Concerts of Thursday, January 17, and Saturday, January 19, 2019, at 8:00p

Robert Spano, Conductor

Johannes Moser, cello

Leonard Bernstein (1918-1990)

Three Meditations from Mass, for Violoncello and Orchestra (1977)

I. Lento assai, molto sostenuto

II. Andante sostenuto—Variations I-IV—Coda

III. Presto—Fast and primitive—Molto adagio

Johannes Moser, cello

Intermission

Dmitri Shostakovich (1906-1975)

Symphony No. 7 in C Major, Opus 60, “Leningrad” (1941)

I. Allegretto

II. Moderato (poco allegretto)

III. Adagio

IV. Allegro non troppo
Notes on the Program by Ken Meltzer

Three Meditations from *Mass*, for Violoncello and Orchestra (1977)

Leonard Bernstein was born in Lawrence, Massachusetts, on August 25, 1918, and died in New York on October 14, 1990. The first performance of *Three Meditations* from *Mass* took place at the Kennedy Center for the Performing Arts in Washington, DC, on October 11, 1977, with Mstislav Rostropovich as soloist, and the composer conducting the National Symphony Orchestra. In addition to the solo cello, the Three Meditations are scored for vibraphone, xylophone, marimba, timpani, glockenspiel, cymbals, suspended cymbal, triangle, tambourine, gourds, tom-tom, two snare drums, bass drum, three hand drums (high, middle, low), harp, piano, organ, and strings. Approximate performance time is nineteen minutes.

First Classical Subscription Performances (Two Meditations): April 21-23, 1988, Robert Shaw, Conductor.

*Mass*, “A Theater Piece for Singers, Players and Dancers”, was commissioned by Jacqueline Kennedy in memory of her husband, President John F. Kennedy. *Mass* was also the work presented at the first public performance in the Kennedy Center for the Performing Arts, which took place on September 8, 1971.

*Mass* is remarkably broad ranging and eclectic, even by Bernstein’s standards. The work features a large cast performing music that draws upon numerous kinds of sacred and secular traditions, both classical and popular. Bernstein’s use of theatrical elements in a sacred work, and his stark depiction of a crisis of faith caused no small amount of controversy among various religious groups. Critics, too, were divided about the overall effectiveness of *Mass*. Few, however, denied Bernstein’s obvious emotional investment in *Mass* and, indeed, the work’s autobiographical elements.

Some years later, Bernstein fashioned works for solo cello and piano, and solo cello and orchestra, based upon music from the original *Mass* score. Bernstein composed those works for the legendary Russian cellist Mstislav Rostropovich (1927-2007). The first performance of *Three Meditations* from *Mass*, for Violoncello Solo and Orchestra, took place at the Kennedy Center on October 11, 1977. Rostropovich was the cello soloist, and the composer conducted the National Symphony Orchestra.

The first Meditation serves as an interlude between the “Confession” and “Gloria” portions of the *Mass*. The second Meditation, an interlude between the “Gloria” and “Epistle,” is a set of theme and variations, based upon music from the finale of Beethoven’s Ninth Symphony (1824). The final Meditation comprises several episodes from *Mass*.

**Symphony No. 7 in C Major, Opus 60, “Leningrad” (1941)**
Dmitri Shostakovich was born in St. Petersburg, Russia, on September 25, 1906, and died in Moscow, Russia, on August 9, 1975. The first performance of the “Leningrad” Symphony took place in Kuibyshev (Samara), Russia, on March 5, 1942, with Samuil Samosud conducting the Orchestra of the Bolshoi Theater. The Symphony No. 7 is scored for piccolo, three flutes, alto flute, two oboes, English horn, E-flat clarinet, three B-flat clarinets, bass clarinet, two bassoons, contrabassoon, eight horns, six trumpets, six trombones, tuba, timpani, bass drum, tambourine, xylophone, snare drum, tam-tam, triangle, suspended cymbal, crash cymbal, two harps, piano, and strings. Approximate performance time is sixty-nine minutes.


On Sunday, June 22, 1941, Dmitri Shostakovich planned a relaxing, early-summer evening in his native city of Leningrad—a football double-header, followed by some dinner. However, while en route to the stadium, Shostakovich heard a radio broadcast announcing Germany’s invasion of the Soviet Union.

