

PROGRAM NOTES BY DR. RICHARD E. RODDA

STEWART COPELAND

Born 16 July 1952 in Alexandria, Virginia

Concerto No. 1 for Trapset, Three Percussionists and Orchestra, “The Tyrant’s Crush” (2012-2015)

WORLD PREMIERE

Commissioned by the Pittsburgh Symphony Orchestra. The original first movement, “Poltroons in Paradise” was commissioned by The Royal Liverpool Philharmonic.

APPROXIMATE DURATION: 31 minutes

INSTRUMENTATION: piccolo, two flutes, three oboes, English horn, two clarinets, bass clarinet, two bassoons, contrabassoon, four horns, three trumpets, three trombones, tuba, timpani, three percussionists, harp, celesta, piano and strings.

Stewart Copeland is internationally known as one of rock’s foremost drummers — he was inducted into the Rock and Roll Hall of Fame in 2003 and came in seventh in the 2010 poll of “Greatest Drummers of All Time” conducted by *Rolling Stone* magazine — but since the 1980s he has also established a reputation for his compositions for film, television, theater and the concert hall. His screen credits include the scores for Oliver Stone’s *Wall Street*, Francis Ford Coppola’s *Rumble Fish* (for which he was nominated for a Golden Globe) and Bruno Barreto’s Oscar-nominated *Four Days in September*; his television work includes *Dead Like Me* (for which he received an Emmy nomination), *The Equalizer*, *Babylon V* and *Desperate Housewives*. He was the recipient of the Hollywood Film Festival’s inaugural Outstanding Music in Film Visionary Award. In 2009, Copeland composed an original evening-length score for a theatrical arena show based on MGM’s silent classic *Ben Hur* (1925). He has also written three operas, five ballets and numerous orchestral and chamber works, most featuring percussion.

The “Tyrant’s Crush” Concerto began with an orchestral passacaglia titled *Monster Just Needed Love* that Copeland composed in 2012; the following year he wrote *Poltroons in Paradise* on a commission from the Liverpool Philharmonic Hall as a solo piece for himself and three other percussionists and orchestra. The Concerto No. 1 for Trapset, Three Percussionists and Orchestra reached its finished state in response to a 2015 commission from the Pittsburgh Symphony Orchestra with *Poltroons* as the opening movement, a reworking of *Monster* as a concerted piece, and the newly composed *Over the Wall (or up against it)* as finale. Copeland provided the following discussion of the work, which speaks of the profound social awareness he finds inherent in music:

“*Poltroons in Paradise* is the cheerful part of the story, about those who ride in on the back of a revolution and then discover the temptation of things against which they had revolted. [A ‘poltroon’ is an utter coward.] A cadre of starving, hitherto excluded intellectuals swagger through the palace of the fallen regime. The chandeliers, the brocades, and the gilded furniture all inspire a grand buffoonery that hides a sneaking desire.

“*Monster Just Needed Love (but ate the children anyway).*

The Monster is at his desk,

with so much to discuss and few to trust.

Kill or cure? Eat or feed?

It’s hard to tell who is who these days.

His comrades are at the bon-bons while the nation creaks.

His epaulettes are hanging on for dear life.

Why is he sitting here making decisions about ... plumbing?

What is Gradenko doing right now?

Something beautiful, no doubt.

Surely there is someone in all of our prisons

who knows how to run this machine!

Did I eat them all?

“*Over the Wall (or up against it).*

Implacable forces converge.

*The butler's hand is shaking as he pours the last beer.
Like me he's wondering how to get out of here.
The palace halls are empty and the scene outside is surly.
My transgressions are mounting up,
and I can hear them weaving through this catastrophe.
The counties don't respond and the generals are vague.
Escape is possible though maybe not.
Will she meet me there? How well do I know even her?
Over the wall or up against it."*

DMITRI SHOSTAKOVICH

Born 25 September 1906 in St. Petersburg; died 9 August 1975 in Moscow.

Symphony No. 1 in F minor, Opus 10 (1925-1926)

PREMIERE OF WORK: Leningrad, 12 May 1926; Leningrad Philharmonic; Nikolai Malko, conductor

PSO PREMIERE: 17 February 1939; Syria Mosque; Michel Gusikoff, conductor

APPROXIMATE DURATION: 30 minutes

INSTRUMENTATION: two piccolos, three flutes, two oboes, two clarinets, two bassoons, four horns, three trumpets, three trombones, tuba, timpani, percussion, piano and strings

