

## Concertino for 2 pianos in A minor

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*Dmitri Shostakovich composed six concertos for solo instrument and orchestra: two for piano, two for violin and two for cello. His concertos are based on the symphonic thinking experience and that of the virtuoso pianist who performed until the third decade, either as a soloist or as part of chamber music ensembles. Concertino for Two Pianos is a rhapsody with elements of sonata. The compositional style indicates clearly, expressiveness and a broad exploration of the keyboard on a wide timbre and technique range. The composer focuses on a purely pianistic feature, within the performer's reach, despite the movement, rhythmic and agogic difficulties. The Concertino will, in fact, be played by the composer, alongside with his son, Maxim. Until the composition of the Concertino, Shostakovich had given the world an important symphonic, ballet and chamber music creation (among which: the first 5 string quartets and symphonies no. 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, 9).*

Key-words: *concertino, second piano, chromiatization, agogic harmonically supports, enharmony.*

### 1. General historical presentation

Dmitri Shostakovich composed six concertos for solo instrument and orchestra: two for piano, two for violin and two for cello. His concertos are based on the symphonic thinking experience and that of the virtuoso pianist who performed until the third decade, either as a soloist or as part of chamber music ensembles.

1. *Concerto No. 1 for Piano and Orchestra in C minor op.35*, was composed in 1933, a time when his composing work was as rich as the soloist one (after completion of the opera "*Lady Macbeth of the Mțensk land*" and the first three symphonies). After this concert, Shostakovich completes the *Jazz Suite No.2* in 1934, whose Western European and American influences are found in the development of the *Concerto No.1 for piano and orchestra* thematic material. Unlike the concertos for violin and those for cello and orchestra, Shostakovich presents here a large playful capacity marked by a mostly lively, ironic and humorous feature. The

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Orchestra has a classical composition, the soloist instrument being accompanied by the trumpet. The concerto has aquadripartite structure: *Allegretto*, *Lento*, *Intermezzo-Moderato* and *Allegro con brio*, structure that will also be met within the *Concerto No.1 for violin and orchestra in A minor* and *Concerto No.1 for Cello and Orchestra in E flat major*.

2. The next concerto, composed in 1953, is revealed to be the *Concertino* for two pianos in A minor. This *Concertino* has a special status, by combining the concerto and the chamber music features. The work brings together elements present in the previous concerto score - motility, rhythmic ostinato, repeated melodic-rhythmic formulas - framed in a development that tends toward introversion, with brilliance and virtuosity effects, in the chamber and concerto spirit. The structure of the *Concertino* for Two Pianos is a rhapsody with elements of sonata. The compositional style indicates clearly, expressiveness and a broad exploration of the keyboard on a wide timbre and technique range. The composer focuses on a purely pianistic feature, within the performer's reach, despite the movement, rhythmic and agogic difficulties. The *Concertino* will, in fact, be played by the composer, alongside with his son, Maxim. Until the composition of the *Concertino*, Shostakovich had given the world an important symphonic, ballet and chamber music creation (among which: the first 5 string quartets and symphonies no. 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, 9).

## 2. Formal aspects of *The Concertino in A minor*

*Concertino in A minor for 2 pianos*, was composed in 1953. It is designed as a work in one movement, with a cyclic structure that unfolds in episodes. The first two episodes consist of the dramatic contrast in the feature of the sections: *Adagio* (introduction), *Allegretto* (intermediary episode) and *Allegro* (conclusion). What can be primarily distinguished is the agogic and dynamic contrast between *Adagio* and *Allegretto* (as thematic exposition). The introduction prepares, from the rhythmic point of view, the confirmation of the theme. Its ambitus is extended.

The introduction - *Adagio* - in A minor, begins on the second piano. The introductory episode (bars 1-38) proposes a musical development with a dramatic confrontation feature between two ideas: the first, marked (*ff*) starts from a tremolo in contra-octave with development in parallel octaves on a dotted rhythm in binary meter ("*alla breve*"), bars 1-5, and stops on step 5 (all in the lower register) and the second homophone musical ideas interpreted by the first piano, in *piano* nuance.

