Dmitri Shostakovich - Symphonies Nos. 11 & 12 (Neeme Järvi) [1991]

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Dmitri Shostakovich - Symphonies Nos. 11 & 12 (Neeme Järvi) [1991]

CD1:
1. Symphony No.11 in G minor, Op.103 "The Year of 1905" - 1. The Palace Square (Adagio) 13:49
2. Symphony No.11 in G minor, Op.103 "The Year of 1905" - 2. Ninth of January (Allegro - Adagio) 17:00
3. Symphony No.11 in G minor, Op.103 "The Year of 1905" - 3. In memoriam (Adagio - attacca:) 10:29
4. Symphony No.11 in G minor, Op.103 "The Year of 1905" - 4. The Tocsin (Allegro non troppo - Allegro – Adagio) 13:29
5. October - Symphonic Poem, Op.131 - Moderato – Allegro 12:30
6. Overture on Russian and Kirghiz Folk Themes, op.115 - Moderato - Allegro non troppo - Adagio -Allegro-Presto

CD2:
1. Symphony No.12 in D minor, Op.112 "The Year 1917" - 1. Revolutionary Petrograd (Moderato - Allegro - Più mosso - Allegro) 12:27
2. Symphony No.12 in D minor, Op.112 "The Year 1917" - 2. Razliv (Allegro. L'istesso tempo - Adagio) 12:58
3. Symphony No.12 in D minor, Op.112 "The Year 1917" - 3. Aurora (L'istesso tempo - Allegro) 4:27
4. Symphony No.12 in D minor, Op.112 "The Year 1917" - 4. Dawn of Humanity (L'istesso tempo - Allegretto - Allegro - Moderato) 9:20
5. Hamlet (Suite) op.32a - 1. Introduction and Night Patrol (Allegro non troppo - Moderato. Poco allegretto) 2:30
6. Hamlet (Suite) op.32a - 2. Funeral March (Adagio) 1:46
7. Hamlet (Suite) op.32a - 3. Flourish and Dance Music (Allegro - Allegretto) 2:20
8. Hamlet (Suite) op.32a - 4. The Hunt (Allegro) 1:54
9. Hamlet (Suite) op.32a - 5. Pantomime of the Actors (Presto) 1:38
10. Hamlet (Suite) op.32a - 6. Procession (Moderato) 1:03
11. Hamlet (Suite) op.32a - 7. Musical Pantomime (Allegro)1:10
12. Hamlet (Suite) op.32a - 8. Banquet (Allegro) 1:11
13. Hamlet (Suite) op.32a - 9. Ophelia's Song (Allegro -Meno mosso - Presto) 1:45
14. Hamlet (Suite) op.32a - 10. Cradle Song (Andantino) 2:13
15. Hamlet (Suite) op.32a - 11. Requiem (Adagio) 1:21

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16. Hamlet (Suite) op.32a - 12. Tournament (Allegro) 1:02
17. Hamlet (Suite) op.32a - 13. Fortinbras's March (Allegretto) 1:48
18. The Age of Gold - Ballet Suite, Op.22a - 1. Introduction (Allegro non troppo) 3:40
19. The Age of Gold - Ballet Suite, Op.22a - 2. Adagio8:05
20. The Age of Gold - Ballet Suite, Op.22a - 3. Polka (Allegretto) 1:57
21. The Age of Gold - Ballet Suite, Op.22a - 4. Dance (Allegro) 2:06

