

The Jewish Experience in Classical Music

The Jewish Experience in Classical Music:
Shostakovich and Asia

Edited by

Alexander Tentser

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The Jewish Experience in Classical Music: Shostakovich and Asia,
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PREFACE

The Jewish Experience in Classical Music: Shostakovich and Asia is a collaboration among musicologists, composers, and performers who are interested in exploring and preserving Jewish culture and music. It focuses on the work of two composers, a Russian composer whose life coincided with the development of a totalitarian regime in the former Soviet Union and a contemporary American composer whose work reflects current American and Jewish culture. This combination of composers allows us to explore the different ways Jewish elements may be incorporated in music. It also allows us to delve into the roots of Jewish culture and examine its interaction with various national schools of music, in particular Eastern European and American. In the music of Shostakovich, Jewish elements are magnified to the point where they become universal symbols of protest against genocide and racial discrimination. In this respect, Shostakovich exemplifies the great Russian intellectual, humanitarian tradition described by Dostoevsky as the tendency “to become brother to all men, *uniman*, if you will.”¹ Asia’s music, in contrast, incorporates the Jewish philosophical, religious, and intellectual traditions in pursuit of a deeper understanding of the relationship between the sacred and the profane. This relationship is explored in his Symphony No. 2, as presented in the broader context of his total symphonic output, and in his approach to issues of text and sacred moments, as presented in his 5th symphony.

Some chapters in the book are dedicated to specific works of Shostakovich and Asia: the Second Piano Trio, the Song Cycle *From Jewish Folk Poetry*, and Symphony #13, “Babi Yar,” by Shostakovich; and Symphony No. 5: *Of Songs and Psalms* by Asia. Other chapters deal with the sources of Jewish folk music in Russia, the philosophical and intellectual traditions of Judaism in the arts, and the historically valuable personal recollections of Dmitri Shostakovich’s interpreter concerning the composer’s last visit to the United States in 1973. The book also includes an in-depth interview with Asia about his music and the roles of Jewish thought and culture in his work. The book can be read both as a narrative of the Jewish musical

¹ Fyodor Dostoevsky, Pushkin Memorial Speech, 1880, in Solomon Volkov, *St Petersburg: A Cultural History* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1997), 126.

tradition and as an introduction to the contemporary treatment of Jewish elements in music.

So, how shall we define the sound of Jewish music? In general, listeners find a huge variety of meaning in music, particularly the “serious” or classical kind. Music triggers memories, stimulates our intellectual activity, and transmits a great deal of information; in short, it functions on many different levels. And, of course, good music expresses human emotions more fully than does any other form of art. In spite of all these properties, or perhaps because of them, we are able to define the distinctive sounds of the music of different peoples. So what is the sound of Jewish music? In the following collection you will encounter the expression “laughter through tears” several times. It is descriptive of the sound of the Eastern European Jewish folk music that profoundly influenced Dmitri Shostakovich, the twentieth-century Soviet composer. To fully understand this expression we would have to traverse the entire history of the Jewish people, from their origin to their diaspora and assimilation into foreign lands. That would, of course, be beyond the scope of this book. But the reader will definitely be able to see how the Jewish people have contributed musically to other cultures, specifically Russian and American, and how the distinct sound of their music has evolved in the twenty-first century. It is a very strong sound, having formed over centuries and carrying all the encoded information of a people’s suffering and their rejuvenation in modern times. We believe it is important to study the sound of this people; moreover, it is the only way to truly comprehend their achievement of new cultural heights. We hope that this book will be viewed as contributing to the study of the Jewish cultural heritage and that it will perhaps stimulate more studies on this important subject.