The musical idea is carried out in medium and acute register (bars 6-11) starting from the fifth step, with a third and a fourth under a rising alteration. The alternation between the solemn idea, with a march feature (high dynamics, *ff*) and the intensely introspective, homophonic (with modulation at the level of the A dominant major key, E - bar 15) is kept in the development of the introductory episode - bars 12 to 30, so that the alternation becomes more alert before the *exposition*. The *Adagio* has a dramatic confrontational feature, which clearly indicates Shostakovich's neoclassical thinking. The composer makes a direct reference to the second part of the *Concerto No. 4 for piano and orchestra in G Major* by Beethoven, where we find the same contrast between the musical ideas, which led some musicologists into making the Orphic analogy metaphor. The isorhythmic homophony in the piano nuance of the first piano idea requires a contrast in feature and it is opposed to the dynamic force and the rhythmic *ostinato* of the second piano theme.

Theme I is expressed in the exposition on unison, tenth and twelfth (the melodic development based on the parallel fifths over the octave being a feature of the melodic structure). The arching is ascending – descending, the hands meeting at the octave, fifth and parallel tenths level.

The alternation of the themes with the melodic-rhythmic variations and of the accompaniment from the first piano score to the second piano score becomes natural. The extended tempo reveals virtuosity, giving the *Concertino* a true concerto feature. The harmonic modulations impose, from the beginning, the tonic relationship –the major relative. The secondary steps bring modal harmonic modulations.

Theme II, interpreted alternately by the second piano and the first piano at a tenth interval, sets the lively feature of the melody by means of the dotted rhythm and the exceptional divisions. The bass accompaniment and the sixteenth passages in descending and chromatic development highlight the playful and funny feature of the secondary theme. The contrasts between registers appear in the foreground, to which the rhythmic diversity is joined (rhythmic divisions of the melodic-rhythmic motifs) on the accompaniment expressed by counterpoint chords or staccato quavers.

If the second piano sets the harmonic pillars of the main steps, the first piano provides a harmonic area full of modal inflections on the secondary steps and non-traditional chaining (reminiscent of Musorgsky's music); the harmonic area reflects on strengthening the fifth step, but also on the descending alteration of the fifth (A - E flat) and the tonic (by moving the small seventh of the A - C - E flat chord - to the dominant seventh chord).

*Allegretto* designates the beginning of the exposition. The theme, interpreted at first in *legato* and *piano*, has a simple melodic progress, similar to a folklore song (developed on the pillars of the A minor tonality main steps, on a diversified rhythm). The melodic direction is ascending, while the second piano marks the lively rhythm of the accompaniment. The phrase is ample and the theme gives the beginning of the exposition (bar 39) a solemn feature, with nostalgic tendencies, by arching the phrase. The hands play in unison and tenth and twelfth interval. The discant is highlighted, in the register of the 3<sup>rd</sup> and the 4<sup>th</sup> octave. A transitional phrase leads to a change of levels. Once the second piano takes over theme I (a<sub>1</sub>), on the same tonality, but with variations, the first piano maintains the tonal level, on the accompaniment of chords and octaves in *toccata* style.

In the accompaniment, there is a varied motif of theme I.

The motif is repeated identically, similar to an *ostinato* intervention and it returns with varied melodic elements, keeping the same rhythm.

This *ostinato* conclusive formula is set through rhythmic insistence. Second piano sequences (bars 57-58) and alternations of piano chords, such as *toccata* on the first piano in C major, move with chromatic harmonic inflections (the 6<sup>th</sup> step being raised and the second one lowered), suggesting a modal scale: dorian with step II lowered. The ascending chromatic of the melodic-rhythmic passages bring modal harmonic inflections: C, E - C - E flat - A - G - A flat - B flat - E flat. The second piano interprets theme I (bar 69), which runs on eight bars (not 12 as it was originally made) and continues with the second phrase, also expansive, but by decreasing the rhythm. It occurs as a transition towards the second theme (bar 77) in C major, which will be interpreted by the second piano.

