

# The Music of Shostakovich:

## Communication Under Soviet Suppression

Thesis: The Soviet composer Dmitri Shostakovich, living under the artistic suppression of a nationalistic regime, communicated the realities of the Soviet Union through his music. His example inspires creative freedom within artists that forever changes the power of music in society.

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Senior Division

Group Website

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Having previously participated in the National History Day competition, we felt that it was important to choose a topic that we were truly passionate about in order to make the creation of the project more enjoyable and genuine. Both being musicians, the topic of creating a project about music immediately came to mind. To us, music is one of the most profound methods of communication, and we wanted to reflect this in our project. We decided for our project to revolve around Dmitri Shostakovich after learning about his life under Soviet rule in our orchestra class. Many of his works are known to communicate his own commentary about important events in history despite suppression from the Soviet government, and we felt that a project around his music would clearly relate to the annual theme. After research, we were able to solidify our final historical argument: how Dmitri Shostakovich communicated his outlook on Soviet life, and how his music is a perfect example of artistic expression's powerful role in society.

We began our research by finding general sources about the Soviet Union and Dmitri Shostakovich's life, knowing that this would help us to create an outline for his most important works and the historical context of our project. We first looked at commentary that drew meaning out of the technicalities of the symphonies from musicians who were well acquainted with Shostakovich's music. Then, we looked for primary sources in newspapers like TIME magazine because we knew that Shostakovich was famous overseas, even during his lifetime, so there would be articles about him and key events in the Soviet Union. Databases were also great tools for primary sources such as photos and documents from the time period.

Because of the COVID-19 pandemic, we could not risk meeting in person to complete the project, limiting our choice of project to Documentary or Website. Feeling that we had more experience with websites from past projects, we chose to create a website for this competition as

well. We created our website with NHD Web Central, which at first was overwhelming, so we turned to the NHD Web Central YouTube tutorials in order to become more proficient. Working on the website remotely while video chatting, we were able to create our project.

Shostakovich's music epitomizes the emotions of the citizens living under the Soviet Union, from the mournful 3rd movement of his 5th Symphony to the heroic 7th Symphony. Because music is such an immersive art, those emotions could be communicated even to teenagers living in the 21st century, like us, and we are able to experience and empathize with people from the past. In today's high tensions between people and their governments, we can look back on ways Shostakovich used music as a form of expression, even in a time of artistic suppression.