The Jewish Experience in Classical Music: Shostakovich and Asia was presented by The Arizona Center for Judaic Studies as the Shaol and Louis Pozez Memorial Fine Arts Symposium at The University of Arizona on January 13, 2013. It was sponsored by the Pozez families and The Pozez Family Fund at the Jewish Community Foundation of Southern Arizona, the Jewish Federation of Southern Arizona, The University of Arizona School of Music, The Arizona Center for Judaic Studies, the Marriott University Park Hotel, and the Center for the Study of American Ideals and Culture. The chapters of the following volume were originally presented by guest speakers in the afternoon symposium session. Following the presentations, a performance was given of two movements of Shostakovich’s Symphony #13, “Babi Yar,” and his Piano Trio #2, and

of Asia's *Amichai Songs* from Symphony #5, *Of Songs and Psalms*, and his Piano Trio.

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Our thanks to the Pozez families and The Pozez Family Fund at the Jewish Community Foundation of Southern Arizona, the Jewish Federation of Southern Arizona, The University of Arizona School of Music, The Arizona Center for Judaic Studies, the Marriott University Park Hotel, and the Center for the Study of American Ideals and Culture for their support of the original symposium.

My thanks also to the other members of the Steering Committee, Daniel Asia and J. Edward Wright, for their support and assistance both in the original project and in the preparation of this volume for publication, and to the contributors for their efforts in converting papers and presentations into the articles found here.

I would like to express my deep gratitude to Curtis and Margaret Smith for their invaluable help in editing this manuscript.

Alexander Tentser, November 2013

INTRODUCTION

A LEGACY OF HONOR AND RISK IN JEWISH MUSIC

JANET STURMAN

Introduction

It is my pleasure and honor to introduce the topic of this volume, the examination of the Jewish Experience in Classical Music, part of the Shaol Pozez Memorial Lecture Series, co-sponsored by The Arizona Center for Judaic Studies and The University of Arizona School of Music. This broad theme permits us to explore, discuss, and exchange, focusing on different individuals and circumstances. Our specific case studies are the composer Dmitri Shostakovich, who lived from 1906 to 1975, and the American composer Daniel Asia, born in 1953.¹ One is a Jew, the other was not, but both men find common cause with Jewish concerns and perspectives, and include in their own compositions sounds rooted in Jewish religious and secular practice.

Connections and Comparisons

One purpose of this volume is to identify connections and points of comparison between Shostakovich and Asia. Mr. Asia tells me that he was never particularly influenced by the music of Shostakovich and the two never met. However, as our contributors will reveal, certain sensibilities still connect them. In particular, each composer in his own way addressed the dynamics of honor and risk that define Jewish experience.

¹ Daniel Asia was present at the symposium held on January 13, 2013, at The University of Arizona School of Music.

Historical Background and Paradoxical Positions

It seems appropriate to begin with a brief review of historical circumstance, beginning in pre-Soviet Russia, so that we may better appreciate how Jews recognized their own history, how they responded to persecution and prejudicial treatment, and how that influenced their music and cultural status in Russia and beyond. In the first decade of the twentieth century, when Shostakovich was born, Russia was the site of virulent anti-Semitism but paradoxically it was also the site for a new movement of Jewish nationalism and one of the most important centers for the rise of Zionism.

The spirit of nationalism burgeoned in Europe during the nineteenth century, spurred by factors too numerous to explore here, but which include political realignments, urban and industrial development, and the general belief that urban cosmopolitanism, along with the invention of new technologies that facilitated research, travel and communication, would eclipse the practice of traditional culture. Ironically, these same travel and communication advances facilitated the formal study of traditional culture and led to the advance of the ethnological sciences. Thus, by the end of the century, nationalist aims were evident in music, the arts, and the sciences. The rise of the academic disciplines of anthropology and ethnology in European and American universities in the twentieth century was related to the interest in defining national culture in a broadly comparative frame.

Russia was not exempt from the thrall of nationalism. Mikhail Glinka (1804-1857) developed an interest in the elements of peasant song and in Russian themes, and he may be credited with initiating Russia's national music movement. His aims were further advanced by a group of composers labeled the "Mighty Five": Mussorgsky, Rimsky-Korsakov, Cui, Borodin, and Balakirev. All of them worked to create a distinctly Russian school of musical composition.

