CIVIC ORCHESTRA of CHICAGO

Shostakovich 11



Michael Sanderling Conductor

NOV 15 | 6:00 PM

NOV 16 | 7:30 PM



The 2026–27 Civic Orchestra season is generously sponsored by **Lori Julian for the Julian Family Foundation,** which also provides major funding for the Civic Fellowship program.

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CIVIC ORCHESTRA OF CHICAGO

Ken-David Masur Principal Conductor
The Robert Kohl and Clark Pellett Principal Conductor Chair

ONE HUNDRED EIGHTH SEASON

Sunday, November 15, 2026, at 6:00
Lincoln-Way East High School

Monday, November 16, 2026, at 7:30
Orchestra Hall at Chicago Symphony Center

Michael Sanderling Conductor

SHOSTAKOVICH — Symphony No. 11 in G Minor, Op. 103 *(The Year 1905)*
The Palace Square: Adagio
The Ninth of January: Allegro
Eternal Memory: Adagio
The Alarm: Allegro non troppo—Allegro

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Major support for the Civic Orchestra of Chicago is also provided by John and Leslie Burns; Robert and Joanne Crown Income Charitable Fund; Nancy Dehmlow; Leslie Fund, Inc.; Judy and Scott McCue; Barbara and Barre Seid Foundation; and Paul and Lisa Wiggin.

The Civic Orchestra of Chicago acknowledges support from the Illinois Arts Council.

DMITRI SHOSTAKOVICH

Born September 25, 1906; Saint Petersburg, Russia
Died August 9, 1975; Moscow, Russia

Symphony No. 11 in G Minor, Op. 103 *(The Year 1905)*

COMPOSED
1956–August 4, 1957

FIRST PERFORMANCE
October 30, 1957; Moscow, Russia

INSTRUMENTATION
3 flutes (3rd doubling piccolo), 3 oboes (3rd doubling english horn), 3 clarinets (3rd doubling bass clarinet), 3 bassoons (3rd doubling contrabassoon), 4 horns, 3 trumpets, 3 trombones, tuba, timpani, triangle, cymbals, snare drum, bass drum, tam-tam, xylophone, bells, celesta, harp, strings

APPROXIMATE PERFORMANCE TIME
62 minutes



One might have naively thought that when Stalin died in March 1953, Shostakovich would have found himself released from the crushing creative, personal, and political pressures of the dictator's last years. To some extent, this was the case, although nobody in the Soviet Union at the time imagined Stalinism would come to an end just because Stalin himself wasn't there. Certainly, Shostakovich's immediate creative response to Stalin's death was striking enough: the Tenth Symphony, a work of tremendous musical dynamism and vivid human scope. At the same time, during these early post-Stalinist years, the composer added substantially to his reputation by releasing a number of powerful, already written works, like the First Violin Concerto and the Fourth String Quartet, which he had previously held back for fear of the consequences. Taken together, these old and new pieces gave every reason to suppose that Shostakovich would now experience a liberation of his genius.

And yet, after the initial explosion of the Tenth, there actually followed one of his bleakest periods. Although a few important pieces date from this time, Shostakovich spent a great part of his

THIS PAGE: Dmitri Shostakovich, as photographed during his visit to Helsinki, Finland, October 1958. Photo by Holger Eklund. Lehtikuva Collection, Helsinki, Finland | OPPOSITE PAGE, FROM LEFT: *January 9, 1905, on Vasilievsky Island (Bloody Sunday)*, depiction by Vladimir Makovsky (1846–1920) of an unarmed group led by Father Georgy Gapon (1870–1906) being fired on by the imperial guard while attempting to present a petition to Tsar Nicholas II at the Winter Palace in Saint Petersburg, 1905. State Central Museum of Contemporary History of Russia, Moscow | Russian poet Anna Akhmatova (1889–1966). Photo by Sovfoto/Universal Images Group via Getty Images | NEXT SPREAD: The Winter Palace in Saint Petersburg, early twentieth century. Color photochrom published by Photoglob Co. Library of Congress, Prints and Photographs Division





energies composing tub-thumping film music, music for unpretentious practical use, and "official" music of one kind or another, including popular songs to sentimental words of the "communist youth" variety. His admirers were confused and disappointed, and he himself complained of frustration and depression.