Gothenburg Symphony Orchestra
Neeme Järvi – conductor

Shostakovich's Symphony No. 11 ostensibly was written to commemorate the tragic events of January 9, 1905, when several hundred of about 10,000 demonstrators at the Tsar's St. Petersburg winter palace were killed on orders from government officials. The slaughter incited further demonstrations and anti-Tsarist activities, culminating in the 1917 Bolshevik Revolution. Shostakovich would later claim, in the controversial Volkov book Testimony, that the symphony's inspiration was actually the Hungarian Revolution of 1956. In any event, the symphony was subtitled "1905," not "1956," and most of its themes were derived from Russian revolutionary songs. Its four movements, all with subtitles, are played without pause. The first (Adagio) is subtitled "The Palace Square" and opens in a somber, dark mood built on several motifs, a crucial one on drums representing the protesters forming at the palace. Themes from two rather mournful revolutionary songs, Listen and The Prisoner, are then presented and later developed. The movement is permeated by ominous thudding drums, eerie string writing, and a growing sense of unrest. The nearly 20-minute second movement (Allegro - Adagio) is subtitled "The Ninth of January" and depicts the bloody events of that day. It is the most complex and dramatic panel, recalling motivic and thematic material from the first movement and using themes from two songs in Shostakovich's 10 Poems for chorus without orchestra -- "Comrades, the Bugles Are Sounding" and "Bare Your Heads" -- the latter reappearing at climactic moments in the third and fourth movements. The most dramatic music in the second movement comes with the fugato section, which builds to a brutal, percussive climax using a variant of the demonstrators' motif to depict the slaughter. The eerie quiet from the symphony's opening follows, leading into the Adagio third movement. Subtitled "In Memoriam," it is mournful, using the melody from the popular song "You Fell As a Victim." Later, the theme from another song, "Welcome, the Free Word of Liberty," is quoted, after which comes a powerful climax. The finale (Allegro non troppo) is subtitled "The Tocsin" (alarm bell). In its feverish opening, it alludes to the music in Shostakovich's Symphony No. 10's second movement, which supposedly satirizes Stalin (Volkov). Later, the melody from "Rage, You Tyrants" is used and the movement gradually takes on a defiant, triumphal air, with a bell tolling its warning at the symphony's powerful close.

There are five Shostakovich symphonies of his 15 that have political/historical programs: Nos. 2, 3, 7, 11, and 12. Probably one of the strongest arguments put forth by those who support the Volkov view of the composer (i.e., that he felt constant oppression in both his professional and personal life under the Stalin and post-Stalin Soviet regimes and thus satirized his persecutors with veiled symbolism in his music), is that these five patriotic symphonies are his least effective. The Twelfth is probably his most approachable symphony, not least because it contains several attractive, quite memorable themes. But its expressive language is self-consciously straightforward, as if the composer were striving with every note to avoid complexity and controversy at all cost.

The Symphony No. 12, being rather simple and straightforward, contains nothing of the hidden symbolism one hears in other Shostakovich symphonies, like the Fifth, Seventh, and Tenth. Thus, its apparently sincere depiction of the Bolshevik Revolution as a heroic and liberating event becomes hard to reconcile with the view of Shostakovich as a dissident. Yet it is possible that the composer disapproved of the Soviet system under Stalin and the oppression that still lingered, but still harbored a positive view of Lenin and the revolutionary movement.

The Symphony No. 12 has four continuous movements, each having subtitles relating to the Revolution: "Revolutionary Petrograd" (marked Moderato - Allegro), "Razliv" (Allegro-Adagio), "Aurora" (Allegro), and "The Dawn of Humanity" (Allegretto - Moderato). It should be mentioned here that the second-movement subtitle, "Razliv" (Overflow), refers to the locale north of St. Petersburg where Lenin hid out to conduct his revolutionary activities in safety; and Aurora was the name of the ship that fired a shot through a window of the Winter Palace, initiating the Revolution.

There are two main themes that occur throughout the symphony. The first symbolizes oppression (in the first movement introduction) and a rallying against it in the Allegro section that follows. The ensuing second theme, which is similar to the first, though more hymn-like and serene, symbolizes hope and ultimately victory over the oppressors. Both have strong appeal, and as Shostakovich develops them throughout the symphony, their metamorphoses yield music of colorful bombast, including the march near the end of the third movement and the percussion-laden coda of the finale, the drama as found in the development of the first movement, and the restlessness of the second movement.

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As a populist drama, this symphony offers thematic appeal but tempers its attractive qualities with the composer's overly simplistic expressive language and blatant bombast in his apparent artistic acquiescence to Soviet authorities. Was Shostakovich a true dissident, like Solzhenitsyn, or an opportunist? --- Robert Cummings, Rovi

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