It is Nikolai Rimsky-Korsakov (1844-1908) who is often credited with prompting Russian-Jewish composers to integrate folk music into concert art music. A famous story recounts his pleasure in hearing an arrangement of a Jewish folk song created by Efraim Shlikar, one of his students at the conservatory. "I am very glad to see that you are writing a composition of the Jewish variety," Rimsky-Korsakov told Shlikar. He continued: "How

strange that my Jewish students occupy themselves so little with their music. Jewish music exists; it is wonderful music, and it awaits its Glinka.”²

This comment reveals the double edge of honor and risk associated with Jewish culture in Russia. By praising and encouraging attention to Jewish music, Rimsky-Korsakov was also implying that it was music distinct from true Russian music. Non-Jewish composers risked being aligned with a shunned population if they openly embraced Jewish forms in non-satiric fashion.

For centuries, the majority of Jews in Russia were forced to live apart from the rest of the population. The only place in the country where Jews were allowed to settle permanently was the Pale of Settlement in the western region of Russia, established by Tsarina Catherine II in 1791 (see Figure 1). By 1885 more than 4 million Jews lived in this region. The Pale operated as a ghetto until 1917, when the tsarist government was removed from power. It was not a safe haven for Jews, as they remained subject to extra taxes, restrictions on employment opportunities, and government-sanctioned pogroms, which increased in the 1880s and led to massive Jewish migration to America.³

Isolation in the Pale meant that identifying as a Jew, or with Jews in general, posed significant social and political risk in Russia. Changing political winds after the 1905 Revolution brought the creation of the first Russian Duma (or Parliament), and Jewish intellectuals and regional leaders began to feel that their rights might be recognized by the new government and that they might have a chance to be part of the whole. However, in 1907 their political aspirations were crushed with the imposition of tsarist controls upon the third Duma and the scapegoating of Jews as rebels in order to appease the general public. In response to these see-sawing politics, Jews turned their energies towards the work of cultural nationalism, a view of group identity shaped by cultural traditions that superseded ethnic or civic affiliations.⁴

² Loeffler, *The Most Musical Nation: Jews and Culture in the Late Russian Empire*, 106.

³ Details of the massive migration of Jews to the United States from 1880-1920 have been compiled by Perlmann, “The Local Geographic Origins of Russian-Jewish Immigrants, Circa 1900.”

⁴ Aberbach, *Jewish Cultural Nationalism: Origins and Influences*.



Fig. 1. The Pale of Settlement in 1825. Source: Doyle Klier, *Russia Gathers Her Jews: The Origins of the Jewish Questions in Russia, 1772-1825* (De Kalb: Northern Illinois University Press, 1986).

In 1908 a group of young composers at the St. Petersburg Conservatory formed the Society for Jewish Folk Music (see Figure 2). The organization sponsored the collection and documentation of Jewish music, the publication of folk songs, and the creation of new compositions based on folk song. The society hosted concerts and promoted fieldwork expeditions in the Pale of Settlement. Branches of the Society for Jewish Folk Music were established in Moscow and Odessa. The society ceased operation in 1917 when, during the tumult of the revolutionary period, many of the original Petersburg members immigrated to Palestine or the United States. In 1923 several of the remaining members formed a new Society for Jewish Music in Moscow, this time dedicated principally to the promotion of Jewish art music. The movement continued to have strong Zionist connections and spread into Europe and the United States with important branches in Vienna and New York.⁵

⁵ Loeffler, "Society for Jewish Folk Music." *YIVO Encyclopedia of Jews in Eastern Europe*.

