

***Concerto No.1 for Cello and Orchestra,
Op.107 in E Flat Major
by Dmitri Shostakovici***

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Abstract: *In the „Concerto no. 1 for cello and orchestra, op.107 in E flat major”, being the most important of Shostakovici’s works, after Symphony no. 11, the solo instrument represents a complex “character” which makes a dialogue or has a confrontation with the orchestral ensemble segments. The orchestra is made up of a piccolo flute, a flute, two oboes, two clarinets (in B flat and A), a bassoon, a contrabassoon, a horn (in F), timpani, celesta and the strings quintet. The instrumental nuances intertwine with the virtuosity of the solo parts. The cantilena feature of the solo episodes, marked by elements of improvisation, is combined with the declamatory “monologue” of the orchestra.*

Key-words: *Concerto, celesta, quadripartit, accompagniament*

1. General historical presentation

In the *Concerto no. 1 for cello and orchestra, op.107 in E flat major*, being the most important of Shostakovici’s works, after Symphony no. 11, the solo instrument represents a complex „character” which makes a dialogue or has a confrontation with the orchestral ensemble segments. The orchestra is made up of a piccolo flute, a flute, two oboes, two clarinets (in B flat and A), a bassoon, a contrabassoon, a horn (in F), timpani, celesta and the strings quintet. The instrumental nuances intertwine with the virtuosity of the solo parts. The cantilena feature of the solo episodes, marked by elements of improvisation, is combined with the declamatory „monologue” of the orchestra.

Shostakovici uses the great orchestra with double the number of woodwind instruments, percussion and celesta. This concerto, similarly to Concerto No. 1 for violin and orchestra, is quadripartite: Allegretto, Moderato, the Cadence and Allegro con moto (Seehans 1991, 37).

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The thematic material is rendered with virtuosity and it covers two octaves (a ninth above the octave):



The simple, yet *ostinato* rhythm of the main theme is imposed and gives personality to the musical idea:



The main theme of the first part derives its force from the rhythmic structure, being outlined by four sounds: G - E (F flat) - B (C flat) - B flat.

These four music notes underlie the musical substance of the main theme which dominates the first part.

The rhythmic structure is imposed with a poignancy that would become emblematic of the entire concerto. The wind instruments express the thematic motif of the *bridge*:

As the cello develops the original theme, the harmonic and contrapuntal accompaniment is preserved and enriched with parts on the clarinet and oboe (2).

The accompaniment of the wind instruments creates *clusters*, melodic passages (piccolo, flute, no. 4). The main theme has also an evolution which covers three aspects: after its introduction on the cello, it is enriched by a melodic episode with a modal structure, in *staccato*:



The wind instruments accompany in *legato*. The initial theme reappears, with a variational rendering, on the cello (no.5), now in harmonic accompaniment of solely the strings, in *staccato*. The bassoon and the contrabassoon bring thematic motifs by marking the transition to the third segment of the main theme, where it is taken up by the divided strings, in *legato* and sudden *crescendo* ($p < sf$). The theme is presented with another feature, but its insistence increases the tension of the expression. The cello adds passages of double notes to the thematic line of the strings (varied in terms of rhythm). The conclusion is brought by the solo cello (no. 8), on the pedal in canon of the strings and the marking in *pizzicato* of the theme. The bridge, with its specific, rhythmic, theme, in *staccato* (and *pizzicato* respectively), is interpreted by the woodwind instruments (piccolo, flute, oboe, clarinet - divided, bassoon and contrabassoon), the grave strings marking the harmony.

The theme of the *bridge* is imposed by insisting on the rhythmic repetition of sounds. The three thematic aspects make up a clear configuration of the musical evolution of the concerto. Among these, the first theme has a special destiny which is also marked by its interrogative feature:



The interrogation remains also at the end of the concerto, giving dynamic and psychological nuances meant to discover its various modes and accents.

The theme of the *bridge* has a well-defined personality, it is developed in parallel with the secondary theme and is found during the thematic rendering and even in the conclusion of the first part:



The secondary theme is brought by the solo cello as well (in *ff*), in alternative bars (prepared by the 4 bars of the bridge and with the accompaniment of the timpani) and has a tragic feature. The cello expresses the second theme in an acute register, interpreted in controlled *vibrato* and using a new stroke of the bow (*tenuto*): (Seehans 1991, 78).



