De-Stalinization Reconsidered: A Comparative Study of Dmitri Shostakovich's two Piano Trios

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“DE-STALINIZATION” RECONSIDERED:
A COMPARATIVE STUDY OF DMITRI
SHOSTAKOVICH’S TWO PIANO TRIOS
EDWIN LI

This paper compares the two piano trios that Shostakovich wrote in 1923 and 1944 respectively (“Piano Trio No. 1 in C minor Op. 8” and “Piano Trio No. 2 in E minor Op. 67”) through harmony, with a view to spotting the change of Shostakovich’s compositional meaning, if not style, and how and why did Shostakovich do so. While harmony and form may seemingly be an abstraction of music itself, they are imperative in deciphering the compositional process and thus extra-musical meaning registered by the composer. The paper also redefines the process of “de-Stalinization”, explains the meaning of it, and proposes three new levels of reconsidering the term. In previous scholarship of Shostakovich studies, there is a scant attention on the integration of historical background and theoretical application. This paper combines the two realms, putting theories into the historical context of the Soviet Union, which, I hope, will be conducive to the future interpretation of “de-Stalinization” as well as the composer’s music.
Dmitri Shostakovich, a composer born in 1906, has riveted wide discussion and attention since the early 20th century. His life could be summed up as a roller coaster: he witnessed the ups and downs of the Soviet Union, and experienced how the dictators, especially Stalin, treated art and music throughout his life. Although his symphonies are more well-known, chamber music, does hold a crucial position in Shostakovich’s music.

Despite the fact that the first piano trio was an unpublished work and was written when Shostakovich was just 17, while the second was written for Ivan Sollertinsky after his death (or/and after Nazi genocide on the Jews), their importance has been played down, especially their connection with Stalin (Volkov, 1979, 2007). The two piano trios were composed in diametrically two different periods. In 1923 Stalin still had not fully taken reign and Soviet Realism had not yet been proposed. On the contrary, 1944 was in the pinnacle years of Soviet Realism after the Great Terror, although much attention was directed to WWII. By and large, these favourable features could allow me to probe into the significant differences and similarities of the two trios and investigate the underlying rationale.

Therefore, this paper aims to compare the two piano trios that Shostakovich wrote in 1923 and 1944 respectively (“Piano Trio No. 1 in C minor Op. 8” and “Piano Trio No. 2 in E minor Op. 67”) through harmony, with a view to spotting the change of Shostakovich’s compositional meaning, if not style, and how and why Shostakovich did so. The paper also redefines the process of “de-Stalinization” and explains its meaning. In previous scholarship of Shostakovich studies, there is scant attention on the integration of historical background and theoretical application. This paper combines the two realms and is conducive to the future interpretation of the term “de-Stalinization” as well as the composer’s music.

Seldom do scholars notice that de-Stalinization is a continual process and not an absolute point in time (the time after Stalin’s death). We cannot tell when the process exactly began but we can observe it through the change of music - in this paper, the two piano trios. As Filtzer (1992, p. 2) states, for example, Khrushchev was “synonymous with the term ‘de-Stalinization’”, and the term relates to post-Stalin political liberation as well as economic reconstruction and reorganization. However, the first trio serves as a basis for comparison and it shows how “tonally” Shostakovich could compose despite the fact that his works around the 1920s are somewhat atonal and accentuates the process of de-Stalinization epitomized in the second trio. The second trio clearly deviates from the “acceptable qualities” stated in the official statement but Shostakovich did not continue writing as tonal as his first trio but embroidered the second trio with some “acceptable features”. The first trio displays the unlimited creativity of Shostakovich as an artist whereas the second trio exhibits his deformation of the harmony of the Classical tradition which ignites extrinsic meaning. These comparisons demonstrate a continual change in his music. Therefore, I reinterpret the term “de-Stalinization” in the field of music as a process contriving to escape from Stalinist rule and establishing a unique kind of music in the Soviet Union in the period during and after Stalin’s reign.
In fact, the rancorous debate around Shostakovich concerns merely with Shostakovich’s *approaches* to composing music, largely void of genuine musical analysis of the composer’s music (Volkov, 1979, 2007; Fay, 2000; MacDonald, 2006). Surprisingly, there is a paucity of literature about the composer’s two piano trios, especially the first. There is one important point worth noting: the majority of the literature on the piano trios, notably the second, is polarized. They are either written in a cardboard historical manner, for example, Volkov (1997) and Roseberry (1982) and or with mere music analysis with little regard to the historical background or meaning, Brown (2006) is a case in point. Volkov, without any further explanations, wrote in his book that the Piano Trio No. 2 is “a memorial work with a palpable subtext” (Volkov, 2007, p. 235). More often, scholars only mention the aim of the piece, which is to pay homage to the death of Shostakovich’s closest friend, Ivan Sollertinsky, although many agree on the political meaning underneath by virtue of Shostakovich’s assimilation of Jewish themes in the trio due to the Nazi genocide of the Jews (Braun, 1985). Yet, scholars have evaded the controversial question on whether the piece contained formalist elements against Stalin and the Soviet regime (Roseberry, 1982; Fay, 2000; MacDonald, 2006; Volkov, 2007).

