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*Shostakovich in Memoriam*  
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## Shostakovich and Berg: Parallels and intersections

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**Abstract.** The article is dedicated to the memory of one of the leading Russian researchers of Dmitri Shostakovich's work, Tamara Nikolaevna Levaya. Turning to the genre of the "double portrait," widely represented in her works, the author attempts to identify parallels and intersections in the creative destinies of two classics of the twentieth century — Dmitri Shostakovich and Alban Berg. First of all, biographical facts related to the Leningrad premiere of *Wozzeck*, which Shostakovich attended, are traced and clarified, and its influence is determined

not only on Shostakovich's operatic style, but also on the reception of both his operas. In addition, Berg's interested attitude to Shostakovich's First Symphony is documented. The most indicative ones are selected from a number of artistic and typological parallels: the phenomenon of processuality, which determined the involvement of both composers in energetics as an archetype of musical thinking in the 1920s, and a passion for Aesopian language and a hidden program, which finds expression in the use of musical monograms (their formation is traced on the basis of the signature). The chosen perspective allows us to clearly see not only similar aspects of creativity, but also to identify fundamental differences. Based on linear patterns, the development of thematic material in Berg maintains a connection with the principles of Schoenberg's "musical prose." His secret program is of a purely private nature, and the monograms do not have intonational specificity and are not designed for recognition. Shostakovich's "thematically concentrated development" is associated with neo-baroque linearity. His Aesopian language was perceived by listeners as a "coded message to his contemporaries," and the DSCH monogram became the intonational emblem of Shostakovich's music.

**Keywords:** Dmitri Shostakovich, Alban Berg, processuality, *Fortspinnung*, Aesopian language, monograms

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≡≡≡ *Памяти Д. Д. Шостаковича* ≡≡≡

Научная статья

**Шостакович и Берг:  
параллели и пересечения**

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**Аннотация.** Статья посвящена памяти одного из ведущих отечественных исследователей творчества Шостаковича Тамары Николаевныевой. Обращаясь к жанру «двойного портрета», широко представленному в ее трудах, автор предпринимает попытку выявить параллели и пересечения в творческих судьбах двух классиков XX века — Дмитрия Шостаковича и Альбана Берга. В первую очередь прослеживаются и уточняются биографические факты, связанные с ленинградской премьерой «Воццека», на которой побывал Шостакович, а также определяется ее влияние не только на оперный стиль Шостаковича, но и на рецепцию обеих его опер. Кроме того, документируется заинтересованное отношение Берга к Первой симфонии Шостаковича. Из ряда художественно-типологических параллелей избираются наиболее показательные: феномен процессуальности,

определивший причастность того и другого композитора к энергетизму как архетипу музыкального мышления 1920-х годов, и пристрастие к эзопову языку и скрытой программе, что находит свое выражение в использовании музыкальных монограмм (прослеживается их формирование на основе подписи). Избранный ракурс позволяет отчетливо увидеть не только сходные аспекты творчества, но и выявить принципиальные различия. Основанное на линейных закономерностях развертывание тематизма у Берга сохраняет связь с принципами шенберговской «музыкальной прозы». Его тайная программа носит сугубо приватный характер, а монограммы не обладают интонационной специфичностью и не рассчитаны на узнавание. «Тематически концентрированное развертывание» у Шостаковича связано с необарочной линейностью. Его эзопов язык воспринимался слушателями как «зашифрованное послание современникам», а монограмма DSCH стала интонационной эмблемой музыки Шостаковича.

**Ключевые слова:** Дмитрий Дмитриевич Шостакович, Альбан Берг, процессуальность, развертывание, эзопов язык, монограммы

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*Introduction*

On January 15, 2025, Tamara Nikolaevna Levaya, Professor at the Nizhny Novgorod Conservatory and one of the leading scholars on Dmitri Shostakovich's works,<sup>1</sup> passed away. The choice of this article's topic, as well as its formulation, is a tribute to a cherished teacher and colleague.

Among Tamara Levaya's preferred musicological subjects was the concept of the "double portrait,"<sup>2</sup> which was also the theme of her final presentation, titled *Schnittke and Shostakovich*.<sup>3</sup> At first glance, creating such a double portrait of Shostakovich and Berg (*Illustrations 1 and 2*) might seem unlikely: these two composers, undisputed giants of 20th-century music, have much that sets them apart. They are separated by time and space, their approaches to avant-garde music and socially relevant art diverge, and their differences also stem from the fundamentally different positions they held as composers in the Soviet Union and in the West. While Shostakovich, despite the dramatic nature of his life, was officially recognized as the "number one" figure in the Soviet Union, almost mythologized, neither Berg nor any of his contemporaries could have achieved a similar status in their homeland. The legacies of Shostakovich and Berg are hardly comparable in quantitative terms: Shostakovich's creative journey spanned more than half a century, his productivity was exceptional, and his body of work vast. In contrast, Berg lived only 50 years, leaving behind around 15 compositions.

<sup>1</sup> The studies on Shostakovich by Levaya were included in the collection [1]. She continued to work on this topic in the following years.

<sup>2</sup> See, in particular, several materials in the book *Dvadtsatyi vek v zerkale russkoi muzyki* [*The Twentieth Century in the Mirror of Russian Music*]: "Rakhmaninov i Prokof'ev. Neperesekayushchiesya miry?" ["Rachmaninoff and Prokofiev. Non-Intersecting Worlds?"] [2, pp. 255–265]; "Shostakovich i Bakhtin. Poetika soprotivleniya" ["Shostakovich and Bakhtin. The Poetics of Resistance"] [2, pp. 296–309]; "Shostakovich i Prokof'ev. Eskiz dvojnogo portreta" ["Shostakovich and Prokofiev. A Sketch of a Double Portrait"] [2, pp. 310–319]; "Sil'vestrov i Motsart. Motiv vestnichestva" ["Silvestrov and Mozart. The Motif of Heralding"] [2, pp. 367–374].

<sup>3</sup> This report was presented twice: at the scientific conference *Akademicheskaya muzyka v XX veke: mezhdru etikoi i estetiko* [*Academic Music in the 20th Century: Between Ethics and Aesthetics*] as part of the Nizhny Novgorod Opera and Ballet Theater's arts festival *Sovremennaya muzyka: Shostakovich, Meierkhol'd, Shnitke* [*Contemporary Music: Shostakovich, Meyerhold, Schnittke*] (Nizhny Novgorod, Arsenal, August 29, 2024), and as an open lecture at the All-Russian Youth Scientific and Cultural Forum *Glinka—navsegda!* [*Glinka—Forever!*] (Nizhny Novgorod Conservatory, November 18, 2024).



