

Masterworks 5 Constantine Conducts Shostakovich
Fort Wayne Philharmonic

PROGRAM NOTES

Inner Demons

Stacy Garrop

(b. 1969; now living in the Chicago area)

American composer Stacy Garrop has a powerful and succinct statement of purpose for her creative career. In her words, her music “is centered on dramatic and lyrical storytelling. The sharing of stories is a defining element of our humanity; we strive to share with others the experiences and concepts that we find compelling. [I want to] share stories by taking audiences on sonic journeys — some simple and beautiful, while others are complicated and dark — depending on the needs and dramatic shape of the story.” “Inner Demons,” the work we will hear at this concert, certainly fulfills this mission; it is the third movement of Garrop’s Second String Quartet, “Demons and Angels,” which traces the psychic breakdown of a man who once had great power and now faces ruin. We will hear the Quartet’s pivotal movement in a version for string orchestra Garrup has made for Andrew Constantine.

Now a sought-after freelance composer based in Chicago, Stacy Garrop earned degrees in music composition at the University of Michigan-Ann Arbor (B.M.), University of Chicago (M.A.), and Indiana University-Bloomington (Ph.D.). She has recently served for three years as composer-in-residence with the Champaign-Urbana Symphony and simultaneously as resident opera composer with the Chicago Opera Theater’s Vanguard Program. One of her notable recent works was *My Dearest Ruth* for soprano and piano, a tribute to the late Ruth Bader Ginsburg set to words by her husband Martin Ginsburg; it has recently been included in a video created by Carnegie Hall in the music-loving Supreme Court Justice’s honor.

To set “Inner Demons” in context, here is Stacy Garrop’s commentary about her Second String Quartet from which it is drawn. “Disguised demons, forgiving angels, tortured human souls. String Quartet No. 2: *Demons and Angels* tells the story of a man who thought his actions were guided by the forces of good, only to discover that he has lost his mind and wreaked havoc on earth. The first two movements explore the man’s personality: I. ‘Demon Spirits’ addresses what he has become, while II. ‘Song of the Angels’ remembers the goodness in him before he became transformed. **III. ‘Inner Demons’ depicts the man as he loses his mind.** The [Quartet] concludes with IV. ‘Broken Spirit,’ as the man faces a life in prison, in which his fleeting thoughts alternate between chaos and the hope of finding redemption by the grace of an angel.”

“Inner Demons” sonically traces this mental collapse. The opening minutes depict a mind still clinging to rationality in music that is tonal and well-mannered, recalling pleasant memories amid growing agitation. The first violins then plaintively sing the popular American folksong “I am a Poor Wayfaring Stranger,” written anonymously and first published in 1858, in the plain harmony style of early 19th-century America. This ultimately collapses into dissonant shards, and the music moves into process of total breakdown as the opening themes and even the folksong try frantically to re-emerge against an unsurmountable tide of dissonance, frenzy, and incoherence.

Dynasty: Double Timpani Concerto

James Oliverio

(b. 1956, Cleveland, Ohio)

With *Dynasty*, James Oliverio introduces us to the timpani in all its range and power. The timpani typically leads the rhythmic elements in an orchestra and memorably provides the “oomph” factor in loud musical climaxes. It is actually a multiple instrument consisting of one, two, four, or — in very large orchestra works — still more kettledrums, which can be tuned to different ranges of pitches by foot pedals and screws. And with two timpanists, each pounding on an array of five kettledrums, the musical possibilities are virtually endless.

As he has composed works for major orchestras throughout America and Europe in addition to many film scores, Oliverio has formed major friendships with a number of players. Two longtime friends are the brothers Paul and Mark Yancich, who, respectively, are the principal timpanists of the Cleveland Orchestra

and the Atlanta Symphony. Since Oliverio had already written a number of works for their instrument, they commissioned him to create *Dynasty*, a double concerto for them to play together. And because the brothers come from a long line of musicians, Oliverio chose this title to honor both them and their forebears. The Concerto was premiered in 2011 by the Yancichs with the Atlanta Symphony Orchestra (with which the composer has been closely associated) and been embraced as a masterpiece by orchestras around the country.

Paul Yancich remembers “we asked Jim to bring out the melodic and harmonic potential of the timpani.” Oliverio himself has written: “My overall aesthetic consideration was to evoke and honor the rich legacy of the brothers and their ancestors, whose love and passion for music continues across multiple generations. The musical metaphor for *Dynasty* was conceived and developed on several levels: the personal, the ancestral, the political, and, in the case of the only two timpanist brothers currently holding simultaneous posts with major American orchestras, as a professional analogy as well.”

The Concerto consists of five movements, which are intended to trace the trajectory of the brothers’ careers from impetuous youthful optimism and naïveté to professional success, as well as their contributions to their family legacy and its continuity (to paraphrase a note for the Ashville Symphony). **Movement one, “Impetuous,”** reflects their youthful enthusiasm and competitiveness as they launched their careers; it revolves around harmonic/rhythmic patterns that will reappear and transform throughout the work. **Number two, “Naïvité,”** sets a melancholic theme in the woodwinds over a faintly ominous descending pattern initiated by the timpani. But soon the timpanists playing together show they can take over this melody just as effectively.