The evacuation of Leningrad began in early July. Shostakovich refused to leave, instead volunteering to join the Red Army. His application was rejected, as was a subsequent attempt to become a member of the Civil Guard. Finally, Shostakovich joined the civil defense forces, digging ditches and constructing barriers. Later, Shostakovich served as a member of the city’s firefighting brigade. A photo of the helmeted Shostakovich, standing guard on the roof of the Leningrad Conservatory, became a worldwide symbol of Soviet resistance.

Shostakovich also lent his art to the cause, continuing to teach at the Conservatory, and providing several arrangements of patriotic songs and arias. Shostakovich began a new large-scale work for soloist, chorus, and orchestra, based upon the Psalms of David. But he abandoned the project after just a few days. At this point, Dmitri Shostakovich turned his attention to a work that would serve as inspiration for millions—both in Russia, and throughout the world.

On July 19, 1941, Shostakovich began the composition of his Seventh Symphony. Despite the horrific conditions engendered by the Nazi attack, Shostakovich composed at a feverish pace: “I worked day and night. I could hear ack-ack guns firing and shells exploding as I worked. But I never stopped working.”

On August 29, the Nazis severed Leningrad’s final rail link with the rest of Russia. This led to the start of the 900-day siege that brought unspeakable destruction, famine, and disease to Leningrad. But despite mounting hardship, Shostakovich continued to resist efforts to evacuate him and his family.

On September 3, Shostakovich completed the first movement of his Symphony No. 7. Two weeks later, Shostakovich put the finishing touches on the second
movement. That evening, the composer appeared on radio, attempting to buoy the spirits of the citizens of Leningrad:

An hour ago I completed the second movement of my new symphonic work. If all goes well, and I succeed in writing the third and fourth movements, then this will be my Seventh Symphony. Why do I tell you this? I tell you this so that the people of Leningrad who hear me now might know that life in our city is still going on. Each of us is now doing his soldier’s duty. Workers in the sphere of culture are fulfilling their duty honourably and selflessly, like all other Leningraders. My thoughts are clear, and my creative energies will spur me to complete my symphony. When it is finished, I shall broadcast my work over the radio, and will await your exacting, friendly appraisal. I can assure you, on behalf of all Leningrad’s cultural workers, that we are invincible, and will never desert our post.

Soviet musicians, my dear brothers-in-arms, my friends! Do not forget that our music is in grave danger. Let us work honestly and selflessly to defend it. The music which is so dear to us, and to which we have given our hearts and souls, must continue to grow as never before. We must remember that our every note contributes to the construction of our culture. And the better and more beautiful our art, the more certain it will be that it will never be destroyed.

On October 1, two days after Shostakovich completed the Symphony’s third movement, the Soviets ordered the composer and his family to leave for Moscow. Shostakovich was able to take only a few scores with him, including the Symphony No. 7.

Two weeks later, Shostakovich and his family were placed on a train bound east from Moscow to the war capital of Kuibyshev, where they arrived on October 22. At first, the Shostakovich family lived in a school classroom, where they slept on the floor. Later, they were relocated to a private room that even included a piano. Still, Shostakovich found it difficult to make any progress on his Symphony: “I began to notice that a single room is terribly inconvenient for working; the children are noisy and intrude. They need to make noise, they’re children after all, but unfortunately, it makes it impossible for me to work.”

Finally, on December 9, Shostakovich and his family relocated to a two-bedroom apartment. The new conditions provided Shostakovich with much-needed privacy. On December 27, Shostakovich announced to his friends that he had completed his Symphony No. 7, “Dedicated to the city of Leningrad.”

Shostakovich described the “Leningrad” as “a symphony about our age, our people, our sacred war and our victory.” The work received its premiere in
Kuibyshev on March 5, 1942, with Samuil Samosud conducting the Orchestra of the Bolshoi Theater. That triumphant performance was broadcast throughout Russia and around the world.