One major cause of his inertia at this period was the death of his wife Nina Varzar in December 1954. A distinguished scientist and an immensely strong character, Nina had been the rock on which his life had been built for many years. Their marriage had not been easy and was "open." But without her, Shostakovich seemed, as several friends later remembered, rudderless, lonely, and confused.

It was during this time that the composer began to acquire an unenviable reputation as an unadventurous conservative, a hack, an official Soviet bard. In the West, commentators wrote off his music as more or less irrelevant as the avant-garde discovered brave new worlds of sound and postwar popular music began to overwhelm the classical traditions. In his own country, the young and rebellious musical generation that came to maturity in those Khrushchev years looked harshly and askance at this dinosaur from another age (he was only fifty). Half-forgotten were the wonders and experiments of his early years, and even the vast and tragic ironies of his middle-period symphonies seemed less important than they once had.

Then, in the summer of 1957, while staying in his favorite dacha (country cottage) in Komarovo on the north Baltic coast just west of Leningrad, Shostakovich produced his Eleventh Symphony.

The auguries were not good. At first hearing, this symphony confirmed the worst fears of the composer's detractors and, at the same time, found worryingly warm favor with Soviet officials, who declared it one of the composer's most satisfactory and splendidly Soviet

pieces. To most listeners—those who liked it and those who hated it—the Eleventh seemed the very embodiment of the doctrine of Socialist Realism.

What made it such a perfect example of that state-sponsored aesthetic? First, the fact that it was explicitly written for the fortieth anniversary celebrations of the 1917 Bolshevik Revolution and that it purported to memorialize another sacred date in Soviet history: the 1905 Revolution. Then, there was the all-too-neat way it fulfilled so many of the musical ideals of Socialist Realism: it was heavily pictorial and programmatic; it often sounded like film music (a very good thing for Socialist Realists); most of the thematic material was not the composer's own but drawn from nineteenth-century revolutionary songs that most people in the audience would already know and love (this was another very important qualification for Socialist Realist music); and finally, its harmonic and orchestral language was deeply and obviously indebted to nineteenth-century Russian nationalist music (Mussorgsky, Tchaikovsky, Rimsky-Korsakov, and the rest).

One particular listener at the first performance understood all of this in a completely different way. She was no special friend of Shostakovich's and no musician, but she was one of Russia's greatest twentieth-century poets—Anna Akhmatova. Zoya Tomashevskaya, the daughter of a famous literary critic, remembered the occasion well:

> At the premiere of the Eleventh Symphony, there was a lot of discontented muttering. The music-loving connoisseurs alleged that the symphony was devoid of interest. All around one heard such remarks as: "He has sold himself down the river. Nothing but quotations and revolutionary songs."
>
> Anna Andreyevna Akhmatova kept her silence. For some reason, my father couldn't attend the concert. When we came home afterward, he asked us, "Well, how was it?" And Anna Andreyevna answered, "Those songs were like white birds flying against a terrible black sky."

Akhmatova had evidently been deeply moved. To another friend she commented:

> His revolutionary songs sometimes spring up close by, sometimes float by far away in the sky . . . they flare up like lightning. . . . That's the way it was in 1905. I remember.

Akhmatova had put her finger on one of the three keys to this symphony—the extraordinary and vivid choice of nineteenth-century songs that provide most of the melodies. The other two keys are the way the symphony develops ideas from one of Shostakovich's own compositions, the sixth of his Ten Poems on Texts by Revolutionary Poets, op. 88, a work for unaccompanied chorus written in 1951. And, finally, there is the way almost the entire symphony seems clearly modeled on a crucial work of music from Russia's past, one of Shostakovich's personal favorites—Mussorgsky's mighty historical opera about a revolution, *Boris Godunov*. Echoes of the crowd scenes from



Boris—from coronation to revolution—abound in all four movements, and there are also specific references to details of Mussorgsky's piece, including the famous two chords of the Coronation Bells. All three of these keys to the mystery bring us to the intriguing realization that this is one of the most purely "Russian" of all Shostakovich's symphonies. There is hardly a hint of Mahler, who was so important as a model from the First Symphony to the Tenth.