Theme II is composed of a dotted rhythm at a tenth interval and consists of two phrases, 4 bars each, interpreted by the second piano and taken over by the first piano. The accompaniment has the same configuration, when alternating from the first to the second piano. The dotted rhythm of the second thematic motif, played in *staccato*, provides a cheerful atmosphere with touches of parody (with the accompaniment of chromatic passages). The medium and acute register under which the musical discourse is developed, both on the second and on the first piano (just as the accompaniment in highlighted chords in counterpoint with chromatic passages and triplets of sixteenths) emphasize the parody feature Theme II.

When the theme goes from the second piano to the first piano, the thematic material develops on the harmonic inflection, which sets the E major tonality. Theme II is interpreted by the first piano, starting from bar 89, in *piano* nuance, and by using modulatory inflections (E flat, B flat). The rhythmic and melodic formulas in *marcato* (bars 99-102) and the pedal on B flat give vivacity to the composition. It

modulates on E flat major and allows the movement towards a new episode, which will be based on the secondary thematic motif.

In the *development* section (bar 107), the secondary theme is played in different registers, the distance between them widening increasingly until reaching the octave sequence in *tremollo* (bar 123), which prepares the ground for theme III (c). It is carried out on crotchets rhythm, dotted crotchets and eighths in counterpoint with quick passages made up of sixteenths, played on the first piano.

The melodic-rhythmic formulas found in the *Concertino* maintain the upbeat, lively feature, sometimes even despite the apparent solemnity, as, for example, in theme I.

Scale passages, alternative chords of the *toccata* and *tremollo* type and parallel octaves are added. The accompaniment that alternates from one piano to another is based on melodic-rhythmic formulas of this type.

Shostakovich insists much on the contrasts of registers. This section of the thematic material retains its feature and it is enriched with new harmonic compositions. Motifs from theme II are now taken over (bars 111-114) and in bar 115 the theme is added the G flat major harmonic tonality, retaining its march feature. The harmonic inflections and the rhythmic formulas used develop this "march", whose divided rhythm precipitates the musical dramatics again (bar 119, insisting on D flat major which becomes C sharp through enharmony and a sensitive to the subdominant G major in bar 123). The second piano augments the theme, and the first piano brings an accompaniment in alternative chords of the *toccata* type (bars 123-124).

Motifs from theme II (the second variation phrase) overlap on counterpoint chords. In bar 129, the composer brings a thematic motif with obvious Russian folklore origins, which is the basis of the third thematic group c (bars 129-134).

The recollection of the main thematic motif is made through the interpretation of the first phrase in B minor (bars 136-137), representing the transition to  $A_1$ .

*Adagio* - which prepares *the A<sub>1</sub> reprise*, represents a recollection of the introduction. This *interlude* begins in E flat major to develop with modal inflections (bars 151-163). It makes the transition towards the second *Allegretto*, where theme I ( $a_{1v}$ ) is met again. It has the same melodic-rhythmic configuration carried out on three asymmetrical sentences: 4 + 4 + 2 and it is played by the first piano (in A minor) on the accompaniment in chords and counterpoints of the second piano. In bar 190 theme I is taken over by the second piano and the transition occurs on the first piano, through the modulation in A major. In the *reprise*, theme II covers two phrases (4 + 4) being interpreted firstly by the first piano and then taken over by the

second piano, in bar 206. Within the *reprise*, theme II is interpreted with variations, on the first piano, then on the second piano (the D → B inflection). The culminating point, *ff* and *fff*, bring back the introductory episode, *Adagio* (bar 254), as a final intermezzo (of only 5 bars). Theme II is played at a tenth interval and in timbral contrast: piano 1 in the acute register, piano 2 in low register. The sudden jump of the first piano in the low register brings theme II chromatically modified towards C major with the 4<sup>th</sup> step being raised (F sharp) and the sixth step lowered. The chromiatization continues with steps 2, 4 and 6. In bar 218, theme III *c*<sub>1</sub> is modified polyphonically and with variation in the toccata style (through chords on the first piano). The episode in which the *Adagio* returns (with *tremolo* on the second piano and *glissando* on the first piano) prepares the *coda* (bar 238). *Coda – Allegro* is suddenly expressed in bars 259-265. It is carried out on the varied motif of theme I in the A minor tonality (with the second step lowered) and concludes the work in a bright sonority. The scheme of the *Concertino* form is the following:

*Introduction- A- exposition -B- development-I- A<sub>1</sub>- reprise<sub>1</sub>-coda:*

*A-B(a-a<sub>1</sub>-b-b<sub>1</sub>)-C(a<sub>v</sub>-b<sub>v</sub>-c-a<sub>v1</sub>-i)-A1-B1(a-a<sub>1</sub>-b<sub>2</sub>-b<sub>3</sub>)- A<sub>2</sub> + Coda*

The *Concertino for two pianos* exceeds, through the pianistic style, the cameral ambience. The two pianos are treated complementary in the thematic development. However Shostakovich gives way to a much broader development to the piano 1 virtuosity side. The themes alternate in their development from one piano to another. The third thematic group is brought in by the D minor with modulatory inflections.

Shostakovich insists on the harmonies of the secondary steps, on the descending alteration of the second step (in A minor) and modal harmonic inflections. Most modal harmonic inflections are encountered in the *development* section (bars 107-150, D flat, G flat, D - E flat - D - B - C - E flat).

Apart from the remarkable thematic affinities with Beethoven themes (*Introduction* - the motifs with dotted rhythm and the episode from - *Adagio*) Musorgski's influence can also be mentioned.

More popular and more often approached, the concertos for piano and orchestra show the art of a virtuoso pianist who knows all the subtleties of the instrument that he masters.

Although they were composed at a distance over time (1935-1957), the concertos for piano and orchestra express the same compositional exuberance even though the compositional writing is different: the first emphasizing the orientation towards constructivism, while the second, more committed to the folklore melody,

presents neoclassical elements in the structure of the forms. The implications of the folklore melos are present especially in the second concerto, while in the first one, the classical musical quotes and references are met.

A characteristic of the piano concertos is the composer's preference for the high registers of the instruments and the unison (in the thematic sequences, within the ensemble or between the instruments and the solo piano). The soloistic feature is enforced by the piano writing whose virtuosity (more emphasized in the second one) has nothing external, demonstrative, just deliberately marked by motility. The inventiveness consists of joining a soloist partner to the piano: the trumpet.

If the two concertos were composed primarily as a reflex of the composer's ambivalence, another original work is the *Concertino for two Pianos in A minor*, where chamber elements are combined with the concerto writing. The themes are taken over and naturally expressed by the two pianos, highlighting the contrasts between registers. The *Concertino for two pianos in A minoris* developed on a concise structure of the musical material in the interpretation of which both the pianistic virtuosity and that of the timbral and dynamic inventiveness are highlighted.

The orchestration of the two concertos is elaborated differently. The first one associates a chamber ensemble to the piano, consisting of a strings section, but the composer also adds the trumpet as an instrument with a very individualized soloist role. In the second concerto, the orchestral ensemble is represented by all groups of instruments. The instrumental timbres are treated rather compactly or in group individualization.

### 3. Conclusions

In the musical scores of the *Concertos for piano and orchestra*, Shostakovich associates the individual role of the instruments within the orchestral ensemble to the piano solo musical score. The strings interpret brief episodes of thematic motifs development. In the *Concerto No. 1 for piano and orchestra in C minor*, the trumpet bears the secondary soloist role. The concerto is characterized by the contrast between the discrete ensemble of strings that creates a chamber atmosphere and the well emphasized soloist role of the piano and trumpet. The woodwind group (oboe, bassoon, piccolo flute) is highly individualized.

The same overall virtuosity also animates the last part of the *Concerto No. 2 for piano and orchestra in F major*, the solo instrument dialoguing with the woodwind group (whose acute register is particularly required). In fact, the entire

orchestral ensemble is engaged in the rapid development of the discourse within which the timbre of the horn, flute, piccolo and small drum emerge, complementing the musical discourse of the solo piano.

A special concerto page is the Concertino for two Pianos in A minor which combines the chamber feature with the concerto spectacularity.

### **References**

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