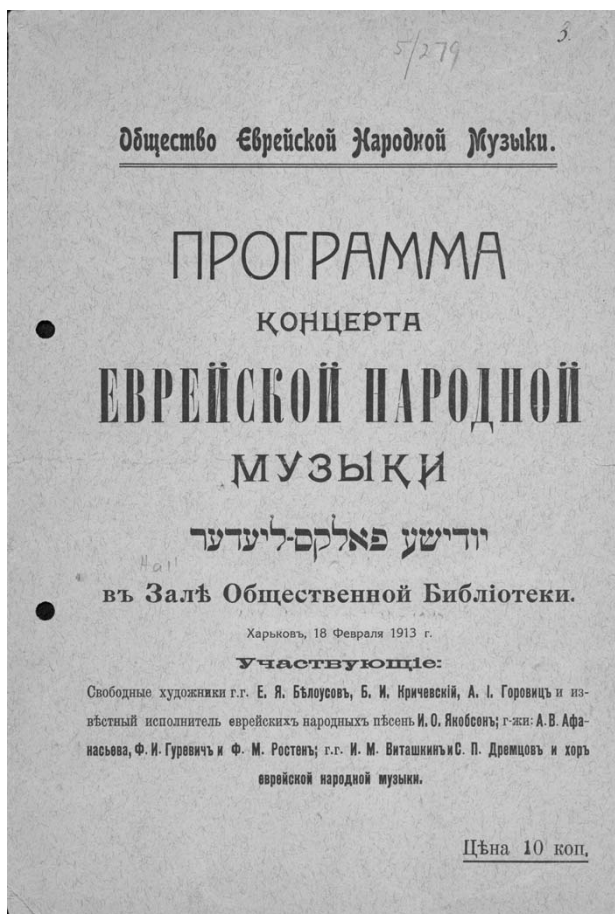


Fig. 2. Program for a Concert by the Society for Jewish Folk Music, Kharkov, 1913. Source: Archive of the YIVO Institute for Jewish Research.

What is Jewish Folk Music?

The formation of the St. Petersburg Society for Jewish Folk Music raised the question, what comprises Jewish folk music? Not surprisingly, there were conflicting answers to that question. One group, represented by Jewish composers such as Joel Engel (1868-1927) and the ethnologist Zinoviy Kiselgof (1878-1934), favored granting such status to the music of daily life: lullabies, love songs, topical Yiddish songs. Another group,

represented by Abraham Idelsohn (1882-1938) and Lazare Saminsky (1882-1959), argued that the underlying nature of Jewish music derived from its diasporic liturgical foundations, and therefore it could not be considered ethnic music. In short, the common understanding of folk song as linked to a single nation or ethnicity proves complicated with the Jews. Idelsohn argued that the Jews carried their spiritual nationality with them wherever they moved and this became the thesis of his classic book, *Jewish Music: Its Historical Development*, written in 1929.⁶

In it Idelsohn links synagogue song to all other Jewish music. He draws his readers' attention to the distinctive strength of the Eastern cantorial tradition, particularly in the southern regions of the Ukraine, where the singers from Volhynia, Bessarabia, and Podolia were recognized as more creative than their northern counterparts (see Figure 3).



Fig. 3. Eastern Provinces of the Ukraine. Source: Wikimedia.

Idelsohn does not consider Jewish political song in *Jewish Music: Its Historical Development*, but a contemporary of his, the ethnomusicologist Moshe Beregovsky (1892-1961, also spelled Beregovski), placed great

⁶ Idelsohn, *Jewish Music: Its Historical Development*, 357-358.

value on Jewish political song.⁷ Beregovsky compiled an anthology of songs of the Jewish worker, organizing them into five categories: 1) songs of work, exploitation, and poverty, 2) songs about strikes, 3) songs about victims of struggle, 4) revolutionary hymns, and 5) musical settings of old revolutionary poetry. The songs, many in Yiddish, were also an inspiration to Jews in the United States, particularly those associated with Yiddish theater and the American labor movements. In the 1940s, Beregovsky came to study at the Moscow Conservatory, where Shostakovich was teaching. The two became friends and exchanged material, including Beregovsky's later collections of klezmer music.⁸ Alexander Tentser refers to this relationship in his exploration of the Jewish influences in Shostakovich's music.