*Illustration 1. Dmitri Shostakovich.*

Source: [https://sun9-43.userapi.com/eiubRTqQrblc-gok62c9e\\_MECnIojShoi81wAw/9iyOERmmttI.jpg](https://sun9-43.userapi.com/eiubRTqQrblc-gok62c9e_MECnIojShoi81wAw/9iyOERmmttI.jpg)

Nonetheless, there were both intersections and parallels in the creative destinies of Shostakovich and Berg. The focal point is the Leningrad premiere of *Wozzeck* on June 13, 1927,<sup>4</sup> where the composers met in person. This event marked the beginning of the worldwide success of Berg's opera, while providing the young Shostakovich with the impetus to search for a modern operatic style. Just weeks after the premiere, work began on his opera *The Nose*.

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<sup>4</sup> The opera was performed at the State Academic Opera and Ballet Theatre. The production was directed by Sergei E. Radlov; the conductor was Vladimir A. Dranishnikov; the title role was performed by Mikhail V. Bocharov. The first study devoted to this topic belongs to Inna A. Barsova: see Barsova, I. A. (1998). 'Nowhere Was My *Wozzeck* Received Better than in Leningrad'. *Music Academy*, (3–4, bk. 1), 141–144.



*Illustration 2.* Alban Berg at his desk (1930). Deutscher Photo-Dienst, MAN, 1930 (Ender, D. (2023). *Alban Berg im Bild. Fotografien und Darstellungen 1887–1935.* Böhlau Verlag, p. 166)

### *The Leningrad Premiere of Wozzeck and Its Reverberations*

Prior to the Leningrad premiere of *Wozzeck*, Shostakovich was unfamiliar with Berg's music, as it had not been performed in Soviet Russia. Berg's name was also absent from the programs of the chamber concerts of the Association for Contemporary Music (ACM), where works by Schoenberg, Bartók, Hindemith, and Krenek<sup>5</sup> were performed. As Shostakovich later wrote in his *Questionnaire on the Psychology of the Creative Process*, it was precisely these composers whose works became the object of his close study beginning in the autumn of 1926 and served as an impetus for the "liberation" of his musical consciousness. A year later, Berg joined this circle. In the questionnaire, he is listed among Shostakovich's favorite composers, and *Wozzeck* among his favorite works.<sup>6</sup>

<sup>5</sup> For more detail on the programs of contemporary music concerts, see the memoirs of Mikhail S. Druskin: Druskin, M. S. (1977). *Studies. Memoirs.* Sovetsky kompozitor, pp. 191–212.

<sup>6</sup> Bobykina, I. A. (Ed.). (2000). *Dmitrii Shostakovich v pis'makh i dokumentakh – Dmitri Shostakovich through His Letters and Documents.* M. I. Glinka State Central Museum of Musical Culture; Antikva, p. 475.

Berg's opera remained in the repertoire only briefly: over the course of two years it was performed just seven times.<sup>7</sup> Shostakovich did not miss a single performance.<sup>8</sup>

The day after the premiere, on June 14, a banquet was held in the spacious apartment of Yuri Shaporin, where members of the ACM honored the composer of *Wozzeck*. Shostakovich was among those present. In *Testimony*, as recorded by Solomon Volkov, we read: "I sat and said nothing, partly because I was young and mostly because my German wasn't very good."<sup>9</sup>

Shostakovich's excitement and restraint are also evident in his signature on the endpaper of the journal *Novaya muzyka* (*New Music*), which he presented to Berg (*Illustrations 3.1. and 3.2.*). He managed to write his surname in German only on the second attempt; the first unsuccessful version—omitting the syllable "ta"—was crossed out. Although from a young age he had worked carefully on his signature (as will be discussed below), writing it in German was still unfamiliar to him at the time. It is worth noting that the German spelling of the composer's surname would later form the basis of his DSCH monogram.

Did Berg hear Shostakovich's music during this meeting? There are no documents confirming this. In one of his interviews, without mentioning any names, Berg remarked that he had the opportunity to become acquainted with the work of young composers and that it struck him by its "diversity of styles, creative personalities, and even genres" [3, p. 58]. It is possible that Shostakovich was among the young composers who performed for Berg: at a similar banquet held earlier, he had presented his own compositions to Sergei Prokofiev, who had come to Soviet Russia on tour for the first time.<sup>10</sup>

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<sup>7</sup> According to announcements in the journal *Rabochii i teatr* (*Worker and Theatre*), six performances followed the premiere (8 and 14 October; 19 November 1927; 3 January, 19 January, and 29 March 1928). However, in a letter from the Directorate of the Leningrad State Theatres to Universal Edition dated September 1928 (TsGALI [*Central State Archive of Literature and Art of the USSR*], F. 260, Inv. 1, Archival unit 731, l. 64), only five performances are indicated.

<sup>8</sup> This is how it appears in *Testimony*; see Volkov, S. (Ed.). (1979). *Testimony: The memoirs of Dmitri Shostakovich* (A. W. Bouis, Trans.). Harper & Row, p. 43. It should be noted that a critical attitude toward this source prevails within the scholarly community, which makes it impossible to accept all of its claims at face value.

<sup>9</sup> Volkov, S. (Ed.). (1979). *Testimony: The memoirs of Dmitri Shostakovich* (A. W. Bouis, Trans.). Harper & Row, p. 45.

<sup>10</sup> Prokofiev, S. S. (2002). *Diary 1907–1933* (Vol. 2). sprkfv, p. 521.