The *ostinato* repetition of the sounds, in *fortissimo*, on long, vibrating notes, provides a low tension to the secondary theme. The contrast between the two themes appears at the rhythmic, metric (alternating the bars of the exposition) and the dynamic level, the piano nuance being used in expressing the first musical idea, *fortissimo*, during the interpretation of the second idea on the cello:



The divided strings harmonically accompany the secondary theme, in *staccato* and counterpoints, to which parts on the flute, on the clarinet and on the piccolo flute are added. The secondary theme contains also a modal melodic episode, originating in the folklore:



The accompaniment is simple within the harmonic passages in counterpoints of the strings and the rhythmic notations, on time, of the low strings, the woodwind instruments expressing a melodic line in *legato*. The secondary theme is written (similarly to the first theme) in the G key. Moreover, the soloist score goes through the three keys: F, G and C.

The third segment of the secondary theme is developed in the acute register of the cello (treble clef, the first octave) on the accompaniment of the bridge motif (woodwind instruments). The melodic episode of the secondary theme is then

interpreted by the cello in the medium register, the solo clarinet interpreting the conclusion of the *exposition* (no. 14), in the *forte* and *decrescendo* nuances. This conclusion of the *exposition* is carried out on the motifs of the secondary theme (in alternative meter). The *development* begins with the main theme interpreted, in *forte*, on the horn, in the tonality of the relative minor (C minor). The horn interprets the main theme (no.15) in the accompaniment of the strings (*staccato* and counterpoints). The cello brings the reversed theme (no.16) and the thematic motifs of the conclusion of the theme from the *exposition*:



From a technical point of view, the cello should support double notes and leaps over intervals and octaves. The development is carried out on the conclusive motif of the theme (solo cello) and on the rendering of the main theme (on the horn) followed by thematic motifs of the melodic episode in the secondary theme. The strings perform the accompaniment in pizzicato and staccato. There are three thematic interventions of the horn, based on the exposition of the first theme, all in *forte*. The third exposition on the horn of the first theme is followed by the rendering in variations of the main theme by the solo cello (and strings) that mark the harmony, in pizzicato, on counterpoints (Seehans, 1991).

The rendering on variations of the first theme is done by the horn (no. 22), to which the woodwind instruments will reply on the motif of the same main theme, resuming the development episode through the variation of the secondary theme (in *staccato* and *forte* no.23):

The image shows a musical score for three woodwind instruments: Piccolo (Picc.), Oboe (Ob.), and Clarinet (Cl.). The music is in treble clef with a key signature of one flat. It features a rhythmic accompaniment of eighth notes. The dynamic marking is *f*. The Piccolo part has a '23' in a box above the first measure. The Oboe and Clarinet parts play similar rhythmic patterns with some chromatic variations.

The dissonant chords are played on the cello. The rendering of the secondary theme is also taken over by the solo cello against the wind instruments (no. 25). The conclusion of the *development* is brought by the horn, which expresses the first theme on the third step, with the rhythmic accompaniment of the strings. The wood wind instruments (clarinet, oboe, flute, piccolo) bring the main thematic motif to its original stage (no. 27), announcing the *reprise*.

Within the *reprise*, the introduction of the main theme is done by the solo cello, on the dotted and contrapuntal accompaniment of the wind instruments. The secondary theme is expressed on the horn (in C), on the motif of the bridge interpreted on the solo cello:

The image shows two staves of musical notation. The upper staff is labeled 'Cor.' (Horn) and is in treble clef. It features a melodic line with several slurs and accents, including a prominent dotted note. The lower staff is labeled 'Vc. solo' (Solo Cello) and is in bass clef. It provides a rhythmic accompaniment with slurs and accents, mirroring the melodic structure of the horn part.

The episode of the secondary theme is taken over by the cello from the horn (no. 31), the solo instrument continuing the rendering of the secondary theme in the acute register (no. 33) on the accompaniment of the bridge motif (the wind instruments). The strings bring colour, with melodic passages, in *legato*. The return of the main theme marks the *coda*. The main theme, translated and rendered on the cello, develops in *diminuendo* towards the grave register. The accent in *ff* of the timpani brings the conclusion of the first part, marked by the sudden appearance of the bridge motif in forte, the conclusion also being imposed in forte.