“Interlude” is the first of three stunning cadenzas. Playing alone, the first timpanist creates drama with drumrolls and sliding glissandos. The timpanists are smoothly integrated into — rather than set against — the orchestra in the solemn **“Ancestors Within,”** in which the pithy theme they introduce will evolve and dominate the entire movement. Finally, in **“Destiny,”** the longest movement, the two timpanists wage a virtuoso battle, with dueling cross rhythms and two sequences of improvised cadenzas that translate them an orchestra unto themselves.

Symphony No. 5 in D minor, opus 47

Dmitri Shostakovich

(b. 1906, St. Petersburg, Russia; d. 1975, Moscow, U.S.S.R.)

In the U.S.S. R., the years 1934 to 1938 were the era of the great Stalinist purges, during which millions of Soviet citizens, from peasants to generals, lost their lives. Early in 1934, the 27-year-old Dmitri Shostakovich premiered a daring new opera, *Lady Macbeth of the Mtsensk District*, whose harsh dissonances mirrored a lurid tale of lust and murder. For two years, it was a popular hit, until one evening in January 1936 Stalin paid a visit to the opera house. The opera's gritty musical and theatrical drama infuriated the Soviet leader, who left the theater before the curtain fell. A few days later, a lead article in *Pravda* denounced the opera under the heading "Muddle Instead of Music," and a second scathing article followed in February. Shostakovich instantly became a non-person. Fellow composers spoke out against him, while acquaintances crossed the street to avoid him. He lived in constant fear of the knock in the night summoning him to his doom; like many Soviet citizens, he kept a suitcase packed in readiness.

But the knock never came. And, strangely, in 1937 Shostakovich was given a chance to rehabilitate himself by writing a suitably triumphant symphony for Leningrad's celebration of the 20th anniversary of the Bolshevik Revolution. As Ian MacDonald explains in *The New Shostakovich*, the composer realized that much of the problem caused by *Lady Macbeth*, aside from its downbeat plot, stemmed from its advanced, modernist musical language, denounced by *Pravda* as "fidgety, screaming, neurotic music." For his new symphony, he determined to simplify his language, making it more consonant and tonal, more melodic, and more pleasing in its instrumental sonorities.

Indeed, the Fifth Symphony is much easier on the ears than many of Shostakovich's earlier works, and this surely contributed to its success in 1937 and its enduring popularity today. But in the fierce drama of its first movement, the biting sarcasm of its second, the emotionally wrenching sorrow of its third, and the ambiguous "triumph" of its finale, it is as uncompromisingly outspoken as any of Shostakovich's works. In *Testimony*, the controversial memoirs purportedly dictated to Solomon Volkov, the composer vehemently denied there was any real triumph at all. "I think that it is clear to everyone what happens in the Fifth. The rejoicing is forced, created under threat, as in [Mussorgsky's opera] *Boris Godunov*. It's as if someone were beating you with a stick and saying, 'Your

business is rejoicing, your business is rejoicing,’ and you rise, shaky, and go marching off, muttering, ‘Our business is rejoicing, our business is rejoicing.’”

First movement: One of the most powerful of symphonic openings launches the work. Played in canon between lower and upper strings, this rugged theme is the seedbed of the movement. Contained in it are two important motives: descending three-note twists and the initially gentle repeated notes at the end. Both will be developed with great power, and the repeated notes will dominate the entire symphony. From this, Shostakovich builds a long melancholy melody sung by first violins. After this music is developed, the second major theme appears: a very hushed sustained melody high in the violins over a pulsing rhythmic accompaniment.

Baleful horns and an aggressive piano hammering out the second theme announce the development section, and the music accelerates into vigorous but slightly mechanical activity. Military snare drums propel a brash march. The music builds to great intensity, and the opening theme returns at a frenzied, driven tempo. But this manic energy eventually dies out in a quiet, haunting coda.

A sardonic sense of humor has saved Russian sanity throughout a brutal history, and it animates the **second-movement scherzo** with its insolent trills, satirical slides, and crude brass outbursts. Bright, shrill scoring, tongue-in-cheek pizzicato strings, and a tipsy solo violin leading the middle trio section suggest defiant mockery — perhaps a jibe at Stalin himself.

The magnificent **third-place slow movement** is as sincere and heartfelt as its predecessor was flippant. Shostakovich once said, “The majority of my symphonies are tombstones,” and this may be a requiem for the many Russians who died in the purges. At the Fifth’s premiere, audiences wept openly during this music. The strings, divided into many parts, dominate; they seem the voices of communal mourning. The music reaches a famous climax of pain as the strings rise to a chorus of hammering repeated notes, intensified by sharp stabs from the xylophone. The great Russian soprano Galina Vishnevskaya, Shostakovich’s friend and Rostropovich’s wife, described this as “like nails being pounded into one’s brain.”

Now the forgotten brass and percussion race into action to launch the **finale's** resolute march theme. If this is a triumphant conclusion, it is more convincing in its gestures than its spirit. First, we hear frenetic musical busyness, then a poignant reminiscence of the third movement's sorrow. Music of Slavic grandeur recalls the Coronation Scene in Mussorgsky's *Boris Godunov*. At the end, disturbing the proudly pounding timpani and pealing brass are those obsessively painful repeated notes that have dogged the entire work. "Our business is rejoicing, our business is rejoicing."