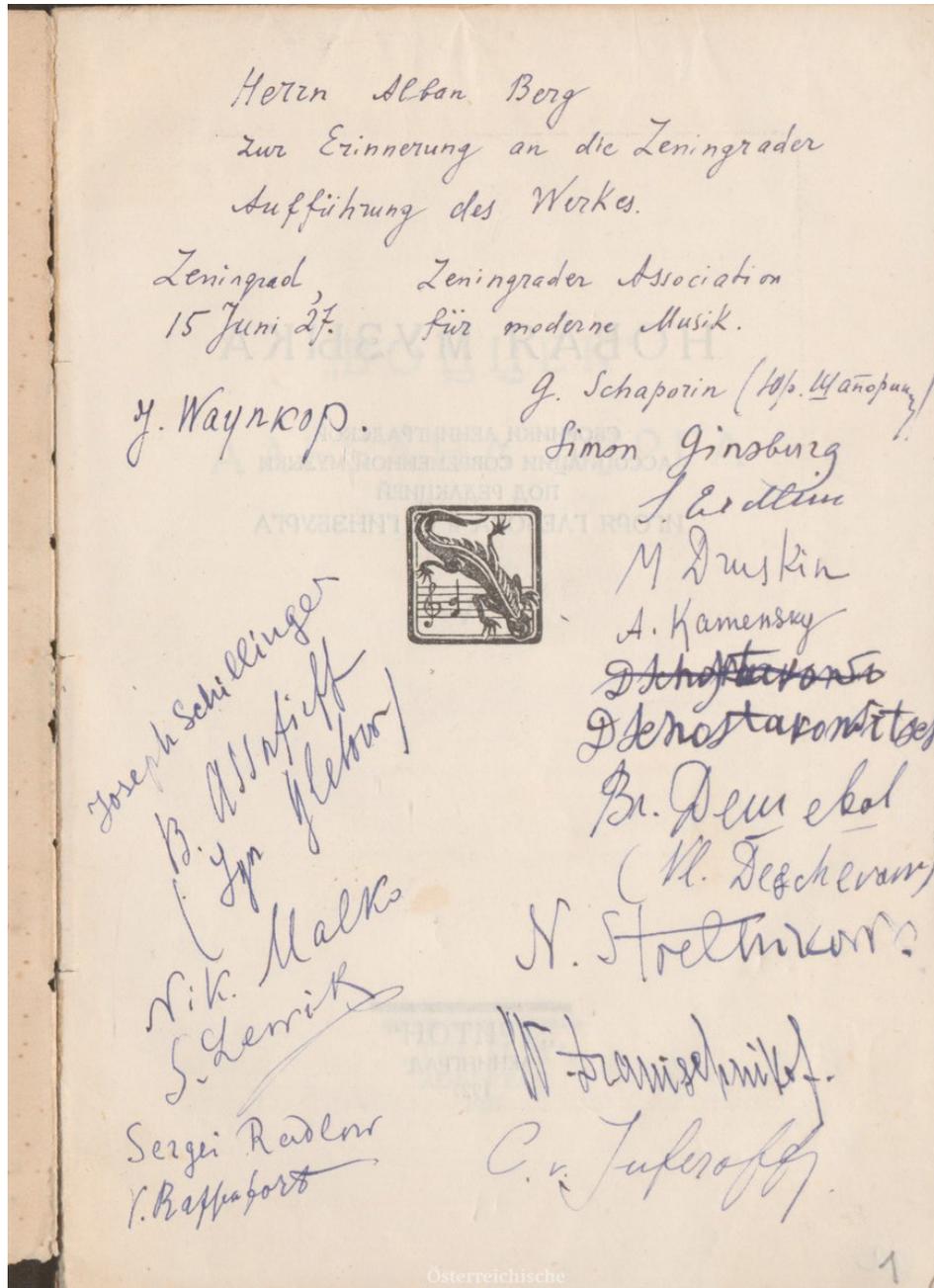


Illustration 3.1. Endpaper of the collection “New Music,”  
Issue 4, 1927 with autographs of ASM members.  
ÖNB Musiksammlung. Fond 21 Berg 3158

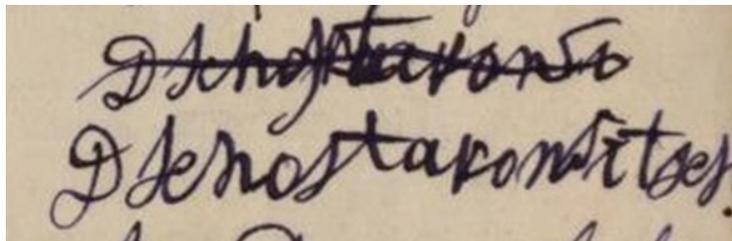


Illustration 3.2.  
Shostakovich's autograph  
on the Endpaper  
of the collection "New Music,"  
Issue 4. 1927 with autographs of ASM members.  
ÖNB Musiksammlung. Fond 21 Berg 3158

After leaving Russia, Berg maintained correspondence for some time with Boris Asafiev, who did not miss the opportunity to remind him of the admiration he inspired among the younger generation. Thus, a year after the premiere, in June 1928, Asafiev wrote: "Mit Ihrem „Wozzeck“ haben Sie unseren jungen besten Komponisten (Schostakowitsch, der eine gute Oper geschrieben hat—„Der Nase“, nach Gogol,—und Popoff) eine neue Welt geöffnet..." [3, p. 74].<sup>11</sup>

Berg undoubtedly remembered Shostakovich's name, all the more so because in that same year, 1928, he witnessed the young composer's success in the West. On November 27, he attended the Viennese premiere of Shostakovich's First Symphony under the direction of Robert Heger.<sup>12</sup> An account of this event is found in a letter to Asafiev from Abram Isaakovich Dzimitrovsky, head of the Russian department of Universal Edition: "Prof. Heger wurde nach Symphonie sechsmal gerufen, was für Wien eine Seltenheit ist. [...] Er teilte mir mit, dass er die Symphonie so lieb gewonnen hat, dass er sie in seinen sämtlichen Gastspielen in sein Programm aufnehmen wird."<sup>13</sup> On the reverse side of Dzimitrovsky's letter, Berg added a note addressed both to Shostakovich and to Asafiev. Of the symphony, he particularly admired the first movement, which he described as "marvelous" ("famos"): "Das klingt wirklich sehr gut."<sup>14</sup>

<sup>11</sup> 27.06.1928. ÖNB [Österreichische Nationalbibliothek] MS F 21 Berg 513/2.

<sup>12</sup> Miller, L. (Ed.). (2016). *Letopis' zhizni i tvorchestva Shostakovicha* [Chronicles of the Life and Work of Dmitri Shostakovich]: Vol. 1: 1903–1930. DSCH, p. 358.

<sup>13</sup> Letter from A. Berg and A. Dzimitrovsky to B. V. Asafiev and D. D. Shostakovich, 29 November 1928. Cited in: Kryukov, A. N. (1981). *Materialy k biografii B. Asaf'eva* [Materials for a Biography of B. Asafiev]. Muzyka, p. 141 (note 13). Further in: Miller, L. (Ed.). (2016). *Letopis' zhizni i tvorchestva Shostakovicha* [Chronicles of the Life and Work of Dmitri Shostakovich]: Vol. 1: 1903–1930. DSCH, p. 359.

<sup>14</sup> Kryukov, A. N. (1981). *Materialy k biografii B. Asaf'eva* [Materials for a Biography of B. Asafiev]. Muzyka, p. 141.

As is well known, Berg was a master of writing benevolent and encouraging assessments, behind which his true attitude was not always immediately discernible. In this instance, however, he appears to demonstrate a genuine interest in Shostakovich's music. At that time, Berg himself had not abandoned the idea of composing a symphony and was examining other works in the genre. It is therefore no coincidence that he requested the score of the Symphony for review. In a letter of December 12 to Universal Edition in Vienna, its return is mentioned<sup>15</sup>—together with materials relating to *Scarlattiana* by Alfredo Casella<sup>16</sup>; the latter is referred to ironically as *Kalaffatiana* (Vasily Pavlovich Kalafati, a professor at the St. Petersburg Conservatory, was likely for Berg the embodiment of conservatism) (*Illustration 4*).