On the other extreme, music theorists such as David Fanning and Stephen C. Brown have been focusing on accounting for what has Shostakovich written; however, seldom do they tell what it means. In Fankhauser’s recent work in 2013, “Cadential Intervention in Shostakovich’s Piano Trio in E minor, op. 67”, for example, it perfectly explicates how cadential intervention occurs in the piano trio but shies away from mentioning its referents. The same evasion is made by Brown in his work “Tracing the Origins of Shostakovich’s Musical Motto”, yet he pinpoints that Shostakovich was profoundly influenced by Stravinsky and Prokofiev (Brown, 2006).

As far as the Piano Trio No. 1 is concerned, a scarcity of literature can be found, perhaps because Shostakovich wrote it when he was only a student at the Petrograd Conservatory and therefore his compositional styles and techniques were immature. However, McCreless’s “The cycle of structure and the cycle of meaning: the Piano Trio in E minor, Op. 67” reconciles the two extremes by integrating both theoretical and hermeneutic analysis in Shostakovich’s piano second trio. He associates, for example, the “Jewish F” with “unjust deaths by political terror” (McCreless, 1995, p. 136). He also reconsiders the interaction between “cyclic structure” and “cyclic meaning”, which is similar to what I called narrative expansion: the integration between immanent and extrinsic meaning of a piece of music. Therefore, his analytical approach is central to my current paper and I believe this approach to analyzing Shostakovich’s music is the most appropriate. Yet, scholars seem to have neglected the importance of his article by continuing to indulge themselves into the theoretical realm.
Previous literature has been swirling around a “Shostakovich War” (Ho & Feoanov, 2011, vi): the veracity of Solomon Volkov’s Testimony: The Memoirs of Dmitri Shostakovich in 1979. As a Russian music journalist, Volkov posits that Shostakovich was by no means a politically insouciance person but a “secret dissident” who showed his hatred of Stalin in disguise (Volkov, 1979). His claims were based largely on his personal acquaintance with Shostakovich himself, which was never been conjectured before. On top of that, the book, contingent on the manuscripts and private conversations with Shostakovich, purportedly contends that Shostakovich’s music has no shortage of dissenting coded messages toward the Soviet regime. As Volkov (1979, xxv) states, Shostakovich “played the fool, while actually being a persistent exposcer of evil and injustice.” While this book led to critical re-evaluation of Shostakovich’s music by Western musicologists at that time, controversies followed.