The nineteenth-century revolutionary songs that so excited Akhmatova are little known to American listeners. But to Russians of the early twentieth century, these lyrics and tunes were part of their cultural inheritance, rather like "The Battle Hymn of the Republic" in the United States.

The first movement opens with Mussorgskian scene-setting music, establishing the place—Palace Square in the middle of Saint Petersburg—and the time—the hour before dawn on the fateful day of January 9, 1905, at the moment when the Russian Revolution of that year began. We hear the frozen stillness of the Neva River in the darkness, the distant sounds of military bugles calling "Reveille" in the barracks, and the equally distant chanting of the Russian Orthodox prayer "Lord, Have Mercy."

Then, like an echo from one of the prison cells in the Peter and Paul Fortress immediately opposite the Winter Palace, we catch the first of those songs Akhmatova recognized—"Listen!" This was a popular

ballad with nineteenth-century political prisoners, and it often was sung in Stalin's gulags, too. It tells a convict's story of hearing a fellow prisoner being led out to early-morning execution. Shostakovich introduces it on the gentle sound of two flutes (like two trumpets playing in the distance), just after an eerie passage of softly beating drums:

Like the deed of a traitor, like the conscience of a tyrant,
the autumn night is black.
But blacker than night looms out of the mist
a gloomy vision of the prison.
All around, the lazy stepping of the guards
in the quiet of the night. But—there it is!—
like the tolling of a bell, lingeringly,
longingly, the echoing call:
"Listen!"

A little further on in the first movement, after a reprise of "Listen!" in the bassoon, violins, and violas, Shostakovich introduces a second melody, gloomy and hymnlike, first in the cellos and basses, then in the flute and clarinet. This is "The Arrested Man," a song from 1850:

The night is dark. Seize the moment!
But the walls of the prison are strong,
and the gates are locked
with two iron padlocks.
Along the corridor there faintly flickers
the watchman's candle,
and the jingling of the spurs
of the sentry, who longs to live.

There follows a grief-filled exchange of words between two equally oppressed individuals, a despairing prisoner and the sentry who cannot help him.

The second movement mostly plays not with tunes from early songs, but instead with melodies taken from the second key ingredient of the Eleventh Symphony, Shostakovich's own unaccompanied choral setting of Arkady Kotz's poem written in the aftermath of the catastrophe it describes, the Bloody Sunday massacre that took place in front of the Winter Palace on January 9, 1905:

Bare your heads! Bare your heads!
On this bitter day the shadow of a long night
trembled over the earth.

In musical language vividly reminiscent of the choral scenes from Mussorgsky's *Boris Godunov,* the unarmed protestors, carrying portraits of Tsar Nicholas II, process to his palace to ask for his help:

Hey you, father Tsar! Look around you.
We have nothing to live on; your servants
give us no help.

After a climax in which the orchestra repeats over and over again the phrase "Bare your heads," Shostakovich returns for a moment to the opening of the symphony, to the prayer for mercy and, again, the sound of the old song "Listen!"

The third movement is a funeral march or processional. It starts with the revolutionary funeral song "You fell as a victim":

You fell as a victim in the fateful struggle
of selfless love for the people.
You gave everything that you could for them,
for their lives, their honor and their freedom.
Sometimes you were tormented in dank prisons.
Your merciless sentence
had already been decided for you by the
executioner-judges,
and your chains rattled as you walked.

This lovely old tune is soon answered by a stern, revolutionary marching song. Here, Shostakovich combines several different sources into a single musical utterance. The most prominent melodies here come from two songs. The first begins:

Bravely, comrades, step forward!
Your spirit has been strengthened in the struggle.
Let us lean our bodies forward
on the road to the kingdom of freedom.
We all come from the people,
we are the children of working families.
Brotherly union and freedom—
this is the slogan that takes us into battle.