Berg's praise, as is well known, never reached Shostakovich. His relationship with Asafiev was complex—a separate subject that has been described more than once in musicological scholarship.<sup>17</sup> Nevertheless, Berg occupied a firm place in the young composer's spiritual world and retained it until the end of his life. This is confirmed, in particular, by the words of Maxim Shostakovich in a 1982 interview: “*Wozzeck* [sic!] was something my father always loved.”<sup>18</sup>

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<sup>15</sup> According to the information available on the website of the *Alban Berg Stiftung* (Vienna), the scores of Shostakovich's works are not present in Berg's library. See Alban Berg Stiftung (n.d.). <https://www.absw.at/bibliothekseintrag.php?content=database>. For more detail on the composer's Viennese library and the process of its digitization, see our article [4].

<sup>16</sup> *Scarlattiana*, Op. 44, a divertimento on themes by Domenico Scarlatti for piano and small orchestra (1926).

<sup>17</sup> On the complex relationship between Shostakovich and Asafiev, see the essay by N. A. Braginskaya: Braginskaya, N. A. (2013). Asafiev. In L. Kovnatskaya (Ed.), *Shostakovich at the Leningrad Conservatory: Vol. 2: 1919–1930*. Kompozitor Publ. — St. Petersburg, pp. 75–82. It is noteworthy that the First Symphony became, in a sense, an “indicator” of their divergence soon after the establishment of friendly and trusting relations. Although Asafiev responded favorably to the young composer's work, he ignored its triumphant premiere on 12 May 1926; and “from a certain moment,” as Braginskaya observes, “Asafiev in his eyes embodied that part of the Leningrad ‘musical world’ into whose ‘murky waters,’ in the composer's own words, he was forced to plunge” (Braginskaya, 2013, p. 77).

<sup>18</sup> Maksim Shostakovich on His Father: An Interview by Aleksandr Abramov (1982). *Vremya i my* [Time and Us], 69, p. 175.

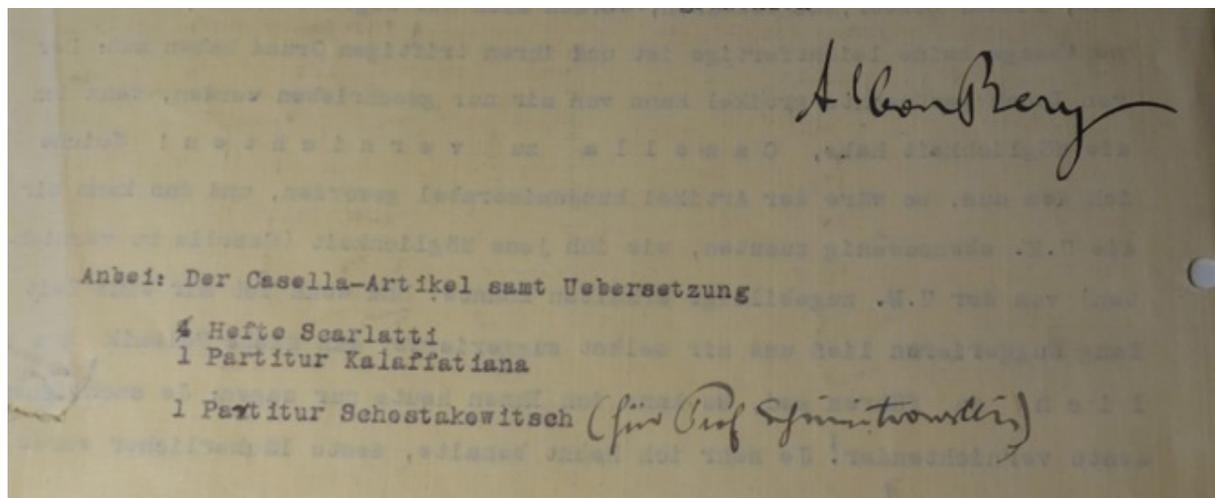


Illustration 4. Letter from A. Berg to O. Heinsheimer, 12.12.1928 (fragment<sup>19</sup>).

Source: Wienbibliothek im Rathaus, Briefwechsel Alban Bergs  
mit der Universal Edition. № 152

*Wozzeck* not only influenced Shostakovich's artistic consciousness; it effectively shaped the reception of his operatic works. Critics repeatedly drew comparisons between them. Decisive in this regard was the opinion of Shostakovich's close friend Ivan Ivanovich Sollertinsky. It was he who declared that "without *Wozzeck* there would have been neither *The Nose* nor *Lady Macbeth of the Mtsensk District*,"<sup>20</sup> in effect counting Berg among Shostakovich's spiritual forebears. By the mid-1930s, Shostakovich and Berg were already placed side by side in the pantheon of outstanding contemporary composers. In 1935, in an obituary for Berg published in the Viennese newspaper *Der Wiener Tag*, *Wozzeck* was mentioned in the same breath as *Elektra*, *Pelléas et Mélisande*, *Jenůfa*, and *Lady Macbeth*.<sup>21</sup>

<sup>19</sup> "Enclosed: Casella's article with translation;  
4 notebooks of Scarlatti;  
1 score of *Kalaffatiana*;  
1 score by Shostakovich (for Prof. Dzimitrovsky)."

<sup>20</sup> Mikheeva, L. V. (Ed.). (1978). *Pamyati I. I. Sollertinskogo: Vospominaniya, materialy, issledovaniya* [In Memory of I. I. Sollertinsky: Recollections, Materials, Studies] (2nd enlarged ed.). Sovetskii kompozitor [Soviet Composer] – Leningrad, p. 205.

<sup>21</sup> Miller, L., & Digonskaya, O. G. (Eds.). (2023). *Letopis' zhizni i tvorchestva Shostakovicha* [Chronicles of the Life and Work of Dmitri Shostakovich]: Vol. 2: 1931–1935. DSCH, p. 638.

Unfortunately, this discourse also provided ammunition for detractors. In the 1930s, the association between the names of Shostakovich and Berg proved fateful: when the campaign against *Lady Macbeth* unfolded, Shostakovich was repeatedly reproached for the supposedly “negative” influence of Berg’s opera. Even well before the article *Muddle Instead of Music*,<sup>22</sup> one critic pointed to the pernicious impact of Western composers who had “determined the character of Shostakovich’s musical technique..., imprinting upon it a stamp of self-purposefulness [samotsel’nost’], rootlessness, and worthlessness.”<sup>23</sup>

The official criticism that followed in the aforementioned fateful article in the newspaper *Pravda* indirectly affected the fate of Berg’s music in Russia as well. Although Berg’s name was not mentioned in the article, it was undoubtedly implied in the references to the deformities of “petty-bourgeois ‘innovation’” and to “jerky, shrill, neurasthenic music.” The article made it impossible to pay full tribute to the Austrian composer, who had died in Vienna only a few weeks before its publication. A memorial concert scheduled in Moscow for 31 March under the direction of Hermann Scherchen was cancelled. The memorial concert in Leningrad, however, did take place. On 12 and 14 January, excerpts from the *Lulu-Symphonie* were performed at the Leningrad Philharmonic for the first time in the USSR, conducted by Fritz Stiedry (see [5, p. 307]). Shostakovich, in all likelihood, attended the concert and heard music from Berg’s second opera. At any rate, he informed Sollertinsky of his intention to do so, adding: “The deceased was a genius. I am certain that he will be appreciated sooner or later.”<sup>24</sup>

### *In the Wake of Energeticism*

The perspective adopted in this article necessitates addressing not only historical-biographical and reception-related aspects, but also attempting to identify parallels between Berg and Shostakovich on the artistic-typological level. Leaving aside questions of operatic style and the specific features of quotation

<sup>22</sup> The editorial article *Muddle Instead of Music*, in which Shostakovich’s opera *Lady Macbeth of the Mtsensk District* was subjected to criticism, was published in the newspaper *Pravda* on 28 January 1936.