Some folk music collectors rejected popular and political song as not authentically Jewish because of the frequent incorporation of foreign and local styles, particularly Ukrainian folk song. Nonetheless, exchange across stylistic and regional boundaries can be credited with sustaining the Jewish tradition. In his book *Tenement Songs*, a study of the music of Russian-Jewish immigrants to America at the turn of the century, Mark Slobin opens with a tale from the stories of Yiddish playwright I.L. Peretz, who grew up in Russian-ruled Poland (see Figure 4). This tale, "A gilgul fun a nigun," has been recently staged for performance in Paris, New York, and Montreal as "The Metamorphosis of a Melody," with Rafael Goldwasser as the protagonist, Chaim.⁹ In the story, the Ukrainian-Jewish fiddler Chaim is sent by wealthy patrons to find a tune for their daughter's wedding, ideally an *El Maleh Rachamim*, a prayer for the dead that forms part of the traditional wedding ritual.¹⁰ But when Chaim arrives in the city,

⁷ Beregovski, *Old Jewish Folk Music*.

⁸ Kuhn, "Laughter through Tears: Shostakovich and Jewish Music," 6-8.

⁹ An introduction to the show appears in Ted Merwin, "I.L. Peretz, Melody Maker," *The Jewish Week* (Nov. 9, 2010), http://www.thejewishweek.com/arts/theater/il_peretz_melody_maker. Since that publication, Goldwasser has performed the show in Montreal, Paris, and other cities.

¹⁰ Transliterations for this Hebrew prayer vary, hence the title of this song appears in variant spellings in different publications: *El Maleh Rachamim*, *El Moleh Rachamim*, *E-el Malei Rachamim* are but a few common spellings. Presented as *El Moleh Rakhamim*, the prayer, performed by Shalom Katz, can be heard on the recording *Prima Voce: Legendary Cantors* (Nimbus Records, 2006). His obituary reports that during World War II he was captured by the Nazis and sent to a concentration camp where he was forced to dig his own grave. He asked to be able to sing the *El Moleh Rakhamim* one last time, and his rendition so moved the Nazi

the master cantor he has traveled to meet has left. He happens to hear another of the master's tunes being performed on the street by a group of itinerant musicians, accompanying the lowly procession of a poor orphan girl's wedding, and he takes the melody back to Kiev.¹¹ There the guests at the wedding transform it into a lively dance tune, and it later finds life as a sinful love song in the Yiddish theater. Years pass, and the theater song is picked up by a young woman kidnapped from her wealthy family, who was forced to sing with a group of circus performers. Continuing the melodrama, the woman contracts typhus and is left to fend for herself as a blind beggar on the street, where a rabbinic scholar hears her singing the itinerant tune. It stays in his mind and he sings it as a *z'mirot* (table song) after Shabbat dinner, thus re-sanctifying it. The scholar tries to help the blind daughter find her parents and discovers that she is related to the original patrons, the mother, who has died, and the father, who has immigrated to the United States. And thus, Slobin concludes, the song lives in both worlds, old and new.

Slobin makes us aware of the complexity of the Jewish world in Old Russia. It was not all *Fiddler on the Roof*. Liturgical musicians in Russian cities like St. Petersburg and Kiev mingled with Jewish entertainers from Germany and elsewhere in Europe, and the Yiddish theater, while regularly banned in Russia after 1883, became an important voice for Jewish enlightenment and strength in the secular world.¹² Emerging media, particularly film, provided additional opportunities for blending perspectives, as did the experimental theatre of FEKS (the Factory of the Eccentric Actor). Shostakovich's collaboration with FEKS brought him into contact with the Jewish film director Leonid Trauberg (1902-1990) and the work of director Vsevolod Meyerhold (1874-1940), whose productions mimicked the pace and zaniness of the circus, vaudeville, and American film.¹³

guard that he was allowed to escape. JTA- Jewish News Archive. "Cantor Sholem Katz dead at 67," (February 26, 1982), <http://archive.jta.org/article/1982/02/26/2992779/cantor-sholom-katz-dead-at-67>.

¹¹ Music for seating of the Bride, the Kale Basetzen, can be heard on several contemporary recording collections, notably *Oytsres (Treasures): History of Klezmer Music 1908-1996* (Wergo, 2000) and *The Joel Rubin Klezmer Band Brave Old World* (Global Village Music, 1995). Both renditions make evident the mournful and prayerful quality that crosses over from liturgical song.

