



Dmitri Shostakovich 1906-1975

Baby Shostakovich was born in St. Petersburg, Russia. His mother taught him to play the piano. At the age of 13 he went to the St. Petersburg Conservatory and there he learned to compose music. His graduation piece was his First Symphony. It was very successful and it brought him international attention.

The Communist politics of the Soviet Union in the 1930's made composing difficult for Mr. Shostakovich. The government criticized his music saying it was "unhealthy and too difficult to understand for audiences". During World War II, the Soviet government forced Mr. Shostakovich to write patriotic music according to their rules. In secret, he composed his own style of music which was not performed until the death of Soviet ruler Joseph Stalin in 1953.

He wrote 2 operas, 3 ballets, 15 symphonies, over 40 pieces for piano and 15 String Quartets (So Said Gwen plays String Quartet #3).

Mr. Shostakovich was part of the *Russian Modernists* of the 20th Century. He enjoyed German and French art and admired the music of Gustav Mahler.

The sound of Mr. Shostakovich's music is influenced by the politics of his time and his struggles to express himself freely. His music is full of dramatic contrasts. It often has long simple melody lines repeated over and over again with driving rhythm patterns. Mr. Shostakovich often has an ironic or comical side to his music that sounds like he is making fun of something or playing a joke on someone.