<sup>23</sup> Thus in Alexander A. Ostretsov’s article *On Shostakovich’s Music*, published in the journal *Muzykal’naya samodeyatel’nost’* in October 1934, as cited in: Miller, L., & Digonskaya, O. G. (Eds.). (2023). *Letopis’ zhizni i tvorchestva Shostakovicha* [Chronicles of the Life and Work of Dmitri Shostakovich]: Vol. 2: 1931–1935. DSCHE, pp. 378–379.

<sup>24</sup> Letter of 9 January 1936, as cited in: Shostakovich, D. D. (2006). *Pis’ma I. I. Sollertinskomu* [Letters to I. I. Sollertinsky]. Kompozitor Publ. — St. Petersburg, p. 184.

and allusion, we shall focus on two aspects that, in our view, are particularly revealing: the phenomenon of processuality and the problem of Aesopian language.

Processuality plays a significant role in the work of both composers, determining their affiliation with energeticism as an archetype of musical thinking in the 1920s, a characteristic feature of which is the “energy–structural dualism” identified by Tatyana Vladimirovna Tsaregradskaya [6, p. 45]. The neo-Baroque and neoclassical tendencies that became established at that time revived an earlier, Bachian understanding of melody as the result of inner energetic forces. Ernst Kurth’s celebrated study *Grundlagen des linearen Kontrapunkts* (1917), even contrary to the author’s own intention, as Hermann Danuser writes, „einen modernen Kontrapunkt, der sich... im Grenzbereich zwischen Tonalität und Atonalität frei nach Maßgabe einer motorischen Bewegungsrhythmik entfaltetete, gegen den Willen des Autors historisch zu legitimieren“ [7, p. 151].

Yet in Berg and Shostakovich processuality is realized in different ways, since their compositional styles differ: atonal and twelve-tone in the mature Berg, and tonal in Shostakovich—despite modernist influences in his youth and certain points of contact with dodecaphony in his late works. Berg remains faithful to the principle of musical prose<sup>25</sup> that is fundamental to the Second Viennese School, whereas Shostakovich more readily reveals an affinity with neo-Baroque motoricism. In both composers, however, melodic development is not determined by harmonic attraction.

I have previously written on several occasions about the intersection of Berg’s work with the ideas of energeticism. Although in Berg the energetic principles manifest themselves primarily at the stage of the compositional process (where an analogue to the Schenkerian *Ursatz* appears, possessing “not a linear-harmonic but rather a linear-dynamic nature” [8, pp. 83–84]), characteristic examples of Bergian melody are equally revealing.

The atonal *Adagio* of the *Chamber Concerto* offers an example of the *Fortspinnung* of a melodic line based on Schoenberg’s principle of developing variation, as well as on combinatorial procedures characteristic of twelve-tone technique: two of its elements return in progressively more remote variants.

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<sup>25</sup> By *musical prose*, composers of the Second Viennese School understood not only asymmetrical syntax, but also the highest possible concentration of expression, conceived as the supreme stage in the development of musical language and as a means of presenting musical thought with clarity and precision.

The large-scale crescendo from *pp* to *ff* encompasses numerous smaller waves, rises, and declines that shape the energetic profile of the work (here dynamics are not a secondary but, in essence, the principal dramaturgical factor) (*Example 1*).

Geige (m.D.)

*pp* *poco* *p*

(poco accel. \_ \_ \_ \_ poco rit.) A tempo (poco accel. \_ \_

Geige (m.D.)

*poco* *mp* *poco*

\_ \_ \_ poco rit.) accel. e cresc. \_ \_ \_ \_ Bewegter (♩ = anfangs 72)

Geige (m.D.)

*mp* *mf* *f* *ff* *molto*

*Example 1.* Alban Berg. Kammerkonzert für Klavier und Geige mit 13 Bläsern.  
*Adagio*, bars 241–261. Violin part, bars 241–261. UE 33148

Shostakovich’s melody has been the subject of an enormous body of scholarship; it is one of the most thoroughly elaborated topics in Soviet musicology. For its description, Victor P. Bobrovsky’s term “thematically concentrated *Fortspinnung*” became established: following the opening motive, there emerges an equally individualized continuation.<sup>26</sup> A classical example of such *Fortspinnung*—the *Andantino* from the *Fourth Quartet* (*Example 2*)—is discussed in the author’s monograph on Shostakovich’s chamber-instrumental works [9, pp. 27, 141–142]. The genesis of this type of *Fortspinnung* was traditionally traced both to Bachian polyphony and to Russian folk song. The latter explanation, as Choi Yong-Gil notes in his dissertation on problems in the study of Shostakovich’s oeuvre, functioned in Soviet times as a kind of euphemism, since it made it possible, at least in this way,

<sup>26</sup> This principle was first formulated by Bobrovsky in 1961 in his monograph on Shostakovich’s chamber instrumental ensembles [9, pp. 26–27].

Andantino (♩=108)

17 2 *p*

18

19 *cresc.* *mf*

20 *cresc.* *dim.* *p*

Example 2. Dmitri Shostakovich. String Quartet No. 4. Second Movement, *Andantino*.  
First violin part. DSCH Publishers 2001, p. 4

to “legitimize” the unfamiliar features of the composer’s melodic style.<sup>27</sup> It is telling that the term *Fortspinnung* itself belongs to Ernst Kurth, and that Lev A. Mazel—who first applied it in Russian scholarship—was also the author of the first Russian-language essay on the energetic theory of the Swiss musicologist (1939). The need for euphemisms has now disappeared, and Kurth’s conceptual and terminological apparatus is widely employed by contemporary scholars of Shostakovich. Thus Levon O. Akopyan points to the “high degree of inner tension” in Shostakovich’s themes, to their “extraordinarily high charge of potential energy, sufficient for the released kinetic energy to sustain a prolonged and eventful development without its artificial ‘spurring’ by means of ‘insignificant harmonic progressions and modulations’” [10, p. 357].

#### *Aesopian Language and Monograms*

The second aspect that allows for parallels between Shostakovich and Berg concerns Aesopian language and the phenomenon of the hidden program. Studies of their music from this perspective, which emerged at the end of the twentieth century, contributed to an unprecedented revival of what had seemed to be a long-forgotten musical hermeneutics.