¹² Slobin, *Tenement Songs*.

¹³ Ross, *The Rest is Noise*, 224.



Fig. 4. Photo of Yiddish author I.L. Peretz from a postcard c. 1910. Source: Wikimedia.

Composers, as well as songs, travel and transform. The influence of travel on Shostakovich and Asia is an important theme in the contributions to this volume. Shostakovich traveled to the United States, and Alexander Dunkel, who accompanied him as a translator, expounds on the experience and their exchanges.

Klezmer music rooted in cantorial song seems a likely source for the “sad Jewish melodies with the lively rhythm” mentioned by Shostakovich in relationship to his own song cycle, *From Jewish Folk Poetry*, composed in 1948.¹⁴ Jewish melodic and rhythmic elements appear in other compositions as well, including some of his string quartets and symphonies. Details regarding Shostakovich’s intentions and motivations with his musical settings of Jewish folk poetry and the controversial responses they generated are addressed more thoroughly by Christopher Booth and Alexander Tentser in their contributions to this book.

¹⁴ Kuhn, “Laughter Through Tears,” 7; Sheinberg, *Irony, Satire, Parody, and the Grotesque in the Music of Shostakovich: A Theory of Musical Incongruities*, 318.

We may surmise, however, that not only was Shostakovich honoring the Jews for their courage and dignity in the face of persecution and peril, and speaking out against anti-Semitism, but that also he found common cause with their courage and perspective on life. The musicologist Esti Sheinberg argues that in the Soviet world of “enforced optimism,” Shostakovich was drawn to the Jewish recognition of existential irony and the Jewish understanding of joy and sorrow as conjoined experiences.¹⁵ This paradoxical perspective I also perceive in much of Daniel Asia’s music, particularly in his song settings, and in his Symphony No. 5. The analytical contributions of Jan Swafford and Aryeh Tepper to this volume examine Asia’s own musical explorations of existential irony and his essential bond with the spiritual tradition that grounds Jewish cultural nationalism.

Conclusion

In his collection of essays, *The Danger of Music and Other Anti-Utopian Essays*, musicologist Richard Taruskin rails against utopian musical projects, mentioning Shostakovich as being on the side of resistance.¹⁶ We could add Daniel Asia as well. And while both composers address political concerns, they also illustrate Taruskin’s claim of a link between the world of political utopianism and the utopian aspirations in musical performance that, Taruskin claims, “infest” the world of classical music, beset by an obsession with autonomy, authenticity, and correctness.¹⁷

After engaging in further reflection on the subjects of this volume, we may perhaps conclude that the future of classical music is indeed indebted to Jewish influence. A larger lesson for artistic survival lies in the legacy of Jewish musicians, whose respect and honor for a spiritual legacy anchored in liturgical song has so often been matched by a readiness to take risks with new musical forms required for life in the present.

¹⁵ Kuhn, “Laughter Through Tears,” 8.

¹⁶ In one instance Taruskin directs attention to Shostakovich’s *Five Satires*, op. 109 (1960), and his setting of the poem “Descendants” by Sasha Cherny, which examines the folly of the Soviet order. He notes the composer’s apparent “unwillingness to sacrifice pleasure in the present while awaiting perfection, evident in the lines ‘I want a little light/for myself, while I am alive.’” Taruskin, *The Danger of Music and Other Anti-Utopian Essays*, xiv.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, xii-xv.

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PART I:
SHOSTAKOVICH

DMITRI SHOSTAKOVICH AND JEWISH MUSIC: THE VOICE OF AN OPPRESSED PEOPLE

ALEXANDER TENTSER

“From art will come a new life and the salvation of humanity”¹

Beginning in the 19th century, Russian artists were always sensitive and responsive to the socio-political situation in the country. The great writers such as Pushkin, Gogol, Dostoevsky, and Tolstoy were worshipped by their readers even during their lives almost as prophets. Literary critics such as Belinsky and Chernyshevsky were also held in incredible respect by the reading public. Their reviews in the newspapers of the day were highly anticipated and debated with emotional intensity.