Shostakovich entered the Leningrad Conservatory in 1919 as a student of piano, composition, counterpoint, harmony and orchestration. He was thirteen. His father died three years later, leaving a widow and children with no means of support, so Dmitri's mother, a talented amateur musician and an unswerving believer in her son's talent and the benefits of his training at the Conservatory, took a job as a typist to provide the necessities for the family. She constantly sought help from official sources to sustain Dmitri's career, but by autumn 1924, it became necessary for the young musician to find work despite the press of his studies and the frail state of his health. (He spent several weeks in 1924 at a sanatorium to treat his tuberculosis.) Victor Seroff described Shostakovich's new job: as pianist in a movie house. "The little theater was old, drafty, and smelly," wrote Seroff. "It had not seen fresh paint or a scrubbing for years, the walls were peeling, and the dirt lay thick in every corner. Three times a day a new crowd packed the small house; they carried the snow in with them on their shoes and overcoats. They munched food that they brought with them, apples and sunflower seeds that they spat on the floor. The heat of the packed bodies in their damp clothes, added to the warmth of two small stoves, made the bad air stifling hot by the end of the performance. Then the doors were flung open to let the crowd out and to air the hall before the next show, and cold damp drafts swept through the house. Down in front below the screen sat Dmitri, his back soaked with perspiration, his near-sighted eyes in their horn-rimmed glasses peering upwards to follow the story, his fingers pounding away on the raucous upright piano. Late at night he trudged home in a thin coat and summer cap, with no warm gloves or galoshes, and arrived exhausted around one o'clock in the morning." The taxing job not only sapped his strength and health, but also made composing virtually impossible — and it was composing that he burned to do. By spring the family decided that he would leave this musical purgatory to devote himself to composition. Shostakovich began the First Symphony immediately, and the hopes of his family were pinned on its eventual success.

By early 1925, Shostakovich had completed his formal studies at the Leningrad Conservatory, and he was seeking to gain a reputation beyond the walls of the school. He chose to write a symphony — a grand, public piece rather than a small-scale chamber work — as his graduation exercise: "the product of my culminating studies at the Conservatory," as he called it. The new work, his first for orchestra, was grounded in the Russian traditions of Tchaikovsky, Rimsky-Korsakov, Glazunov and Scriabin that his composition teacher Maximilian Steinberg had passed on to him, but also allowed for such modern influences as the music of Hindemith, Prokofiev, Mahler and Stravinsky. Of the Symphony's progressive traits, Nicolas Slonimsky noted that they show "some definite departures from traditionalism.... The harmony of the Symphony is far more acrid than any academic training would justify and the linear writing is hardly counterpoint conscious. There are such strange interludes as a kettle-drum solo. The melodic structure is angular, dramatic at times, and then again broad, suggesting folksong rather than a

subject for a symphony. Yet there is enough academism in this first important work of Shostakovich to connect it with his Conservatory training.”

The Symphony was completed early in 1926, and scheduled for its premiere in May, though his family’s economic hardship was so severe at the time that Shostakovich could not afford to have the parts copied and the score published. The Conservatory, as a gesture of faith in the young composer’s talent, underwrote the expenses, and the Symphony was first displayed to the world on May 12th. It was an immediate success. Shostakovich was proclaimed the leader of the first generation of post-Revolution Soviet composers (Prokofiev had left for the West in 1918), and the twenty-year-old musician became a celebrity at home and abroad in a matter of months. The conductor Bruno Walter performed the First Symphony in Berlin in 1927, and Leopold Stokowski led the Philadelphia Orchestra in the score’s American premiere a year later. Each year for the rest of his life, Shostakovich set aside May 12th as the day he celebrated his “birthday as a composer.”

“I sensed that music was not merely a combination of sounds, arranged in a particular order, but an art capable of expressing through its own means the most varied ideas and feelings,” wrote Shostakovich. In many later works, those “ideas and feelings” were specifically political in nature, but this Symphony is primarily an aesthetic expression rather than a tonal tract. The first movement follows a form derived from traditional sonata-allegro. The exposition consists of four theme groups, presented almost like large tiles in a mosaic: a melody with long notes presented by the solo trumpet, with a cheeky retort from the bassoon; a scalar theme punctuated by spiky intervals given by the violins alone; a mock-march strutted out by the clarinet; and a cockeyed waltz from the flute. All four themes are whipped together in the development, which reaches a noisy climax before the themes are recapitulated — backwards. First the waltz is heard (flute again), then the mock-march (low strings), followed by the long-note melody (clarinet) and a compressed version of the scalar tune (briefly, in the lower strings). This music exudes the distinctive personality, technical craftsmanship and wry wit that mark the best of Shostakovich’s works.

The second movement is a sardonic scherzo built on a cocky theme initiated by the clarinet. The woodwind-dominated trio, contrasting in mood and meter, is icy and detached in its quiet intensity. The third movement, full of pathos, begins with a lamenting theme for the oboe. A short, rhetorical gesture insinuates itself as accompaniment, and serves as transition to the second theme, a dirge, again entrusted to the oboe. Both themes are recalled, with the rhetorical gesture used as the bridge to the finale. A swell on the snare drum leads directly to the slow introduction of the closing movement. A snappy, chromatic melody from the clarinet is followed at some distance by the movement’s second theme, a broad melody with Tchaikovskian sweep (and Prokofievian “wrong notes”). These two themes, along with the rhetorical gesture (in mirror image — i.e., rising rather than falling) dominate the remainder of the movement, which ends with a stentorian proclamation from the full orchestra.

Of this invigorating work by the nineteen-year-old Shostakovich, Donald N. Ferguson wrote, “The style is perhaps more spontaneous than in any first symphony since Schumann’s. There is no pondering of the elaborate process that is ordinarily supposed to be indispensable in symphonic structure. Indeed, the charm of the work is largely owing to the absence of all recondite devices, in whose place there is a bubbling enthusiasm as infectious as the laughter of a child. Childlike, perhaps, is also the insouciant transition from one theme to another, at any moment when the idea under discussion, whether exhausted or not, has lost its grip on the composer’s attention.”