The orchestra is present in order to offer thematic support to the solo instrument, with a certain degree of discretion, when the primary thematic part is played by the cello. The rhythmic and harmonic scoring dominates the discourse of the orchestra, which imposes itself precisely through the compact and differentiated manner of rhythmic and harmonic support. The woodwind instruments prevail at the beginning of the *exposition* and the *reprise*. The use of instruments is exemplary – the strings naturally replacing the wind instruments in supporting the cello.

The distinctive, short but clear interventions of the wind instruments comment on the rendering of the theme. (Seehans 1991, 87).

The same inspiration and clarity also distinguishes the rendering of the first thematic idea on the strings. The feature of the interrogation gets a certain disguised aggression. The wind instruments are highlighted in supporting the bridge and the exposition of the secondary theme. The timpano intervenes aggressively (bridge and conclusion). Within the wind instruments ensemble, the piccolo intervenes thematically and distinctly (together or in dialogue with the instruments of the same make), just like the contrabassoon.

The layout of the contrasting timbre registers and the opposite registers (piccolo - contrabassoon) represents a style characteristic of the composer.

The second part, *Moderato* (A minor), with a three-part *lied* form and a *reprise* is predominantly lyrical. A brief introduction on the strings, in *piano*, opens the slow part in a modal atmosphere, on a melodic line (in triple meter) which starts in the medium register; its internalization (*piano espressivo, pp*) receives a surprising impetus through its major seventh leap (A – G sharp); it prepares the solo on the horn (no. 39) that anticipates the introduction of the solo cello.

2.2. The Second Part

The theme of the second part, interpreted by the solo cello, is in duple meter and it begins in the middle register. The melody of the theme has a strong folklore feature, reminiscent of the Russian melancholy song. The cello sustains this theme which it develops, instilling it sorrow, like a lamentation, in the melodic bows of the violas and the rhythmic and harmonic marks of the contrabassoons. The evolution of the musical idea sustained by the cello has continuity and its rendering seems an improvisation. On this seemingly improvisatory development, the solo clarinet comes with the exposition of the theme (no. 42). The melodic line of the cello is complemented by that of the violas, preserving the piano and pianissimo nuances.

When the solo clarinet takes over the theme, the horn sustains the pedal and the timpani highlight the theme in *tremollo*. The violas intervene by bringing the thematic motifs, while the cello continues to develop the theme in a more and more discreet nuance, towards the grave register. The *intermezzo* on the strings (no. 45) brings back the motif of the introduction (*ppespressivo*) and the triple meter ends the thematic exposition; now it is modulated on F sharp minor (three sharps on the key signature). The thematic rendering of the solo cello (no. 47) highlights (along with the added violas) the modal feature; this sad, resigned recollection marks the emotional level of the theme. (Seehans, 199:, 135)

The improvisatory recitative of the cello (no.49) brings back the rendering of the motif in the introduction (*intermezzo*), which makes space, discreetly, to a sections, B (no.50), related to the previous thematic motif. In the same nuance of *piano dolce*, the cello interprets a simple theme, reminiscent of a patriotic song which is now metamorphosed into a nostalgic song, full of a serene naiveté, which develops discreetly on the harmonic accompaniment, in counterpoints, of the wind instruments: flute, clarinet, bassoon (D major, with inflections towards B, C sharp).

The wind instruments accompany the cello on a dissonant harmony that suggests the music of the mechanical instruments used in fairs (barrel organs):

The musical score for page 67 of Concerto No. 1 for Cello and Orchestra, Op. 107 in E Flat Major, features several parts:

- Vc. solo (top):** Includes markings for *poco rit.*, *a tempo*, and *riten.*. Dynamics range from *p* to *mp*. It includes *arco* and *pp* markings.
- Fl. (Flute):** Marked *non stacc.* and *p dolce*.
- Cl. (Clarinet):** Marked *non stacc.* and *p dolce*.
- Fag. (Bassoon):** Marked *non stacc.* and *p dolce*.
- Vc. solo (bottom):** Dynamics include *p* and *mf*.

In resuming these melodic segments, in section *B*, the solo cello interprets improvisatory melodic lines. The nostalgic melody is carried out in the grave register of the cello (no. 52) on the harmonic, dissonant scoring of the strings, in *pizzicato*, with counterpoints and accents on a part of the measure (suggesting a staccato march):

The musical score for the solo cello (Vc. solo) in the grave register shows a melodic line with dynamics *p* and *f*.

The nuance increases and the atmosphere brightness with the introduction of the wind instruments on the motif of the main theme. The discourse of the cello becomes more animated. The strings bring back the theme of the middle section (no. 54) in unison, translated and rendered on the staccato harmonies of the double basses and on the cello improvisation.