Evidently, Laurel E. Fay is an opponent of Testimony. In her essay “Shostakovich versus Volkov: Whose Testimony?” in 1980 and her subsequent book Shostakovich: a life in 2000, she blatantly and acrimoniously questions the authenticity of Volkov’s Testimony. Indications that Volkov plagiarized and fabricated Testimony could easily be found in her work (Fay, 2000). The “war” becomes more acute and complicated when more musicologists and scholars take their sides. Ho, Feoanov and Ashkenazy’s Shostakovich Reconsidered is one which supports Testimony and contends that Fay should not discredit the whole Testimony because of minor errors (Ho, Feoanov & Ashkenazy, 1998). On the other hand, Irina Shostakovich, the third wife of the composer, published “An Open Letter to Those Who Would Abuse Shostakovich.” Vehemently, she reprimanded Volkov of abusing the name of Shostakovich to create certain kind of scandal, and this had humiliated his memory (Shostakovich, 2000). Brown’s (2004) book A Shostakovich casebook intends to rupture the defense for Testimony. Apparently, the controversy will never end. Ho & Feoanov wrote The Shostakovich wars in 2011 to respond to Brown’s book and Volkov wrote another book to restate his ideas in 2007 but sidestepped his opponents’ attack; in the previous year, Ian MacDonald finished his book The New Shostakovich defending for Volkov.

NARRATIVE EXPANSION

The notion of “narrative expansion” is first coined by Gibbons in his article “Debussy as Storyteller: Narrative Expansion in the Trois Chansons De Bilitis” in 2008. Gibbon’s notion preoccupies with the ability of the audience to make “inter textual connections beyond the bounds of the song cycle at hand” (Gibbons, 2008, p. 7). He mentions the intertextuality of the three parts of the Debussy’s as interthematically related, in particular, the last part, is an overall conclusion of the entire song. This technique, he suggests, allows an interaction between the composer as well as the audience (particularly second-level listeners), which I believe is crucial to my study due to the fact that how a listener perceives Shostakovich’s music and his participation are important. However, since Gibbons focuses a large part on the text but little on music, I redefine it
as “the expansion of musical meaning as narrated by the music itself.” I find this is a better interpretation than Volkov’s equivocal terminology to describe Shostakovich’s music that is comprised of coded messages toward Stalin. In fact, narrative expansion is a more accurate term to describe the composer’s music and compositional style instead of a “secret dissident” after all.

On top of that, Nattiez (1992) points out two categories of meanings in a piece of music (in the time when he refers to Wagner specifically): “immanent meanings” and “extrinsic meanings”. The former, as McCreless (1995, p. 117) puts, concerns with “meanings embodied in intrinsically musical relations” while the latter “meanings that provide a link to ‘socio-cultural, ideological, political, artistic and philosophical contexts’”. However, this categorization compartmentalizes music and its meaning and fails to regard music and musical meaning as a single continuum. Often, using Nattiez’s terms, immanent meanings bring about, if not connote, extrinsic meanings. Therefore, narrative expansion provides integration between immanent and extrinsic meanings and it is what McCreless intended to achieve in her article. This idea will be employed throughout the paper.

**TONALITY AND HARMONY**

Harmony is a structural system denoting the combination of notes, whereas tonality refers to “systematic arrangements of pitch phenomena and relations between them” (Hyer, 2015). The following table is a *sine qua non* of comparing the two piano trios owing to its authenticity: it was an official publication after the condemnation of Shostakovich’s two operas, *The Nose* and *Lady Macbeth of Mtsensk* in 1936. It clearly states the requirement of a piece of music under the state’s control.

Table 1 “Some acceptable and unacceptable features of Soviet music”, from Kuhn’s (2010, p. 8) *Shostakovich in Dialogue: Form, Imagery and Ideas in Quartets 1-7* (from “Muddle instead of music”)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Unacceptable qualities</th>
<th>Desirable qualities</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Dissonance, cacophony, harshness</td>
<td>Beauty, warmth, lyricism, a clear harmonic structure</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Confusion, lack of structure, musical chaos</td>
<td>Simplicity, comprehensibility, tunefulness, clear structure, harmonic and emotional logic</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Crudity, primitiveness, vulgarity, perversion, unhealthiness, immorality, sexual explicitness</td>
<td>Healthiness, good moral fibre, ‘supporting the determination of the Soviet people to banish crassness and crudeness from every corner of Soviet daily life’</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Stalin’s foreign policy: “Socialism in One Country” and his opponent

