Nationalistic music is a deliberate intention by composers to draw inspiration from their homeland. The way that a nation can be evoked in music ranges from using rhythms of national dances to basing their melodies on those from their country's folk songs. I am going to discuss the case of Dmitri Shostakovich (1906-1975), a Russian composer and pianist, as he provides a particularly interesting example of a composer for whom questions of the 'nation' were paramount, as his musical nationalism has to be considered in the context of the politically volatile situation which surrounded him. He wanted to be seen to represent the nation and satisfy the Communist Party, whilst also integrating his own views on the nation in which he lived and worked. Contrasting, some composers, such as Ralph Vaughan Williams, composed nationalistic music simply to show their deep sense of loving patriotism for their nation.

Music in Russia during Shostakovich's period was used as a propagandist method by the Communist Party to push across their aims and increase the popularity of the Party. However, a composer's position with the Party could change completely dependent on whether they were providing music that fitted what they wanted to put across as their 'culture' or not. Critics would alter their views based on what the Party deemed suitable. Under the regime of Stalin, experimentation was discouraged as he preferred classicism and a more accessible musical language that favoured traditional Russian melodies.

In 1936 Shostakovich first fell out of official favor due to his opera *Lady Macbeth of the Mtsensk District*. The opera, first performed in 1934, was an instant success. Initial response to the opera included that it "could have been written only by a Soviet composer brought up in the best tradition of Soviet culture". However, Joseph Stalin visited a Bolshoi theatre production of the opera, only to be enraged by the inclusion of the topics of rape, corruption, and murder - topics that opposed the Party's ideology that was focused around traditional family life that he wanted the arts to portray. Stalin disliked it so much that he left before the opera could conclude. He then described Shostakovich as 'a very talented individual, but much too much in the "Meyerhold" mould.' Considering that Vsevolod Meyerhold was a Russian theatre director murdered for his overly progressive works, the comparison to him would

1. *Nationalism and its effect on music in the Romantic era*, John Miles 1985
3. Classicism referring to a musical style that "sought to emulate the ideals of classical antiquity, especially those of classical Greece" including favouring "simplicity rather than complexity." *Overview of the Classical Era of Music*, article on www.courses.lumenlearning.com by Natalia Kuznetsova
4. *Dmitri Shostakovich*, article on www.courses.lumenlearning.com by Elliot Jones
have been immensely worrying for Shostakovich. Two days after Stalin's visit to the theatre, *Pravda* (the official Communist Party newspaper) published an article named "*Muddle Instead of Music*", claiming the opera had 'deliberate dissonance' and only 'snatches of melody'.\(^6\) The article labelled the work as 'formalistic',\(^7\) announcing that the dissonant harmonies were not accessible, and that listeners would become confused as they weren't accustomed to this style of music.\(^8\)

Many have suggested that it was Stalin that could have written this article. This is because the language used was less informed than would be expected of a music critic, and the article was published only two days after Stalin had visited the production. If so, it would have allowed him to publish his views by attacking the music rather than the morals that the production portrays. Otherwise, this may have shown Stalin exerting control over the arts. Following the publication of the article, commissions decreased, and Shostakovich's income fell. Those that had previously praised the opera were essentially forced to claim that their previous comments were written in a momentary lack of judgement.

The publication of the negative article coincided with his Fourth Symphony, a piece greatly influenced by Mahler and that used many experimental Western elements\(^9\) such as sudden changes in mood and unconventional instrumentation - many aspects that Stalin would have disliked as it seemed too 'chaotic' for music that should be representing a stable nation. As a result, Shostakovich decided to withdraw the piece, ultimately an action that could have saved his life. One of the most extreme examples of Stalin’s desire to carve out his 'perfect nation' was the 'Great Terror' in 1936.\(^10\) He accused Russian composers of formalism that suggested that they intended to alienate the Soviet listeners, as their music sounded similar to the Western music Stalin was trying to avoid. Many of those accused were either executed or imprisoned, and among those dead included his patron (Marshal Tukhachevsky) and his uncle (Maxim Kostrykin). This shaped Shostakovich’s negative view on the 'nation', as he witnessed from those around him the effects of composing what Stalin saw as 'un-nationalistic' music.