The ensemble returns to the forefront in *crescendo*. The stroke of the timpani announces the return of the introduction theme (A), this time in *fortissimo*, and not just on the strings, but on the woodwind instruments as well, with the sound effect of the piccolo flute. The *reprise* resumes the introduction on the solo horn, and the theme is interpreted in *piano* (the melodic undulation of the strings in sourdine) by the cello and the celesta. The complementarity of the thematic treatment between the cello and the celesta brings back the inner atmosphere (of intense sadness) on the *tremolo crescendo-decrescendo* of the timpani.

The arrangement of the second part, *Moderato*, can be structured:

A - B - A + Reprise

2.3. The Third Part

The third part, the *Cadence*, is a self-contained part where the solo cello creates a monologue, starting from the rendering of the thematic material from the previous parts. The techniques are varied and very difficult.

The composer emphasizes the expressiveness of the grave register. The polyphonic writing underlies the development of the cadence. The theme of the *Moderato* is carried out in polyphonic writing and alternative bars. In the „Allegro” section, the cello renders the initial version of the first theme. *Piu Mosso*, slightly grotesque, prepares the direct entry of the final part.

The fourth part, *Allegro con moto*, is a *rondo-sonata* without development, where the thematic synthesis of the preceding parts occurs, with the interrogation of the main theme.

The ending is compressed and the free rendering of the form allows an improvisatory development of the thematic material.

The theme - *chorus - A* is introduced by the wind instruments (oboe, clarinet), the chords emphasizing the harmony. The ensemble of the wind instruments is extended with the piccolo and the flute. The theme is taken over by the cello:

The image contains two staves of musical notation for a cello solo. The first staff is labeled 'Vc. solo' and shows a series of rests followed by a final two-note phrase. The second staff, starting at measure 9, is also labeled 'Vc. solo' and shows a more active melodic line with many beamed notes and rests, indicating a complex rhythmic pattern.

The accents on the timpani have an expressive feature. So do the descending demisemiquavers of the wind instruments that prepare the introduction of the cello with a new theme, *the first couplet - B*, which has a dancing feature, with a folklore influence and a triple meter:



The transition passage brings back the theme of the *chorus*. The duple meter is replaced by the triple meter. The grave strings take over the theme of the *couplet B* with a syncopated rhythm (67):

A multi-staff musical score. The top staff is for the solo cello (Vc. solo) and the bottom four staves are for the strings (Archi). The music shows a transition to a triple meter, with the strings playing a syncopated rhythm and the cello playing a melodic line.

The cello leads a secondary idea in ascending passages of sixteenths. The theme of the *chorus* is introduced gradually (clarinet and flute). The woodwind instruments bring back the *chorus*, in duple meter (bar 68, flute, oboe, clarinet). The strings carry out the harmony, in *pizzicato*, the solo cello performs the accompaniment, with figurations of sixteenths (Albertini bass), in *staccato* and leaps (over octaves, major sevenths) and then of repeated notes. The figurations are made by rendering the thematic motif of the *chorus*:

A single staff of music for the solo cello. The notation features a series of sixteenth notes, many with slurs and accents, indicating a melodic passage.

The second *couplet, C*, with a triple meter (bar 69) is imposed by the strings, in *forte*. The theme of the *couplet C* is taken over by the solo cello (bar 70). The rhythmic poignancy, the chromaticization of the melodic line and the highlighting of the acute register are elements with a maximum of difficulty:

A single staff of music for the solo cello. The notation features a series of sixteenth notes, many with slurs and accents, indicating a melodic passage.

The theme in *couplet C* is taken over by the wind instruments (bar 71), in *forte*. With the expressive introduction of the horn (bar 72) the dynamic is reduced to the *piano* nuance. The cello interprets a dancing theme. It is the moment of the middle section in the *development*, where the thematic ideas are rendered.