Before delving into the comparison, understanding the prime Stalinist policy that many scholars have missed in order to comprehend the socio-historical contexts of the two trios is of great importance. Stalin’s policy and notion of “Socialism in One Country” emphasized on a worker-peasant revolutionary coalition under proletarian leadership and eventually the setting up of a bourgeois-democratic dictatorship of workers and peasants, which would prepare the conditions for a possible socialist revolution (Davies, 2005). Stalin also advocated that the revolutionary process should stop at this point in order to first improve the poor economic conditions in the Soviet Union. In addition, this idea is preoccupied with the promotion of self-sufficiency (Zywniewski, 1958). Nevertheless, he emphasized that world revolution was and would always remain a prime objective of Soviet policy. Therefore, in view of this policy, Stalin laid much attention on the revolutionary ideology among the workers and peasants and thus disallowing any “formalist” elements from disrupting.

Trotsky’s idea of “permanent revolution” was the stalwart opponent of Stalin’s. Trotsky argued that, revolution in Russia would begin as a bourgeoisie revolution and the proletariat would then naturally bring about the socialist revolution, leading to the dictatorship of the proletariat (Carr, 1970). He accentuated that Russia should take the initiative to set up communist governments in the West
to avoid being crushed by reaction or an imperialist war (Carr, 1970). Trotsky’s “permanent revolution” was the view that a socialist economy could not be built in Russia except with the aid of a proletarian revolution in other developed countries. Therefore, his idea concentrated less on the absolute constraint on artwork but more on a swift external Soviet ideological establishment.

**First Piano Trio**

Shostakovich wrote his first piano trio in 1923 when he was 17, the third year at the Petrograd Conservatoire. It was originally entitled “Poème” (Poem). Dedicating the “poem” to his lover Tanya Gilvenko, Shostakovich was nevertheless still a student and sought to use experimental compositional techniques to create Romantic elements. Digonskaya (2010) points out that the second subject in the trio resembles the beginning of the second movement of Shostakovich’s B minor sonata and conveys the composer’s affection with his lover similarly to his sonata. Contradictorily, in the year before he composed the trio, his father, Dmitri Boleslavovich, died and he himself suffered from deteriorated tuberculosis. Therefore, the work oozes a duality of love—his condolence and affection towards his father and lover respectively. The work was published posthumously and reassembled from scattered manuscripts with the final 22 bars being composed by Shostakovich’s student Boris Tishchenko.

As far as the political background is concerned, 1923 was a year of struggle between Stalin and his opponents (especially Trotsky with his idea of “permanent revolution”) while his foreign policy of “Socialism in One Country” had not yet been established (Carr, 1970). This is a crucial point that many scholars, including Volkov (1979, 2007) himself had missed. Stalin had not yet been established as a leader and controlled the artwork in the country in 1923; after Lenin’s death in 1924 that he took the reign.

Concerning the tonality and harmony in Piano Trio No. 1, the work is predominantly tonal with scattered chromaticism. Although the key is unstable in the inception of the piece, there is an affirmative establishment of Eb major from bar 103 onwards along with traditional chord progressions. Ex. 1 clearly demonstrates the classic I-IV-V progression and the singing-like lyrical melody aptly responds to the theme of love in the trio. On the other hand, the piece is harmonically experimental in terms of its employment of chromaticism and octatonicism. The cello solo in Ex. 2 exhibits the hybrid of chromatic and octatonic upward and downward movement, through which this idea permeates the entire piece. Compare the stalwart establishment of tonality in the first trio with the second, the latter is of polar difference.
The Second Piano Trio

Written in 1944, the work was in the pinnacle years of Stalinism. Despite the fact that Stalin’s attention was directed to the Second World War in the face of the breach of the Nazi-Soviet Non-Aggression Pact previously signed in 1939 by Germany (Carley, 2001), he did not give up consolidating the worker-peasant coalition and thus preventing any “formalist” elements from taking their tolls on the people’s revolutionary spirit (Davies & Harris, 2005).