The second song at this point is called "Hail, free word of liberty!"

The finale of the Eleventh begins with a fiery revolutionary march:

Rage, you tyrants, and mock at us,
threaten us with prison and with chains.
We are stronger than you in spirit,
though you trampled on our bodies.
Shame! Shame! Shame on you,
you tyrants!

This is followed, in an extended marching sequence for the strings of the orchestra alone, by one of the most famous and catchy of all revolutionary anthems, the so-called Warsaw Song:

Malevolent whirlwinds blow around us,
dark forces press down on us with hate.
We have engaged in the fateful struggle with our enemies,
the fate that awaits us is still unknown.
But with pride and courage, we will raise
the battle standard of the workers' cause,
the standard of the great struggle of all peoples
for a better world, for holy freedom!
To the bloody battle, holy and true,
march, march onward, you working people!

COMMENTS

The violence unleashed in this final movement is astonishing, overpowering with its sense of uncontrollable rage. The symphony ends with a last return to Shostakovich's own 1951 chorus and its opening words, repeated over and over again and at deafening volume by the whole orchestra: "Bare your heads! Bare your heads!"

And that brings us back to the meaning of this symphony and to Akhmatova's brilliant description of the songs in it as "white birds flying against a terrible black sky." This piece may indeed be "about" the 1905 Revolution, that bloody upheaval whose eventual failure led directly to the 1917 Revolution and the establishment of the Soviet Union. Then again, when Shostakovich wrote it, his country was only just emerging from the nightmare of the Stalinist Terror and the mass executions and imprisonments by means of which the Bolsheviks continued the old tyranny of the Romanov emperors in new and vastly destructive forms. And in the year in which it was composed, the USSR invaded Hungary and bloodily repressed the uprising there, an event that caused many Western communists to tear up their party cards and made many more in the Soviet intelligentsia, to which Shostakovich belonged, despair at the workings of their own country.

Shostakovich himself never "explained" this music, beyond leaving its pictorial titles to tell a clear story of 1905 almost in the manner of a children's cartoon book. But when we hear and listen—"Listen!"—to its not-so-hidden words (and almost every bar suggests words), then we quickly see that what the composer is talking about has many more layers of meaning than we first suspected. This is a symphony not about one event, but many events, and about how any one of us approaches those events in the darkness of our conscience. *C*

—Gerard McBurney

Gerard McBurney is a British composer and writer who works in theater, radio, television, and the concert hall. He has a long-standing interest in the music of Shostakovich and has reconstructed and reorchestrated a number of his works. Between 2006 and 2016, he was artistic programming advisor at the Chicago Symphony Orchestra and creative director of Beyond the Score®. Since 2017 he has been a creative consultant with the San Diego Symphony Orchestra.

ELECTRONIC DEVICES
Before the concert begins, cell phones and other electronic devices must be turned off or set to silent mode. The use of photography, audio, and video recording equipment is not permitted during the music. Please refrain from any screen use during the performance.



Michael Sanderling
Conductor



Since the 2021–22 season, Michael Sanderling has served as chief conductor of the Lucerne Symphony Orchestra. This appointment marked the logical continuation of a long-standing, close partnership aimed at further establishing the orchestra's international reputation in the late romantic repertoire—particularly with works by Bruckner, Mahler, and Strauss. Tours throughout Europe, Asia, and South America, as well as innovative projects, attest to the impact of this collaboration. Particular attention was drawn to the multimedia production of Shostakovich's Symphony no. 10, featuring artist William Kentridge. After its premiere at the KKL Lucerne and in Pompeii, the production enjoyed triumphant performances at the Vienna Konzerthaus and the Philharmonie de Paris.

Sanderling's discography with the Lucerne Symphony Orchestra, including a celebrated Brahms cycle on Warner Classics and the recording of the piano concertos by Antonín Dvořák and Edvard Grieg with Elisabeth Leonskaja, documents the sonic depth of this era.