The idea of a hidden program in Berg’s works was first discussed in connection with the annotated copy of the *Lyric Suite* for string quartet<sup>28</sup> discovered in 1977. This discovery brought about a veritable revolution in Berg scholarship and prompted a reassessment of the composer’s entire oeuvre. It challenged the foundations of absolute and autonomous music as the principal achievement of modernism. It seemed that Berg felt ill at ease in modernity. The various kinds of symbolism he employed may be understood as a means of “inhabiting” the space of modernist art, which he perceived as inwardly alien.

Different motives underlie Shostakovich’s Aesopian language. His poetics of allegory was bound up with the central theme of his oeuvre—“existence within the framework of a totalitarian state” (Tamara N. Levaya). “The history of relations

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<sup>27</sup> Choi Yong-Gil (2004). *Cherty stilya D. D. Shostakovicha: Itogi i problemy izucheniya v sovetskom i rossiiskom muzykoznanii* [Stylistic Features of D. D. Shostakovich: Results and Problems of Their Study in Soviet and Russian Musicology] [Unpublished doctoral dissertation]. Russian Institute of Art History, p. 88.

<sup>28</sup> Perle, G. (1977). The Secret Programme of the Lyric Suite. *Musical Times*, (118), 629–632, 709–713, 809–813.

with authority, one might say, became absorbed into the very substance of the ‘Shostakovich phenomenon,’ becoming an inseparable part of it” [11, p. 4], notes Akopyan, while at the same time defending the possibility of another approach to the study of Shostakovich’s work—a phenomenological one: this oeuvre should be seen first and foremost as one of the manifestations of absolute spirit.

Let us, however, attempt to build bridges between the Aesopian languages of Berg and Shostakovich. Among other things, they are united by a predilection for monograms.

In her article *Ot podpisi k monogramme* [*From Signature to Monogram*] [12], Olga G. Digonskaya traces the formation of the famous DSCH monogram. It begins with Shostakovich’s elaboration of his own signature, followed by its translation into musical tones. Berg followed the same path. *Illustration 5* presents variants of the young Mitya’s efforts to refine his signature; as Digonskaya aptly remarks, he “was truly obsessed with the idea of finding a precise and expressive graphic formula for his name” [12, p. 245]. Above them appears the well-known signature of the mature Shostakovich. *Illustration 6* shows analogous variants of Berg’s signature: his monogram from the pages of his youthful musical diary and the plaque on the door of his apartment executed in the pretzel-like script he devised. Both composers attached particular importance to developing an individual, semantically dense, and aesthetically refined signature. Both, already in their youth, reflected on sound–letter correspondences.

In 1908 Berg signed one of his letters to his fiancée Helene Nahowsky<sup>29</sup> with the musical tones of his name, A–B (*Illustration 7*). Yet another fifteen years would pass before monograms entered his music. They appeared in two successive works—the *Chamber Concerto* (1923–1925) and the *Lyric Suite* (1925–1926)—as if representing two variants: public and secret. The former occurs in the motto prefacing the concerto, where not merely initials but the full names of Arnold Schoenberg, Alban Berg, and Anton Webern are encoded (*Illustration 8*). Limiting himself in the score to a brief hint (“Aller guten Dinge... [sind drei]” / “Good things come in threes”), Berg explained

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<sup>29</sup> See Knaus, H., & Leibnitz, Th. (Eds.). (2012–2016). *Briefwechsel Alban Berg—Helene Berg: Gesamtausgabe; aus den Beständen der Musiksammlung der Österreichischen Nationalbibliothek: Vol. 1. 1907–1911*. Florian Noetzel Verlag, p. 81.

his intentions in the Open Letter to Schoenberg: the work was conceived as a tribute to his teacher and as a monument to the Second Viennese School.<sup>30</sup>

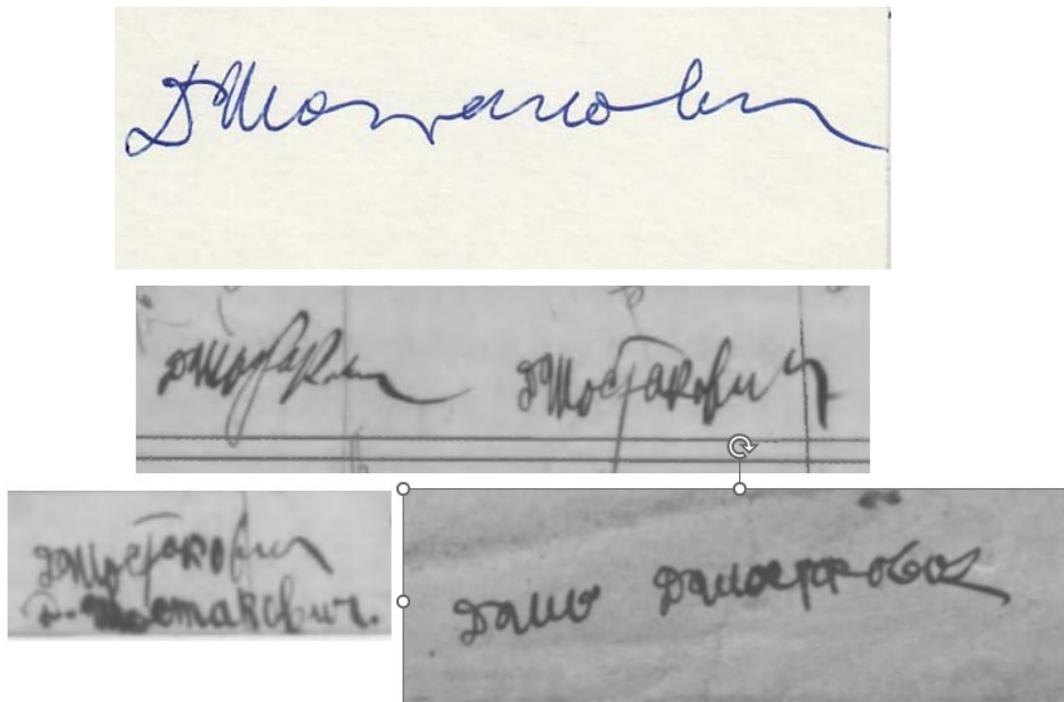


Illustration 5. Variants of Shostakovich's signature.

Source: <https://www.memorabilia-uk.co.uk/p/dmitri-shostakovich>;  
[12, c. 245, 248]

The unofficial variant of the monogram is contained in the *Lyric Suite*. Here only initials are used—those of Berg himself (AB) and of his beloved Hanna Fuchs (HF). In creating a love story in six movements, the composer

<sup>30</sup> In the Open Letter Berg writes: “In einem musikalischen Motto, das dem ersten Satz vorangesetzt ist, sind die Buchstaben Deines, Anton Weberns und meines Namens, soweit dies in der Notenschrift möglich ist, in drei Themen (bezw. Motiven) festgehalten, denen eine bedeutende Rolle in der melodischen Entwicklung dieser Musik zugefallen ist.” Alban Bergs Kammerkonzert für Geige und Klavier mit Begleitung von dreizehn Bläsern [Offener Brief an A. Schönberg] (1925). *Pult und Taktstock*, Jg. 2, p. 23.