Gogol, who at the end of his life felt himself almost a preacher, wrote, “The sermon will pierce the soul and will not fall on barren soil. Like an angel’s grief, our poetry will flare up and strike all the strings that there may be in the Russian person, bringing holiness into the most coarsened souls.”²

Russian artists were very conscious of their special place in the society. When the first Russian revolution broke out in 1905, the general unrest and anxiety which had caused it was mirrored in artistic circles. Dmitri Dmitrievich Shostakovich was born in the midst of this tumultuous time period, in 1906.

Shostakovich’s family had a longstanding democratic tradition. Most notably his paternal grandfather, Boleslav Shostakovich, was a Polish revolutionary who had participated in the January Uprising of 1863-64 and been exiled to Narym, a town near Tomsk, in Siberia in 1866 by the

¹ Volkov, *St. Petersburg: A Cultural History*, 272.

² Volkov, *Romanov Riches: Russian Writers and Artists Under the Tsars*, 136.

Russian Tsar Alexander II. Boleslav was associated with the infamous Polish rebel, General Yaroslav Dombrowsky, and had helped him escape from prison. The composer's father, Dmitri Boleslavovich, was born in exile, but had managed to acquire a very good education at St. Petersburg University and had become an engineer. The composer's maternal grandfather also came to the capital from Siberia. There is no question that young Shostakovich's early upbringing was liberal and democratic; these traditions were very much alive in his family.

The Russian version of the democratic tradition was international, the idealistic belief being that in a new, upcoming era all nations would live as one peaceful, freedom-loving people. In this milieu, a number of leading revolutionaries were of Jewish origin, including leaders of the October Revolution of 1917 like Trotsky, Sverdlov, Kamenev, Zinoviev, and others. Some of the Jewish population supported this revolution, seeing in it the hope of being freed from the confinement of the Pale of Settlement imposed by the Tsarist regime. At the time, the Pale incorporated about 20% of European Russian territory: the countries known currently as Lithuania, Poland, Moldova, Belorussia, and Ukraine as well as parts of Western Russia. The majority of the Jews were prohibited from living in large cities such as St. Petersburg, Moscow, or Kiev, and the living conditions in provincial towns, or *shtetls*, where the population was centered, were very poor. Nevertheless, every Jewish village had a *yeshiva*, or religious school, and the education level was much higher than in many other parts of the Russian Empire. Some Jews were, however, allowed to live in larger cities if they were accepted as students, or if they were highly regarded professional specialists (doctors and engineers) or successful merchants or bankers. The student population at the St. Petersburg Conservatory—in keeping with the Russian democratic tradition—was very international. The conservatory's most important Russian teacher, the great composer Rimsky-Korsakov, had attracted many talented young students from various distant regions of the Russian Empire, among them a number of Jewish students. Rimsky-Korsakov knew Jewish music and liked it. He is famously quoted as asserting that “Jewish music exists – this is beautiful music and it awaits its Glinka.”³ His Jewish pupils were instrumental in creating The Jewish Folk Music Society in St. Petersburg in 1908.

It is generally acknowledged and well described in musicological literature that Shostakovich learned the Jewish idiomatic style of music

³ Braun, *Jews and Jewish Elements in Soviet Music*, 37.

