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■Dmitri Shostakovich (1906–1975)

■Symphony No. 9 E-flat Major Op. 70 (26')

Ever since Beethoven wrote his monumental symphony scored for orchestra and voices back in the 1820s, the phrase “the Ninth” became a sort of a spell, making later composers feel that they must incorporate special features into their symphonic works that would be labeled as their ninth. Bruckner, for instance, had to work on his Ninth Symphony for nearly ten years and was not even able to complete it.

Soon after composing Symphony No. 8 in the summer of 1943, Dimitri Shostakovich started to think about writing his Ninth and was very much conscious about making it “special.” Prior to its completion, he made it clear that the new work would be for orchestra, vocal soloists, and chorus. Here his celebratory intention was obvious, as he described it as a piece “about the greatness of the Soviet people, about our Red Army liberating our native land from the enemy.” He was undoubtedly following the path Beethoven explored; however, upon completion on August 30, 1945, Shostakovich’s Symphony No. 9 in E-flat Major, Op. 70 was entirely different from his original intention. It did not call for voices and was scored for a relatively small orchestra. Moreover, the piece was short — less than one half the duration of Beethoven’s Ninth. Shostakovich had written a portion of a symphony scored for a large orchestra, but for some reason he abandoned it (the whereabouts of the incomplete score had been unknown until it was recently discovered).

Shostakovich seems to have composed his Ninth Symphony with Prokofiev’s Symphony No. 1 (1917) in mind. Often referred to as the *Classical* Symphony, Prokofiev imitates the compositional style of the late-eighteenth century masters like Haydn and Mozart. In Shostakovich’s Ninth, this type of neo-classism tone is most apparent in the first movement. It begins with a simple theme played by the first violins, followed by a series of solo passages performed by the woodwinds (flute, oboe, and piccolo). The solo clarinet

opens the melancholic and serious second movement. It also initiates the fast third movement, which becomes increasingly delirious until the trombones and tuba play the profound opening fanfare of the fourth movement. The finale begins with the bassoon solo and retains its dark sonority until the music lightens up and becomes rather comical to conclude the whole piece.

[Akira Ishii]