Although the dedicatee of the second piano trio was Sollertinsky, one of Shostakovich’s best friends who accompanied him for 17 years, Shostakovich laid much emphasis on the victimization of the Jews in the Nazi death camps (MacDonald, 2006). Through reading the news that the Jews had to dance beside the graves to which their bodies would be dumped, Shostakovich, apart from expressing his sorrow for the death of Sollertinsky, incorporated elements of outrage due to the deaths caused by another totalitarian country, namely, Germany. Many scholars conjecture meanings beyond. Radice (2012, p. 247) states that “Shostakovich uses Jewish musical topics as a broader signal indicative of the victimization of humanity” while McCreless (1995, p. 136), as aforementioned, interprets the “Jewish F” with “unjust deaths by political terror”. In fact, MacDonald (2006, p. 174) explicates the rationale behind this piece:
“Written rapidly in late July and early August, [the finale] is the first of Shostakovich’s ‘Jewish’ pieces, in this case provoked by reports in the Soviet press of the Red Army’s liberation of the Nazi death camps at Belzec, Sobibor, Majdanek, and Treblinka. Horrified by stories that SS guards had made their victims dance beside their own graves, Shostakovich created a directly programmatic image of it.”

While the trio was well received and was rewarded a Stalin Prize in 1946 (Fay, 2000), the harmony of the second trio is, however, sometimes unexplainable as Fankhauser (2013, p. 224) states, “[harmonies in the second piano trio] may function solely as rhetorical references to an older, traditional aesthetic.” In his article, he rightly points out that “analysis of the music of Shostakovich may no longer lead to the discovery of unified underlying processes of functional tonality”; rather, the harmonic ambiguity invites hermeneutic analysis, that is, in my own term, narrative expansion. In fact, scholars have largely agreed upon the “cadential intervention” in Shostakovich’s second piano trio, meaning that the normal progression, especially V-I, is “intervened” by an extra material, making the tendency tone unable to resolve (Fankhauser, 2013; McCreless, 1995). For example, cadential intervention occurs two bars before figure 105. The resolution of the flattened-second scale degree F is intervened by a sudden change of tonality and tempo. This largely deviates from the classic norm since it disrupts the formation of tonality.

Another difference of the second trio from the first is the use of polytonality by employing two distinct tetrachords. Ex. 3 shows that the violin part in bars 9-10 uses a [0134] tetrachord and Shostakovich made use of this [0134] chord to create two distinct tonalities (Brown, 2006). For instance, Bb-F-G-A and F#-G-A-B tetrachords are not resolved throughout the entire third movement until the finale. Brown (2006) also points out that Shostakovich used modes of Freigish (Phrygian with raised scale degree 3) and Dorian with raised scale degree 4 while they embed [0134] tetrachords. Compare with the first piano trio, the second trio’s tetrachords create a more dissonant sound than the chromatic and octatonic melodic ascents and descents in the first due to the loss of tonality (the chromatic melodic materials in the first trio have a tendency going toward the established tonic, while in the second, the scale degree 4-3-2-1 motif to the tonic is often intervened (McCreless, 1995)).

With the above analysis, it is surprising finding that the first trio, under minimum restriction by Lenin at that time due to his preoccupation with the New Economic Policy (Lenin, 2008), Shostakovich wrote a piece with clear harmonic structure and lyricism. As a corollary, the second trio should have been more tonal with less formalist elements under the strict control by Stalin. However, he wrote the second trio with “dissonance, cacophony, harshness”, which are “unacceptable qualities” stated by the government.
The reason he deviates from the national prescription is obvious: Shostakovich incorporates extra-musical meanings (i.e. narrative expansion) toward Stalin’s rule and camouflages the entire second trio with “some acceptable qualities”. McCreless (1995, p. 122) posits that “the instruments cannot speak independently...something devastating...rendered them almost speechless” and “the instruments [are] unable to do anything but repeat the same material” while MacDonald (2006, p. 173) states that the cello “weeps like an abandoned boy” from the start. The muted cello at the very beginning of the piece represents the muzzled voice of the people in the Soviet Union, if not Shostakovich himself, and is not found in the first trio. Moreover, the use of minor mode, Jewish folk idiom (flattened-second and flattened-fourth scale degree; Brown (2006) names it “modal lowering”), melodic augmented seconds and the semitonal movement in the piece rendered the piece somber, leading to a strong association with death. Regarding cadential intervention, McCreless (1995, p. 128) states that it “[forces] ourselves to believe something that seems obvious, but that we somehow cannot grasp or accept”. Shostakovich did not imply cadential intervention in his first trio but the second. Evidently, the second piano trio signals significant political meaning: his resentment toward Stalin’s rule.