The thematic motifs of the *chorus* (solo cello, clarinet) are expressed over the theme of *couplet D*. The strings interpret the accentuated sounds in *ff*, with an alternative attack (bar 75). The theme of the *chorus* returns (bar 76), alternatively on the clarinet and flute and then on oboe and piccolo flute. The dynamics is kept in high nuance (*ff*) and signals from the wind instruments can be heard (bassoon, clarinet, oboe, flute, piccolo), which anticipates the generic theme of the first part (a variant of the composer's musical monogram motif). The theme will be interpreted, augmented, on the horn (bar 78):



The cello answers the interrogative theme with its developed idea. The answer is taken over by the bassoon. The *chorus* theme, more dynamic, is brought back by the wind instruments (the transition from triple to duple being done naturally). The first thematic motif of the first part is heard on the horn (the monogram theme, the CBED version). It is taken over by the piccolo and the flute (bar 82), after the virtuosity passages on the cello (ascending and descending demisemiquavers passages). The primordially of the *chorus* theme faces the generic theme of the first part, interpreted in *forte* and alternately, within the segment of the woodwind instruments (clarinet - oboe, oboe - piccolo flute). The metric alternation is maintained. The cello interprets passages of high technical difficulty without having the time for a break. The horn and the bassoon interpret the long sounds pedal (bar 83). It is the moment of the *coda*, where the main thematic motif echoes one last time (horn, bassoon, clarinet, oboe, flute, piccolo), on the double octaves of the cello. This interrogative thematic motif, with a threatening feature, has the last word, abruptly ending the concerto.

The structural unit of the work has to be emphasized. The argument is represented by the generic theme which is found in the development of the musical material of all the parts.

The form is arranged as follows:

Chorus A - Couplet B - Chorus A - Couplet C - Couplet D (the development of the thematic material) - Chorus A + Coda (the theme of the interrogation):

A B A₁ C D (D+B)

The cello is included in the symphonic discourse and the orchestra, although used with all its resources, is treated with an economy of means. The soloist score is very demanding. The woodwind and the brass instruments are placed in the foreground, suggesting a healthy humour within the ample dynamics. The accents in *sforzando*, the unison and the acute registers increase the aggressiveness of the thematic treatment. This concerto hides a parable, the one of determining one's destiny. The interrogative theme is perceived long after the concerto ends.

3. Conclusions

Concerto no.1 for cello and orchestra continues the stylistic line of the previous concertos dedicated to the violin. Here, the cello has a primary role, being almost continuously active and facing a large, well individualised orchestral ensemble. The concerto develops a very rich soloist page, highlighting the virtuosity side and the diverse possibilities of the solo instrument. The structural unit of the musical material, built on a cyclical thematic motif is also to be noted.

The concertos for cello are real challenges in the literature dedicated to this instrument, both from the solo instrument and from the symphonic point of view. The first part of the Concerto no. 1 for cello and orchestra in E flat major is developed on the dialogue between the cello and the woodwind instruments group. The presence of the timpani is obvious. The cyclical unit of the concerto is based on the presence of the general theme, built on a simple rhythm, marked by the staccato and *portato* technique, a theme which is found with the same rhythmic configuration, but transposed in various modulating segments (individualizing the instrumental timbres of the symphonic ensemble) in the first part, in the cadence which represents the third part and in the last section of the ending, *Allegro con brio*.

The different musical content of the two concertos is also determined by their different structure: the first one has four parts, while the other has three. The first part of the Concerto no. 1 for Cello - *Allegretto* - is energetic, the main theme returning with obstination. The first part of the Concerto no. 2 for cello - *Largo* - brings a tragic theme at chromatic intervals, which can be interpreted as a continuation of the interrogation in the main theme from the beginning of the Concerto no. 1 for cello. The strong dynamic contrasts highlight the tragic and enigmatic expression. In Concerto no. 2 for cello, the development of the orchestral episodes, in contrast with the original theme, are strongly individualized and clearly distinguished from the dynamic point of view, but also in terms of character and instrumentation. Shostakovici introduces the harp, the celesta and the xylophone into the orchestra (as he has done in Concerto no. 1 for violin and orchestra). The cyclical unit is determined by the presence of the thematic elements during the development of the musical material within sections. It must be noted that the high

registers of the wind instruments (oboe, clarinet, flute, piccolo flute) and of the solo instrument are used (Wolkow 1989, 97).

The elements of technical difficulty are also not to be ignored. The individualization of the instrumental timbres within the ensemble is put into practice in Concerto no. 2 for cello and orchestra. The direct transition from the second to the last part is reminiscent of the piano concertos. Unlike the end of the other solo instrument concertos, Concerto no. 2 for cello and orchestra proposes a temporal expansion through the discrete dynamics and the instrumentation (alongside the contrabassoon, the percussion and the wind instruments create dialogues and mark the theme). (Wolkow 1989, 159).

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