The Moscow premiere of the “Leningrad” Symphony took place on March 29. This time, Samosud led an ensemble consisting of members of the Bolshoi and All-Union Radio Orchestras. Two weeks later, the “Leningrad” Symphony earned Shostakovich the Stalin Prize. In program notes for the Moscow premiere, Shostakovich commented: “During the great Patriotic War our writers, artists and musicians are working hard and prolifically, because they are inspired by the most progressive ideas of our age. And as the cannons roar, our muses also raise their mighty heads. No one shall ever wrench the pen from our hands.”

The “Leningrad” Symphony quickly became an international symbol of the struggle against fascism. In April the score, preserved on microfilm, was flown to Tehran—the start of a journey to Western countries. The Symphony received its Western broadcast premiere on June 22, 1942, with Henry Wood conducting the London Philharmonic Orchestra.

A fierce competition arose as to who would conduct the American premiere. That distinction was finally accorded to the legendary Italian maestro, Arturo Toscanini, who led his NBC Symphony Orchestra in a July 19, 1942 broadcast, heard by approximately 20 million people. That year alone, Shostakovich’s “Leningrad” Symphony received more than 60 performances in America.

But the most extraordinary presentation of the Symphony No. 7 took place in war-ravaged Leningrad, on August 9, 1942. By then, Leningrad’s Orchestra had been reduced to only fifteen musicians. Nevertheless, players from several other Russian orchestras—including troops recalled from the front lines—joined forces to create a full ensemble. Leningrad’s commander-in-chief, General Govorov, ordered the destruction of as many German guns as possible, in order to prevent interference with the music. The concert was broadcast on the radio and into the streets of Leningrad.

For decades, people continued to assume that the “Leningrad” Symphony was precisely what Shostakovich publicly represented it to be—a depiction of the Nazi invasion and prophecy of its ultimate defeat. But in 1979, the publication of Testimony forced the music world to confront the possibility that Dmitri Shostakovich battled other enemies in his “Leningrad” Symphony.

Solomon Volkov, a friend and student of Shostakovich, compiled Testimony. Subtitled “The Memoirs of Dmitri Shostakovich,” Testimony offers a quite different picture of a composer once typically viewed as a loyal and compliant member of Soviet Russia. In Testimony, Shostakovich describes the Seventh Symphony as “my requiem.” He goes on to state that the “Leningrad” Symphony “had been planned long before the war and consequently it cannot be seen as a reaction to Hitler’s attack.”
In discussing the infamous “theme of war” of the Symphony’s opening movement, the Shostakovich of Testimony comments that it:

has nothing to do with the attack. I was thinking of other enemies of humanity when I composed that theme.

Naturally, fascism is repugnant to me, but not only German fascism, any form of it is repugnant. Nowadays people like to recall the prewar period as an idyllic time, saying that everything was fine until Hitler bothered us. Hitler is a criminal, that’s clear, but so is Stalin.

I feel eternal pain for those who were killed by Hitler, but I feel no less pain for those killed on Stalin’s orders. I suffer for everyone who was tortured, shot, or starved to death. There were millions of them in our country before the war with Hitler began.

The war brought much new sorrow and much new destruction, but I haven’t forgotten the terrible prewar years. That is what all my symphonies, beginning with the Fourth, are about, including the Seventh and Eighth.

Actually, I have nothing against calling the Seventh the Leningrad Symphony, but it’s not about Leningrad under siege, it’s about the Leningrad Stalin destroyed and that Hitler merely finished off.

The authenticity of Testimony continues to be the subject of heated debate. Many of Shostakovich’s friends have insisted that Testimony is an accurate depiction of the composer’s thoughts (I had the opportunity to discuss this issue with both Mstislav Rostropovich and composer Rodion Shchedrin, both of whom reaffirmed that position). In all likelihood, disagreements will remain both over Solomon Volkov’s book, and the meaning of the “Leningrad” Symphony. But regardless of the identity of the foe(s) portrayed in the “Leningrad” Symphony, what clearly emerges in the epic work is a profound expression of compassion for the suffering within a city Shostakovich once referred to as “my own house.”

Many years after the conclusion of the Second World War, a group of Russian schoolchildren created a museum relating to the “Leningrad” Symphony. Shostakovich himself provided one of the exhibits—his ticket for the June 22, 1941 football match.

**Musical Analysis**

In the musical description below, Shostakovich’s program notes for the March 29, 1942 Moscow premiere are included in bold type.

