feeling of unity.
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<i>ref</i>	<i>time</i>	<i>structure</i>	<i>remarks</i>
[start]	0:00		
[19]	0:51	A	here's the first group of notes I'd be prepared to call a melody, though it would be a tough one to whistle
[21]+2	1:27	B	the English horn gives us 6 bars of a melody we can actually whistle, picked up by horns and strings, but soon..
[22]+4	1:44		...we're back to illustrative sounds rather than melody
[26]+2	2:47	B	from cellos this time...
[27]+6	3:08		...but just as quickly back to the melodic fragment pattern
[32]	4:04	1A (motto)	finally, here's the motto theme, stripped down to bare essentials, as befits the style of this movement
[33]	4:17	A	from flutes this time around, taken over by oboes after 4 bars
[33]+8	4:27	C	second violins and cellos
[38]	5:16	1A (motto)	a very small but loud hint at the motto theme from horns and trumpets

Third movement

Dialogue of the wind and sea

This movement binds the work together, recalling and elaborating on themes from the first movement.

I'll use the notation 1A, 1B, etc. to denote those themes in the following outline.

<i>ref</i>	<i>time</i>	<i>structure</i>	<i>remarks</i>
[start]	0:00		a choppy figure in bass strings suggests waves
[43]	0:14	A	a sustained fragment from oboes, suggesting the wind over the choppy sea. This fragment is derived from the more expansive melody that we'll hear later, which I've labeled as theme A
[44]	0:48	1B	muted trumpet
[45]+2	1:08	1A (motto)	horns
[46]	1:25	A	the expanded theme A from oboe and bassoon
[47]	1:51	development	this movement is a far cry from sonata form, but this section is very much in the character of a sonata-form development, and I think it helps our understanding of the piece to label it as such
[47]	1:51	1A	flute and cellos
[49]+6	2:26	1B	bassoons and cellos give us a whole-tone-scale ⁶ variant of theme 1B
[52]+8	3:16	recapitulation/ coda	this very extended section is like a free-format recapitulation, liberally recalling themes 1A, 1B, and A. It gradually takes on the character of a coda without there being a clear delineation.
[62]+4	8:02		as the piece draws to a close the brass do their best to be heard with the (1A) motto theme, but there's a lot of competition

**Samuel Barber (1910-1981) (born West Chester, PA; died New York, NY)
Summer Music**

Wind quintet (Modern period)



Barber wrote *Summer Music* in 1955-6 in response to a commission from Detroit, where the work was first performed, though he had worked fairly closely with the New York Woodwind Quintet over its composition. (Timings refer to the recording by the Galliard Ensemble, on BBC MM243)

⁶ A whole-tone scale has only 6 notes (versus 7 for the usual major and minor scales), the space between each note being a well, you can guess.

- 1 0:00 the opening features flowing liquid runs from flute, then clarinet, and finally bassoon.
- 2 0:47 the oboe sings a long-breathed melody, whose first rocking notes are taken up by the accompaniment
- 3 2:03 the tempo increases and the music is now staccato and disjointed
- 4 2:42 an abrupt break is followed by an even faster passage in irregular bar lengths. Notice also that the tonality has changed from minor to major.
- 5 3:16 Barber now embarks on a kind of miniature fantasia, in which he combines and develops the preceding three ideas.
- 6 5:25 the opening material returns, accompanied by some commentary from clarinet that sounds almost ad lib, with which other instruments eventually join.
- 7 6:45 another fast section begins with a new melody for oboe, cheeky-sounding and syncopated, which is passed to flute...
- 8 8:23 ...and eventually to bassoon.
- 9 8:44 another brief appearance of the opening material
- 10 8:56 the flute introduces a passage marked “joyous and flowing”
- 11 9:42 we reach a kind of subdued climax, which gradually subsides into what we may regard as a coda, with fragments of earlier themes reappearing in gentle understatement. Finally, the piece rather abruptly evaporates into thin air.

Henry VIII (1491-1547) (England) *Rose without a Thorn*

Brass quintet (Medieval period)



Yes, this is *the* Henry VIII we’re talking about, king of England, who was a very accomplished musician and poet. This work was not constructed in this form (and certainly not for this instrumentation) by King Henry himself; rather Philip Jones (founder of the Philip Jones Brass Ensemble) assembled a number of Henry’s compositions. The name Jones chose for the suite, *Rose without a Thorn*, was how Henry described his favorite wife, Anne Boleyn.