SYMPHONY No. 11 IN G MINOR, OP. 103
"THE YEAR 1905"
SAN DIEGO SYMPHONY ORCHESTRA
RAFAEL PAYARE
The San Diego Symphony and Rafael Payare give a powerful performance of Shostakovich’s Symphony No. 11, captured live at Jacobs Music Center’s Copley Symphony Hall in February 2020. Composed at the height of the Cold War, in the wake of the 1956 Hungarian uprising, Shostakovich’s searing symphony is subtitled “The Year 1905” and depicts one of the most violent and tragic events in Russian history. This was the “Bloody Sunday” massacre of January 9, 1905, when crowds of innocent men, women and children were slaughtered by Tsarist troops in front of Nicholas II’s palace in St. Petersburg. A tragic, consciously cinematic lament, the four-movement work uses traditional prisoners’ songs and revolutionary anthems in what is widely understood as a veiled critique of the Soviet regime in the wake of the 1956 Hungarian uprising. Dazzlingly orchestrated and thrilling in its theatricality, “The Year 1905” is Shostakovich at his most forcefully accessible and direct.
SYMPHONY NO. II IN G MINOR, OP. 103: “THE YEAR 1905”

DMITRI SHOSTAKOVICH
Born September 25, 1906, St. Petersburg
Died August 9, 1975, Moscow

Shostakovich composed his Eleventh Symphony in 1957 to help observe the fortieth anniversary of the Communist Revolution that fall. It was premiered on October 30, 1957, by Nathan Rabin and the USSR State Symphony Orchestra. It is a heady moment in Soviet history: the launch of the first Sputnik four weeks earlier had stood the West on its head with what seemed evidence of Russian technological superiority. Shostakovich’s three previous symphonies had all been abstract, but the Eleventh had a title—“The Year 1905”—and a subject: it depicts one of the central events leading to the Communist Revolution: the Bloody Sunday massacre of January 9, 1905. On that date, a group of unarmed workers led by a priest gathered in the square of the winter palace in St. Petersburg to ask Czar Nicholas II for redress of their poverty and miserable working conditions. Unwilling even to accept their right to demonstrate, the czar had already left the palace, and his troops opened fire on the petitioners. Over 500 were killed.

These events took place the year before Shostakovich was born in St. Petersburg, but memories of that atrocity were still fresh during the symphony’s composition. Shostakovich sensed the material deeply, has come to it through its head with what seemed evidence of Russian

It is quite natural that composers should frequently return to the frozen stillness of the beginning. Solo flute announces the first revolutionary “Tocsin” which then reappears in various ways throughout the symphony. The Eleventh is rarely performed today, but it is much more skillfully made symphonic music than many Western critics have been able—or willing—to understand.

Shostakovich’s ability to generate atmosphere is evident in the first instants of the opening movement, _The Palace Square_, a description of the square where the massacre took place. This portrait of a frozen, misty winter morning is done perfectly with natural and traditional stringlining, and Shostakovich achieves here a sense of space and quiet, but also tension. Very quietly, the timpani taps out the motto-theme that will shape so much of the symphony, and trumpet and horns repeat this in turn. Solo flute announces the first revolutionary song, a prison song whose title has been translated variously as “Listen” and “Awake.” This is developed briefly, but at the end of the movement returns to the frozen stillness of the beginning.

The second movement, _The 9th of January_, depicts the actual massacre. Ominous lower strings sound a funeral knell that drives to its powerful close as percussion hammers out the motto-theme rhythm one final time. How are we to evaluate the Eleventh Symphony, over half a century after it was composed and three decades after the ignominious collapse of the Communist regime? As a celebration of the Soviet Union, revisionist Western critics have been quick to pounce on every note Shostakovich wrote, and one of the most extreme of these has suggested that the Eleventh Symphony should be understood not as a depiction of the czar’s slaughter of innocent Russians in 1905 but as a satirical comment on the Russian government’s crushing of the Hungarian Revolution of 1956. Perhaps the symphony was too organic and kin to the general structure of the music. It is best to divorce this symphony from our awareness of what the Soviet government became and to understand it instead as a portrait of a horrifying moment when innocent citizens were murdered by their own repressive government. Shostakovich’s response to that memory was personal and direct, and the symphony he wrote to commemorate it is better than many have been willing to admit.

(Program notes by Eric Bromberger)
VIOLIN Jeff Thayer, Concertmaster • Wesley Precourt, Associate Concertmaster • Issun Yang, Assistant Concertmaster • Alex Palamidis, Principal Second Violin • Nick Grant, Principal Associate Concertmaster Emeritus • Hanah Stuart, Acting Associate Principal Second Violin • Ai Nihira Awata • Jing Yan Bowcott • Yumi Cho • Benjamin Hoffman • Nicole Sauder • Sarah Schwartz • Missy Lukin • Nari Park • Chial Tajima • Maryse Thayer • Aki Tsai • Ryo Usami

VIOLA Chi-Yuan Chen, Principal • Nancy Lochner, Associate Principal • Wanda Law • Qing Liang • Johanna Nowik • Ethan Pernel • Marcel Gamperl • Kevin Hsu • Jason Karlyn • Michael Molnau • Carrie Dennis • Rebecca Matayoshi

CELLO Yao Zhao, Principal • Chia-Ling Chien, Associate Principal • Marcia Bookstein • Andrew Hayhurst • Richard Levine • Mary Szanto • Xian Zhuo • Joanna Morrison • Jian Wang • Anna Cho

BASS Jeremy Kurtz-Harris, Principal • Susan Wulf, Associate Principal • P.J. Cinque • Kaelan Decman • Samuel Hager • Michael Wais • Margaret Johnston • Michael Marks • Doug Basye • Dennis Caravakis

FLUTE Rose Lombardo, Principal • Sarah Tuck • Amy Taylor, Piccolo

OBOE Sarah Skuster, Principal • Andrea Overturf, English Horn • Andrea Lambden English Horn Chair

CLARINET Sheryl Renk, Principal • Terri Tunnicliff • Frank Renk, Bass Clarinet

VIOLIN Jeff Thayer, Concertmaster • Wesley Precourt, Associate Concertmaster • Issun Yang, Assistant Concertmaster • Alex Palamidis, Principal Second Violin • Nick Grant, Principal Associate Concertmaster Emeritus • Hanah Stuart, Acting Associate Principal Second Violin • Ai Nihira Awata • Jing Yan Bowcott • Yumi Cho • Benjamin Hoffman • Nicole Sauder • Sarah Schwartz • Missy Lukin • Nari Park • Chial Tajima • Maryse Thayer • Aki Tsai • Ryo Usami

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* Substitute Musician

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