

Rofe, Michael. *Dimensions of Energy in Shostakovich's Symphonies*. Burlington: Ashgate Publishing Company, 2012. xviii-274 pp. ISBN 978-1-4094-0745-4.

Since the demise of the Soviet Union, Shostakovich research has been marked by a highly mediatized conflict on the composer's politics. The controversy has masked an older debate that was more concerned with the question of the autonomy versus social determinism of music. To defend Shostakovich in that context amounted to a demonstration of the value of his music without regard of its societal context. In this book, Michael Rofe redirects Shostakovich studies toward a concern for the actual music, with reference to political meaning only when it serves the analysis. The author shows himself fully aware of the actual state of Shostakovich scholarship. He contends, however, that Shostakovich's appeal to audiences that have no detailed knowledge of the facts of Soviet history offers proof enough of the transcendent qualities of his music.

We may doubt, however, that the reception by contemporary audiences is as spontaneous and unbiased as the author supposes. In the post-Soviet decades, the music of Shostakovich has been thoroughly marketed as part of the spiritual process of settling scores with the vanished state and the belief system on which it had been based. Shostakovich's music continues to thrive on the mystique of individual resistance under dictatorship. Rofe seems to admit as much in his discussion of the disquieting extra-musical import associated with Shostakovich's music as part of the energy that it projects on its listeners. In this way, the author can keep controversial interpretations, such as those offered in Volkov's *Testimony* or in Ian MacDonald's *The New Shostakovich*, on board. Rofe may argue that political interpretation is not his issue, but this strategy comes close to an easy way out of making unavoidable critical choices of his own.

Rofe argues that longstanding debates should be solved on the basis of musical fact. To achieve this end, he focuses on Shostakovich's supreme mastery of the dimensions of musical energy as the defining trait of the composer's individuality. Rofe's theoretical background to his analytical method is double. On the one hand, he relies on the empirical results of research in embodied cognition, on the other he reconstructs a hypothetical theoretical background to Shostakovich's own understanding of symphonic music in the theories of such contemporaries as Asafiev, Yavorsky, Shcherbachev, and Rozenov, the latter with special poignancy in relation to the question of the golden section that the author detects in Shostakovich's handling of different layers of energy. While the ultimate proof that Shostakovich actively used their theories is lacking, the connections are plausible and offer the huge advantage that Shostakovich's approach to the symphony is grounded in his own intellectual milieu.

Analysis based on dimensions of energy liberates the analyst of the criteria with which form and structure are conventionally described. Rofe admits that his analytical lens does not unearth in Shostakovich an approach to symphonic composition that is entirely new. The analysis does demonstrate, however, the extraordinary quality and refinement of Shostakovich's musical thinking. Rofe offers new arguments to defend Shostakovich's music as highly sophisticated, even when its surface qualities are meant to be readily accessible.

The author examines in detail four symphonies, which are notorious for their challenges to analysis and criticism. The analysis of the Sixth Symphony is entirely convincing, the one of the Fourteenth Symphony is subtle, but the author refrains from applying his musical discoveries to an in-depth reading of the work's philosophical

content. The analysis of the Fourth and Fifth Symphonies is proposed as a way out of the long-standing critical question about Shostakovich's about-face in the Fifth Symphony under political pressure. The author is undoubtedly right that the story of Shostakovich's repression in 1936 and 1937 and his restructuring as a Soviet personality in the Fifth Symphony has been over-dramatized. He also demonstrates convincingly that the Fifth could be understood as a consequence of Shostakovich's discoveries in the Fourth, but with an audible return to a balance that the Fourth Symphony shunned. This observation does not silence, however, the vexed question of the relationship between art and the pressures of a totalitarian state. The hypothesis that Rofe puts forward about the relationship between the two works as a result of Shostakovich's independent artistic evolution could never be proven. Political pressure did interfere, even if not in the dramatic form that has previously been read into it. We shall never know what would have happened to Shostakovich's creative path when things had been different.

As an appendix to his main argument, Michael Rofe proposes a theory on the meaning of the golden section in music. However tentatively announced, the chapter is excellently argued. The author incorporates all possible objections to his theory in his own argumentation. He concludes that the golden section appears so often in music because it is a logical outcome of any approach to composition that is based on energy streams rather than on symmetrical structures.

Rofe's study is a welcome addition to Shostakovich scholarship and will certainly influence the analysis of his music. On the consequences of his analytical method for solving critical questions, the author is less clear, with the exception of the case concerning the Fourth and Fifth Symphonies. In searching for what is constant in Shostakovich's style, the author gives no clue of how we should deal with the apparent heterogeneity of Shostakovich's output as a whole. This is a book that could open new vistas, on the condition that its scientism is complemented with more pronounced critical choices.

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