I. Allegretto—
My Seventh Symphony is a programme work, charged with the sinister events of 1941. It has four movements. The first movement tells of how the evil force of war broke into our peaceful, wonderful life. I did not try to depict naturalistic war sounds (the noise of aeroplanes, the rumble of tanks, the whistle of bullets): it is not a battle-piece. I wanted to convey the essence of the terrible events.

The exposition of the first movement tells of the happy lives of our people, their confidence in themselves, and in their future—the kind of life that before the war thousands of Leningraders, indeed all our countrymen, were leading.

The Symphony begins with the strings' unison presentation of the vigorous, initial theme. The energy of the opening section finally resolves to a more lyrical episode, highlighting the flutes. This serves as the prelude to the flowing, second principal theme (Poco più mosso), played by the first violins to undulating accompaniment in the lower strings. The exposition concludes with a tranquil sequence, featuring a solo piccolo and violin.

The theme of war can be heard through the whole of the middle section.

Instead of the traditional development of themes presented in the exposition, Shostakovich introduces a two-measure repeated figure in the side drum. This serves as rhythmic accompaniment to a theme, first played quietly by the violins and violas. This “theme of war” undergoes a series of variations, gaining in volume and intensity until finally, the music explodes with alarming force (here, it is perhaps appropriate to note that the Shostakovich of Testimony characterized Stalin as “like the frog puffing himself up to the size of the ox”). This terrifying sequence leads to the final section of the opening movement:

A central position in the first movement is occupied by a funeral march, or rather, a requiem for the victims of the war. The Soviet people honour the memory of their heroes. After the requiem comes an even more tragic episode. I do not even know how to describe this music. Perhaps it contains a mother’s tears, or even that feeling when one’s grief is so great that there are no tears left. After a long bassoon solo, describing the suffering of friends and relations of those who perish in the war, comes the bright, lyrical conclusion to the first movement. Only at the very end can the theme of war be heard again in the distance, reminding us of the struggle still to come.

II. Moderato (poco allegretto)—
The second movement is a lyrical scherzo, which contains recollections of pleasant, happy events. Underlying this, there is a trace of sadness and meditation.

The scherzo opens with a tripping theme, first played by the second violins, soon joined by the first violins. The broad second theme—played over pulsating accompaniment in the strings—is sung first by the oboe, then by the English horn. The first violins’ subdued, pizzicato repetition of the opening theme is suddenly interrupted by a triple-time danse macabre, led by the eerie sonorities of the E-flat clarinet. The first violins launch the reprise of the opening section. The second theme now enters in quite different sonic guise, with the bass clarinet singing the melody to accompaniment by the harp and fluttering sequences in the flutes. Repetitions of the two principal themes lead to the scherzo’s pianissimo close.

III. Adagio—

The third movement is an emotional adagio. Ecstasy in life and admiration of nature—these are the main themes running through this movement, which flows into the fourth without a break.

The Adagio opens with a stark chorale passage for the winds, followed by a plaintive response by the strings. A repetition of this exchange leads to an extended, lyrical passage. Soon, the tension builds, finally resolving to a highly agitated episode (Moderato risoluto), featuring an insistent, dotted-rhythm motif that recalls the opening movement of the composer’s Fifth Symphony (1937). The violence of this section ultimately yields to a serene echo of material from the opening portion of the Adagio. A more emphatic reprise precedes the somber closing measures, leading directly to the final movement.

IV. Allegro non troppo—

The first and the fourth movements are the most important in the composition. The first is the struggle, the fourth the impending victory. The first opens with a short introduction, followed by the exposition of the stirring first theme. The second theme, triumphal in mood, is the climax of the entire composition. The climax develops peacefully and assuredly, culminating in the grand, joyful sound of the finale.

The hushed introduction features hints of the finale’s ensuing, principal thematic material. Finally, the scurrying, initial theme is presented in full by the strings, launching music of ever-increasing power and momentum. However, the mood quickly changes with the sudden arrival of the Moderato section, featuring omnipresent and stern dotted rhythms. The opening theme returns in far more grandiose form, as does, finally, the principal theme of the Symphony’s first
movement. That triumphant restatement brings the "Leningrad" Symphony to a blazing conclusion.