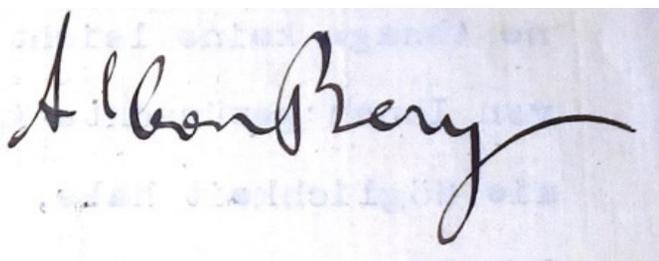


Illustration 6. Variants of Berg's Signature.

Letter from A. Berg to O. Heinsheimer, 12.12.1928.

Source: <https://www.absw.at/stiftung-wohnung>

the first and, probably, the last. The earliest attempt to establish sound-letter correspondences for his name was identified by Digonskaya in the composer's youthful manuscripts dating from 1920–1921 [12, pp. 252–259]. The presumably final

incorporates the initials into the tone row, thereby demonstrating the truly boundless possibilities of Schoenberg's technique.<sup>31</sup> Through permutations of the row, the initials are combined into the four-note motive B–A–F–H, which—with reordering of pitches—appears repeatedly in the third movement (*Illustration 9*). It is noteworthy that neither in the *Chamber Concerto*, where Berg employs name-themes, nor in the *Lyric Suite*, where the motive derived from initials appears, does the composer particularly rely on memorability or recognizability. In the *Allegro misterioso*, moreover, the monogram-motive passes like an almost imperceptible rustle, rendered estranged through timbre, articulation, tempo, and dynamics.

The situation is different with Shostakovich. *Illustration 10* presents two of his monograms—

<sup>31</sup> In the annotated copy of the *Lyric Suite*, Berg refers to this, commenting on a sentence from the Preface: "...die scheinbar so gebundene „Komposition mit zwölf Tönen“... hat mir meine Hanna, auch noch andere Freiheiten gelassen! Z.Bsp. die, in dieser Musik immer wieder unsere Buchstaben H, F und A, B hineinzugeheimnissen" Annotated score of the *Lyric Suite*. In ÖNB MS F 21 Berg 3437, p. VI.

Und somit küß' ich Dir die mir teuren Hände innigst



Illustration 7. Letter from Berg to Helena Nakhovskaya, 1908 (undated)<sup>32</sup>

Motto:\*) *Aller guten Dinge...*

Langsame  $\text{♩}$ .

A musical score for three instruments: Violin (or Clarinet), Horn in F, and Piano. The tempo is marked 'Langsame' with a quarter note symbol. The key signature has one flat (B-flat). The time signature is 6/4. The score consists of three staves. The Violin part starts with a whole note G4, followed by a half note A4, and a whole note B4. The Horn part starts with a whole note G4, followed by a half note A4, and a whole note B4. The Piano part starts with a whole note G4, followed by a half note A4, and a whole note B4. The score ends with a fermata over the final note and the instruction 'verklungen lassen'. Dynamics include *mf*, *fp*, *m.Dpf.*, and *p*.

ARNOLD SCHÖNBERG

Anton WEBERN

ALBAN BERG

Illustration 8. Alban Berg. Chamber Concerto. First Movement. *Motto*. Score. UE 33148

appearance of the DSCH monogram occurs in a letter sent by Shostakovich a few months before his death to Derek Hulme, the author of the well-known catalogue of the composer's manuscripts.<sup>33</sup> The principal works in which the DSCH monogram appears were written during the period of the "Thaw," and the degree of its recognizability increased from opus to opus. In the Tenth Symphony (1953; *Illustration 11.1*) it was rather intuitively perceived by audiences

<sup>32</sup> "And so, I tenderly kiss your hands, which are so dear to me. [Alban Berg]." See Knaus, H., & Leibnitz, Th. (Eds.) (2012–2016). *Briefwechsel Alban Berg – Helene Berg: Gesamtausgabe; aus den Beständen der Musiksammlung der Österreichischen Nationalbibliothek. Vol. 1. 1907–1911*. Florian Noetzel Verlag, p. 81.

<sup>33</sup> Hulme, D. C. (2002). *Dmitri Shostakovich: A Catalogue, Bibliography, and Discography* (3rd ed.) Scarecrow Press, p. 568.

26

- 20. 5. 1925 -

III

**Allegro misterioso**, denn noch war alles Geheimnis - aus selbst Geheimnis - - - -

♩ = 150

1 am Steg

2

pp sempre B A F H am Steg B A F H etc

pp sempre AB H F am Steg pp sempre AB F H etc

den ganzen Satz mit Dämpfer

Illustration 9. Alban Berg. *Lyric Suite*. Third Movement. *Allegro misterioso*, bars 1–2. Annotated exemplar for Hannah Fuchs. ÖNB MS F 21 Berg 3437, p. 26

who, in the words of Arkady I. Klimovitsky, were “psychologically oriented toward the poetics of Aesopian language” [13, p. 249]. In the Eighth Quartet, *In Memory of the Victims of Fascism and War* (1960; *Illustration 11.2*)—which the composer interpreted as a kind of auto-epitaph—Shostakovich himself pointed to it in a letter to Isaak Glikman.<sup>34</sup> Finally, in the *Preface to the Complete Edition of My Works* (1966; *Illustration 11.3*)<sup>35</sup>—for the benefit of the least perceptive—the composer’s first and last name are demonstratively sung to the DSCH motive.

<sup>34</sup> “If I should ever die, it is unlikely that anyone will write a work dedicated to my memory. Therefore I have decided to write one myself. One could even inscribe on the title page: ‘Dedicated to the memory of the author of this quartet.’” (Shostakovich’s letter to Isaak Glikman, 19 July 1960, as cited in [11, p. 527]).

<sup>35</sup> *Preface to the Complete Edition of My Works and a Brief Reflection on This Preface*, for bass and piano, Op. 123, words by Pushkin and Shostakovich.



DECEHA  
Димитрий Шостакович

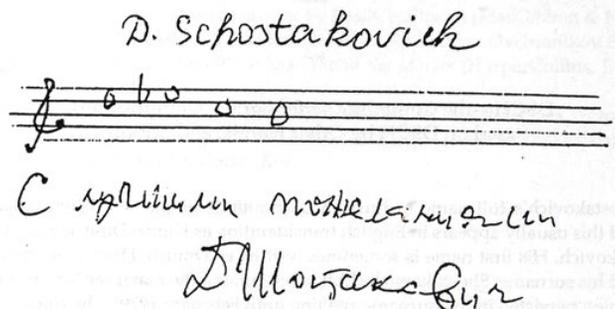


Illustration 10. Dmitry Shostakovich.