from several sources dating from 1936 and later. He very much liked the unfinished opera *Rothschild's Violin*, which his favorite composition student, Venyamin Fleishman (drafted into the army and tragically killed during the beginning of the war in 1941), had based on a Chekhov story. Shostakovich completed and orchestrated it. Shostakovich was also familiar with the collection of Jewish songs and instrumental pieces published by Moisei Beregovsky, the Ukrainian musicologist from Kiev who was defending his dissertation on Jewish folk music at Moscow Conservatory in 1944. A letter from Shostakovich to his friend Atovmian referring to Beregovsky and his wife indicates that the composer knew them personally. Russian musicologists think that Shostakovich helped obtain Beregovsky's rehabilitation from prison, to which he had been consigned during the last wave of Stalinist purges from 1948 to 1953. Perhaps it is no coincidence that Shostakovich was working on his Piano Trio, one of his most important works where Jewish elements are used, in 1943-44. Beregovsky's collection contained unique material gathered before the Second World War on field trips to Jewish communities that were to be completely annihilated during the Holocaust. Furthermore, we know full well that Shostakovich was very friendly with Mieczyslaw (Moisei) Weinberg, the Polish composer of Jewish origin who lost his family in the Holocaust and escaped to Russia, where he survived in exile. Shostakovich thought highly of Weinberg's talent and helped him settle in Moscow. Weinberg, although much younger than Shostakovich, was well-versed in Jewish tradition and by then had already created several works on Jewish themes. Their friendship undoubtedly inspired Shostakovich. Weinberg would remain a most dedicated friend of Shostakovich's to the very end.

But quite probably Shostakovich's knowledge of Jewish life and folklore originated much earlier. Between 1881 and 1917, as Tsarist rule was coming to an end, there were a series of anti-Jewish pogroms, many unleashed by the Tsarist regime itself. They particularly intensified during the revolution of 1905 as the population searched for a scapegoat to blame for life's difficulties. Inevitably, intelligent families such as Shostakovich's would be aware of these atrocities and would discuss them. One anti-Semitic ultra-nationalist group, the Union of the Russian People, better known as the "Black Hundred," was particularly brutal. Shostakovich portrayed a pogrom unleashed by this group in the first movement of his Symphony #13, "Babi Yar," composed years later in 1962 and based on

Yevgeny Yevtushenko's poem. In the movement, he symbolically used a Russian song, "Akh vy seni, moi seni,"⁴ often associated with this group.

Shostakovich lost many friends to war and repression, but his friendship with Lev Arnshtam (1905-1979), son of a well-known St. Petersburg doctor, who entered the St. Petersburg Conservatory in the same year as young Dmitri, survived over time. Arnshtam became a prominent Soviet film director. Among his films is the 1946 biography of Mikhail Glinka, the "father of Russian music." Shostakovich wrote music for the following Arnshtam films: *The Girl Friends* (1936), *Friends* (1938), *Zoya* (1944), *Five Days, Five Nights* (1960), and *Sofiya Perovskaya* (1967). Arnshtam remembers that one of Shostakovich's main personality traits was his limitless kindness to all the people he met during his life. He could not stand to see anyone humiliated and was a true humanitarian.⁵ Sofia Khentova, Shostakovich's official Soviet biographer, tells us that also among Shostakovich's friends at that time were Solomon Gershov and Boris Erbshtein, talented young painters who had been brought up in the Jewish cultural tradition and knew Jewish music and folklore.⁶ Shostakovich's composition teacher at the St Petersburg Conservatory was Maximilian Shteinberg, who had come out of the Vilno (Vilnius) Jewish community. Shteinberg became Rimsky-Korsakov's son-in-law and was completely embraced by the Rimsky-Korsakov family. So it is obvious that Shostakovich's friendships with Jewish artists and musicians were lifelong and originated in his youth, and we can safely infer that his respect for and interest in Jewish music and culture originated very early, during his student years.

We do not know much of Shostakovich's strong folkloric interests, either Russian or Jewish, during this period. In his works he always tended to avoid directly quoting Russian or Jewish songs, instead forging his own unique musical language. There are several exceptions, of course. One is in the first movement of the 13th Symphony, and another is in his 8th String Quartet, with its very important quotes from an old Russian political prisoners' song, "Tormented by Grievous Bondage."

In spite of his fragile health, Shostakovich displayed a confident, somewhat ironic personality in his youth, undoubtedly inspired by his

⁴ [Hey There, My New Porch], for translation, see McBurney, "Fried Chicken in the Bird-Cherry Trees," 250.

⁵ Arnshtam, "Bessmertie" [Immortality], 113.

⁶ Khentova, "Udivitel'nyi Shostakovich" [Amazing Shostakovich], 36.