Allegro, from Symphony No. 10

by Dmitri Shostakovich (1906 - 1975)

Lesson plan by Stephanie Riley

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About the Composer

Dmitri Shostakovich was born in St. Petersburg in 1906. He entered the Petrograd Conservatory at age 13, studied piano and composition, and graduated in 1925 with his First Symphony. He met with great success when the piece premiered in 1926. His work was performed in Europe and the United States, making Shostakovich world-famous by age 19.

About the Composition

Shostakovich’s Symphony No. 10 was premiered on December 17, 1953. This premiere was just after the death of Joseph Stalin, leader of the communist Soviet Union. The Symphony No. 10 has been described as Shostakovich’s retaliation against Stalin, who had pressured him to write more “proletarian” music. The country’s leaders thought Shostakovich’s music had too much Western influence and therefore was not “Soviet.” With Stalin’s death, Shostakovich was finally able to express his creativity without fear of punishment from the Soviet Union’s government. Shostakovich had this to say about his piece:

"I did depict Stalin in my 10th symphony. I wrote it right after Stalin's death and no one has yet guessed what the symphony is about. It's about Stalin and the Stalin years. The second part, the scherzo, is a musical portrait of Stalin."

Many symphonies over time have been created in response to various world events and personal events of the composer, in order to communicate a story, a feeling, or to shed light on a political occurrence. They paint a musical picture throughout the work of how the composer reacted to the various events. The symphony is the book, and each movement is a chapter within the book.
Activity: The Scherzo Storyboard

Knowing what we know about this piece, how would you illustrate and caption this movement?

Create your story: Divide movement 2 of Symphony no. 10 into 10 sections. Draw in the spaces below what you think is happening in the story that Dmitri Shostakovich is giving to us in musical format. Be sure to add written dialogue or descriptions like you would see in a comic strip or as a caption to a picture or illustration.

While creating your storyboard, keep these questions in mind to help guide you in your creativity:

Questions to consider:

- What does “proletarian” mean?
- What does “Scherzo” mean?
- What is Meter? Duple Meter? Triple Meter? What’s the meter of this piece?
- What is a theme?
- What instruments play the various melodies and when do they play them?
- How would you describe the tempo?
- How would you describe the rhythm throughout the movement? Accented? Calm? Melodic?