After the disaster that was *Lady Macbeth* Shostakovich remained relatively hidden. Then he released his more conservative Fifth Symphony of 1937 in Leningrad that was a huge success as many of the audience in Leningrad had lost loved ones to the

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\(^{6}\) *Dmitri Shostakovich - The Life and Background of a Soviet Composer*, Seroff, Read Books Ltd. 2013  
\(^{7}\) Formalism referred to musical elements (harmony, rhythm, instrumentation etc.) in a piece that contrast a 
traditional harmonic structure, but was in fact ultimately a way of criticising anything that was 'counterproductive 
to the ultimate goals of the Party.' *Op. cit.* Tirman  
\(^{8}\) *Muddle instead of music: Stalin and Lady Macbeth of Mtsen*, article by Isabella Steppan 2017 on  
www.bachtrack.com  
\(^{9}\) *Shostakovich: The Man and His Music*, Norris, Lawrence and Wishart, London 1982  
\(^{10}\) *Stalin Purges Musicians*, Howe, published in Labor Action, Vol. 12 No. 8, 23 February 1948
'Great Terror'. Shostakovich had reached a middle ground between his own artistic ideas and the conventions that fitted within Socialist Realism as he managed to re-establish himself and be in favour again with the Party. However, the title that he gave to the symphony of 'A Soviet Artist's Reply To Just Criticism' promoted huge debate over his true intentions. Moreover, Shostakovich manages to put forward both of his ideas of the 'nation'. On the surface, the piece appears to be presenting Russia in a heroic light and many people in Russia perceived his work as 'tragic, but more of an apology from Shostakovich and his ability to move forward as a composer of the people.'11 However, some insist that in reality there is an alternative meaning to the piece.

Some may argue that it is an autobiographical work to show his own negative views on the nation. For example, in the greatly 'un-nationalistic' Largo movement the unsettling oboe melody could be symbolizing his suffering post denunciation due to the criticism he had faced, and the shock he felt as composers were exiled around him during the 'Great Terror'. They believe that he is challenging Stalin, rather than giving an expected apology. Further confusion is caused by his final movement that finishes with a surprisingly triumphant ending that can be seen as an ironic image of his view on Russia and Shostakovich's triumph. Although, Shostakovich likely concluded the piece with a jubilant ending to please Stalin and appear as if he was representing Stalin's views to protect himself.

Shostakovich's Seventh Symphony is possibly his greatest and most well-known wartime piece. The public saw it as a portrayal of the bravery of those in Leningrad, his native city, as they resisted German invaders.12 Stalin loved the Symphony as he saw within it a patriotism that acted as propaganda to protect the city. The West celebrated him, however, Stalin was determined to prevent this as he believed the West were forming and changing Russia's culture. This was made worse after the 'iron curtain' fell after the War. The West began criticising Russia, leading to Stalin's response to criticise all Western influences, especially in the Arts. As a result, in Shostakovich's 'second denunciation', he was labelled a formalist, humiliated and condemned by the Soviet Union. His music was rejected by the regime and he had to make compromises, as he had done previously by removing his Fourth Symphony.

Whilst on the surface Shostakovich appears to have been a fairly nationalistic composer, in reality, while witnessing the horrors of the 'Great Terror', his aim became to simply survive. This was why he created music that at least appeared nationalistic to Stalin in hopes that he would not suffer the same fate that many other 'un-nationalistic' composers did. He had a dual way of approaching music as he

12Presented in the Documentary Dmitri Shostakovich - Into the Cold dawn, Becker 2008
compromised his own individuality and ideas to satisfy the remit of the Communist Party whilst also presenting his own view on what he saw within the nation.

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