Michael Sanderling's path to the conductor's podium was shaped by a deep understanding of orchestral sound. Following a distinguished career as a cello soloist with ensembles including the Orchestre de Paris, Los Angeles Philharmonic, and the Boston Symphony Orchestra, he served as principal cellist of the Gewandhausorchester Leipzig under Kurt Masur from 1987 to 1992 and laid the foundation for his career as a conductor through his tenure as artistic director of the Kammerakademie Potsdam (2006–11).

From 2011 to 2019, he led the Dresden Philharmonic into a new era as its chief conductor and established the orchestra among Germany's top-tier ensembles. A lasting monument to this period is the highly acclaimed complete recording of the symphonies of Beethoven and Shostakovich for Sony Classical. In addition to the great symphonies, his discography includes significant concert recordings with soloists such as Edgar Moreau and Katrin Scholz, as well as collaborations with the Rundfunkchor Berlin.

Sanderling is a guest conductor with renowned orchestras worldwide, including the Berliner Philharmoniker, Gewandhausorchester Leipzig, Royal Concertgebouw Orchestra Amsterdam, Wiener Symphoniker, Helsinki Philharmonic Orchestra, Orchestre de Paris, Dallas Symphony Orchestra, Philharmonia Orchestra London, and NHK Symphony Orchestra.

In addition to the big stage, Sanderling devotes himself to the next generation with passionate intensity. For many years, he has taught at the Frankfurt University of Music and Performing Arts. His long-standing commitment to ensembles such as the Deutsche Streicherphilharmonie, Schleswig-Holstein Festival Orchestra, and German National Youth Orchestra underscores his belief that musical excellence and the passing on of experience are inseparably linked.

Photo © Marco Borggreve

Civic Orchestra of Chicago

The Civic Orchestra of Chicago prepares its members for multifaceted and meaningful careers in orchestral music and beyond. The prestigious ensemble is part of the Chicago Symphony Negaunee Music Institute and a pillar of the organization's commitment to the future of classical music. It was founded during the 1919–20 season by Frederick Stock, the Chicago Symphony Orchestra's second music director. For more than a century, its members have gone on to secure positions in orchestras around the world, including over 160 players who have joined the CSO.

Each season, Civic Orchestra members give numerous performances and participate in rigorous orchestral training with Principal Conductor Ken-David Masur, distinguished guest conductors, and a faculty of coaches comprised of CSO musicians. The Civic Orchestra serves the city by presenting free and low-cost concerts of the highest quality at Chicago Symphony Center and in venues across Greater Chicago. The Civic Orchestra also anchors the annual Crain-Maling Foundation CSO Young Artists Competition and the Chicago Youth in Music Festival. Civic Orchestra musicians expand their creative, professional, and artistic boundaries and engage diverse audiences through educational performances in neighborhood venues, including Chicago Public Schools.

To further expand professional development opportunities, the Civic Orchestra launched the Civic Fellowship program in the 2013–14 season. The program's curriculum has four pillars: artistic planning, music education, social justice, and project management. Through an array of experiences designed to cultivate creativity and diversify skills, the Civic Fellowship program enables participants to realize their full potential as civically minded and entrepreneurial musicians.

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The Institute oversees the Civic Orchestra of Chicago, a prestigious ensemble for early-career musicians. Civic Orchestra members receive world-class training in orchestral music and play an active role in the Institute's mission to provide inclusive, innovative, and affordable programming for Chicago communities. The ensemble performs throughout the city and anchors many of the Institute's programs for youth, including the annual Crain-Maling Foundation CSO Young Artists Competition and Chicago Youth in Music Festival.

Other Institute programs include a series of CSO School and Family Concerts, open rehearsals, 100 in-depth school partnerships, online learning resources and music education activities that engage communities during the CSO's domestic and international tours. The Institute also highlights the unique ability of music to create empathy and healing through social impact programs such as Notes for Peace, which supports families impacted by gun violence, and collaborations with the Chicago Refugee Coalition.

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