

**MIKHAIL IVANOVICH GLINKA**  
**Overture to *Ruslan and Ludmilla***

*Mikhail Ivanovich Glinka was born in Smolensk, Russia in 1804 and died in Berlin in 1857. He completed his opera Ruslan and Ludmilla in 1842, and it was first performed at the Imperial Theater, St. Petersburg, the same year. The Overture is scored for 2 flutes, 2 oboes, 2 clarinets, 3 bassoons, contra-bassoon, 4 horns, 2 trumpets, 3 trombones, timpani, and strings.*

Glinka composed his second opera, *Ruslan and Ludmilla*, in fits and starts during a period of domestic turmoil, as the composer's stormy marriage to Ekaterina finally ended in divorce. Glinka had composed a number of set-pieces over the course of several years, finally stitching them together for the opera's first performance in 1842. The story of the opera is based on an ancient legend as told by Pushkin: a tale of a princess, rival princes, magicians, magic swords, sleeping-spells, abduction, rescue, and love. In the end, the boy (Ruslan) gets the girl (Ludmilla), and all live happily ever after.

The opera was not well received when it was first given, partly due to the difficulty in staging a story that relies upon atmosphere rather than action in the telling. Later, however, *Ruslan and Ludmilla* gained recognition as one of Glinka's finest works. The music of the Overture is taken largely from the opera's cheerful finale.

Glinka had little formal training in

music, but he did have a gift for melody (often incorporating or imitating Russian folk song) and an inventive sense of harmony. His lack of instruction may have made it easier to find his own musical voice, which in turn gave later Russian composers (including Tchaikovsky and Stravinsky) an example of creative independence—an example that allowed them to develop their own musical personalities and to consider Glinka the father of Russian national style.

---

**DMITRI SHOSTAKOVICH**  
**Symphony No. 9 in E-flat Major,**  
**Op. 70**

*Dmitri Shostakovich was born in Saint Petersburg, Russia in 1906 and died in Moscow in 1975. He composed his Ninth Symphony in 1945 and it was first performed the same year by the Leningrad Philharmonic under the direction of Eugene Mravinsky. The score calls for 3 flutes, piccolo, 2 oboes, 2 clarinets, 2 bassoons, 4 horns, 2 trumpets, 3 trombones, tuba, timpani, percussion, and strings.*

After his epic-length wartime symphonies, the Seventh and Eighth, Shostakovich was expected by all—and most especially by his Soviet minders—to compose a grand celebratory symphony once the war was over.

---

Instead, he composed this.

Puckish, tart, and only half as long as his previous two symphonies, the Ninth defied all expectations, including those the composer himself had sown. In public statements and in conversations with friends he had intimated that he was going to compose a huge “Victory” symphony complete with chorus and soloists. He seems to have begun such a work—he even played parts of it for friends—but in the end, he said, “I couldn’t write an apotheosis to Stalin. I simply couldn’t.”

When he began anew, the Ninth became the very opposite of what was expected. “I knew what I was in for when I wrote the Ninth,” he said. “When it was performed, Stalin was incensed. He was deeply offended, because there was no chorus, no soloists. And no apotheosis. It was just music, which Stalin didn’t understand very well, and which was of dubious content.” He believed that the Ninth was one reason he made the A-list of composers to be officially denounced in 1948. “It wasn’t a list for prizes,” he said, “but for possible extermination.” But Shostakovich was too important to Stalin as a propaganda tool so the composer survived, though not without having to publicly denounce his own music and promise to make amends.

What the Ninth became was, in the composer’s words, “A merry little piece. Musicians will love to play it, and critics will delight in blasting it.” Unlike the historical potboilers and the wartime epics, the Ninth harkened back to his First Symphony, the student work that propelled him to the front rank of Soviet composers. It begins with a soft melody

in the strings that could have come from the pen of Haydn had he lived in the twentieth century. This theme interacts with a lighthearted, almost goofy march—though sometimes in ways that aren’t so lighthearted. A yearning clarinet opens the slow movement, eventually joined by the entire woodwind choir. Their music is contrasted with a wandering theme in muted strings.

The next three movements are played as one. The *Presto* is led by a frothy theme in the clarinet, and it courses through an amazing number of contrasting episodes in its brief length. The *Largo* is begun by stentorian low brass, in alternation with a pensive solo bassoon. That bassoon turns sarcastic when it begins the Finale, its theme becoming heavier, almost brutal as it is taken by the full orchestra.

There is a raging debate among scholars today: some say that Shostakovich embedded “secret messages” in his music, allowing him to speak the truth while still satisfying his Soviet masters. The Ninth is allegedly full of them. But there’s not much evidence for this and some of it comes from dubious sources. Shostakovich often made up outlandish but politically acceptable programs to explain his works, while keeping their true meaning to himself. The only really knowable truth we have lies in the notes left us by this magnificent composer, and for most of us that is truth enough.

---