On the left is a monogram from a notebook  
with educational tasks (1920–1921) [12, p. 256].

On the right is a monogram from a letter to Derek Hulme dated 12 July 1974<sup>36</sup>



Illustration 11.1. Examples of the DSCH monogram in Shostakovich's works:  
*Tenth Symphony*, Third Movement, 7 bar to Reh. 105 (Hawkes Pocket Scores. 604)

<sup>36</sup> Hulme, D. C. (2002). *Dmitri Shostakovich: a catalogue, bibliography, and discography* (3rd ed.). Scarecrow Press, p. 568.

The image shows a musical score for four instruments: Violino I, Violino II, Viola, and Violoncello. The tempo is marked 'Largo' with a quarter note equal to 63 (♩ = 63). The key signature has two flats (B-flat and E-flat). The score illustrates the DSCH monogram, which is a diminished fourth interval. The monogram is present in the first notes of each instrument's part. The Viola part includes the markings 'poco' and 'espress.'.

Illustration 11.2. Examples of the DSCH monogram in Shostakovich's works:  
*Eighth Quartet*, First Movement, bars 1–10<sup>37</sup>

The image shows a musical score for voice and piano. The tempo is marked 'p ma maestoso'. The voice part has the lyrics 'Дми - рий Шос - та - ко - вич.' written below the notes. The piano accompaniment is shown in two staves. The DSCH monogram is indicated by a dotted line with the number '8' below it, pointing to the first notes of the piano accompaniment.

Illustration 11.3. Examples of the DSCH monogram in Shostakovich's works:  
Preface to my complete works, bars 83–90<sup>38</sup>

As a kind of self-portrait, the auto-monogram generates an entire spectrum of meanings: from the affirmation, against all odds, of an unbending authorial will and of the composer's own Self, to self-irony, self-abasement, and self-estrangement. Unlike Berg's monogram, the DSCH motive functions as a thematic formula endowed with a specific intonational profile: its outer tones outline the tense interval of a diminished fourth, one of the emblematic intervals

<sup>37</sup> Shostakovich, D. D. (1979). *Collected Works*. Vol. 35. *Quartets № 1–8*. Muzyka, p. 237.

<sup>38</sup> Shostakovich, D. D. (1984). *Collected Works*. Vol. 33. *Romances and songs for voice with piano*. Muzyka, p. 66.

in Shostakovich's music. Yet the monogram may operate in another context as well: as later became clear, in the Tenth Symphony it forms part of a love narrative, much as in Berg's *Lyric Suite*. The name of the woman who at that time "occupied Shostakovich's heart and thoughts" [13, p. 267]—the Azerbaijani composer Elmira Nazirova (*Illustration 12*)—is likewise represented in the form of a monogram (*Illustration 13*).<sup>39</sup> Did Shostakovich know of Berg's monograms? Berg did not conceal them in the *Chamber Concerto*, but the secret program of the *Lyric Suite* became known only after Shostakovich's death.



*Illustration 12.* Elmira Nazirova.

Source: <https://www.100philharmonia.spb.ru/persons/35844/>

<sup>39</sup> See Kravets, N. (1996). Novyi vzglyad na Desyatuyu simfoniyu Shostakovicha [A new look at the Tenth Symphony of Shostakovich]. In L. G. Kohnatskaya (Ed.), *D. D. Shostakovich: A Collection of Articles on the 90th Anniversary of His Birth*. Kompozitor Publ. – St. Petersburg, pp. 228–248, for more. The author cites Shostakovich's letter to Nazirova of 29 August 1953, in which the composer informs his beloved that, "since he is constantly thinking of her, he has transformed her name into musical notes" (Kravets, 1996, p. 231).

146 **118** ♩ = 108

Cox *I Solo*

Archi

E-A-E-D-A  
E | A MI(E) Pe(D) A  
Э л ь м и р а

Illustration 13. Tenth Symphony, Third Movement, Reh. 118,  
Elmira Nazirova's monogram

### *Instead of a Conclusion*

The present essay has not sought to produce a conventional “double portrait” of Shostakovich and Berg—an undertaking that would hardly be meaningful in view of the distance, and even the incompatibility, between their artistic worlds. Yet it was precisely this circumstance that prompted us to search for parallels and points of intersection between them. The composers’ only personal meeting did not lead to further contact, which in any case would soon have become impossible under the conditions of the descending “Iron Curtain.” Of immeasurably greater significance for Shostakovich was his encounter with Berg’s music, which set a vector for his own explorations in opera—and not only in opera (there is evidently no need to speak of reciprocal influence, although Berg received Shostakovich’s music with interest).

The impact of *Wozzeck* on both of Shostakovich's operas is indisputable; Shostakovich undoubtedly became acquainted with other works by his Austrian colleague as well, and many scholars have noted Bergian allusions and resonances even in his late opuses.

We have deliberately left this question beyond the scope of the present article, since it seems more important to trace not only aspects of "influence" as such, but also moments of affinity not conditioned by such influence and testifying instead to a typological community of artistic thinking. Within this framework, the differences between the two composers' artistic principles emerge with greater clarity. Thus, Shostakovich's and Berg's music is united by the phenomenon of processuality and, more broadly, by an energetic paradigm of musical thought characteristic of the neobaroque and neoclassicism of the 1920s. In both composers, this paradigm determines the principles governing their treatment of musical material. In Berg, who remains faithful to "musical prose," processuality manifests itself in Schoenberg's "developing variation"; in Shostakovich, in "thematically concentrated Fortspinnung." Fundamental differences also emerge in a trait characteristic of both composers—their predilection for Aesopian language and the hidden program. In Shostakovich, Aesopian language possesses a socio-political dimension, reflecting the impossibility of open utterance within the framework of state ideology. Berg's hidden program, by contrast, is exclusively personal and private in nature, enabling him to preserve a connection with the romantic tradition that had receded into the past. The treatment of monograms likewise diverges: in Shostakovich, DSCH functions as a symbolic theme endowed with distinctive intonational character and oriented toward recognition. Berg's monograms are akin to elements of twelve-tone technique, forming a deep structural layer of the musical text accessible only through analysis.

Naturally, the present article has by no means exhausted the parallels between Shostakovich and Berg. Many other elements of the two composers' Aesopian language—notably quotations and allusions, to which numerous studies have been devoted—remain beyond its scope. The theme of the reception of Shostakovich's and Berg's music in the twentieth century likewise allows the series of parallels to be extended. Despite the differences in the contexts of their reception, their music became a stumbling block for the broader public, perceived as excessively complex and incomprehensible, while at the same time serving as a target of criticism from the radical avant-garde as insufficiently progressive

or overly compromised. The elucidation of these and other points of attraction and repulsion will contribute not only to a better understanding of the work of these two protagonists, but also to a deeper comprehension of the musical landscape of the past century.

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