

Suite for Variety Stage Orchestra (Jazz Suite No2)

Dmitri Shostakovich (1906-1975)

March

Dance 1

Dance 2

Little Polka

Lyric Waltz

Waltz 1

Waltz 2

Finale

Dmitri Shostakovich could legitimately be called the musical conscience of the Soviet Union. Under constant scrutiny to ensure his music obeyed Soviet values – and the victim of cruel censure when the party machine felt it didn't (as we'll discover after the interval with his Tenth Symphony) – Shostakovich nevertheless produced some of the twentieth century's most powerful, humane music, which celebrates the very liberties that the Soviet state so often denied him.

A skilled composer

As well as being one of the twentieth century's finest symphonists, Shostakovich was equally capable of putting together lighter fare – sometimes following state demands for celebratory, populist music to entertain the masses. There's no suggestion of any hidden agenda in his Suite for Variety Stage Orchestra, though – nor any sense of Shostakovich watering down his creativity or patronising his listeners – even if there's been some confusion over its title.

Jazz Suite

For years, the suite was known as Jazz Suite No2, and was even issued on CD recordings under that title. Shostakovich's original Jazz Suite No2, in just three movements, had been lost for many years until a piano

score of it was rediscovered in 1999, and orchestrated by Gerard McBurney in 2000. It's not known exactly when Shostakovich put together the eight-movement suite you'll hear tonight, but it's likely to have been around 1956, since it reuses material from film scores Shostakovich wrote at that time.

And in any case, there's not much that's particularly jazzy about it. Instead, Shostakovich casts his music in a series of light-music idioms, including melancholy Viennese waltzes, breathless dances and even American-sounding marching band evocations, all of which he effortlessly makes his own. His unusually expanded orchestra adds four saxophones, guitar, accordion and two pianos (or piano duet), plus plenty of percussion, to the normal ensemble, and Shostakovich indicates in a note that any number of the movements may be played in any order.

The music of the suite

After the opening *March's* bright call to attention, a trumpet delivers its perky, catchy tune, and saxophones later introduce a quieter, mellower melody. *Dance 1* contrasts a breathless, unstoppable melody on clarinets and saxophones with a rocking theme in the strings. *Dance 2* is slower and gentler, with prominent contributions from the accordion and glockenspiel. The xylophone has the distinctive hopping theme in the *Little Polka*, and a solo saxophone takes us to a state of world-weary sophistication in the *Lyric Waltz*. Following the glittering fairground sounds of *Waltz 1*, *Waltz 2* is the suite's most famous movement, used in the opening and closing credits of Stanley Kubrick's film *Eyes Wide Shut*. The *Finale* begins with an appropriately grand Hollywood-style flourish, and its cheeky tune is at one point shared by the ear-catching combination of accordion and xylophone.

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