Others might challenge such a conjecture owing to the political background in 1923 when Shostakovich wrote his first piano trio: Shostakovich was “forced” to write such a tonal piece in a totalitarian country. However, by looking at his other work in the same period, for example, Murzilka in 1920, it is not hard to find out that is a completely atonal piano work during the reign of Lenin. This shows that Shostakovich wrote his first piano trio in an unpressurized environment. The first piano trio evinces that Shostakovich has the ability to write such a tonal piece, but this kind of compositional style did not occur, sarcastically, in the second trio, written in a contained artistic milieu. This is in contrast to his second piano trio and accentuates its narrative expansion and political meaning—
Shostakovich’s compositional style hinges on his willingness and his intended meaning.

Of course, Shostakovich did some camouflage in terms of harmony in his second trio. For example, although tonal goal is intervened, the scale degree 4-3-2-1 motif finally arrives at tonic. This renders the piece out of the scope of “atonality”. The second movement, I think, is of great importance. The very tonal contrast makes the people believe that it was a tonal piece. However, in fact, Shostakovich takes advantage of this movement to provide a stark contrast and it resembles some kind of recollections before Stalin’s rule, thus accentuating how Stalin’s rule takes its toll on the Russians, as shown in other movements. Moreover, as Kuhn (2010) states, the second trio has used Russian native folk elements, especially in its melody and parallel triads. These “acceptable qualities” make the work acceptable, even well received by the Russian audience.

**DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION**

In fact, many scholars focus on guessing the underlying meaning in Shostakovich’s music, but “how far should we go” remains a question. Taruskin (2009, p. 343, cited in Fankhauser (2013, p. 222)) answers, “as far as it serves our interests”. This is, of course, an ambiguous answer. But in his book he contradicts himself by warning scholars not to make definitive conclusions on both structural and hermeneutic analysis.

In light of this, and the fact that the meaning in Shostakovich’s music may subject to personal variegation and interpretation, I would like to propose three levels of reconsidering de-Stalinization and its meaning. The first level concerns with the means of achieving the process. This paper, already through harmony, demonstrates it. However, one has to bear in mind that the process of de-Stalinization should be shown in a comparative or continual study in order to spot the change of pre-Stalin and post-Stalin era. Therefore, the means of achieving the process, shown by comparative studies, can be further subdivided into musical and non-musical means. Musical means include the traditional musical elements, such as harmony, form, rhythm, timbre and more; non-musical means include any other elements that can help trace the process, for example, letters, comments from other composer-related people, magazines, documentary, to name but a few. All these are the means of achieving the process of de-Stalinization, whereas they bear certain kind of objectivity, especially in meaning, without contextualization.

The second level concerns with the overall process itself. It is not useful or meaningful to know every single hidden meaning in Shostakovich’s music owing to mainly personal conjecture (and it meaningless to challenge the others’ postulation insofar as by challenging the others you are making some guess work on the other hand simultaneously, though supported by other “objective” musical examples, perhaps), but the process of de-Stalinization is important. A process, it can mean to overtly rebel, or rebel in disguise, but it is less important
to know he is doing so in which way, in his music at least, because it has already demonstrated the process of rebellion and the means of achieving the meaning and the process, is less important after all. This seems to contradict with the first level consideration - this level of consideration does not play down the value of the means of achieving de-Stalinization but it only changes the focus to the process per se and treats the means as a contributory factor to the meaning and the process. It also shows that a comparative study is far more convincing than analyzing a single piece of Shostakovich’s music because the former can trace the process of de-Stalinization (also the means of achieving it) but not merely the way of achieving it.

The third level concerns with the mental process in considering another mental process of the composer in achieving de-Stalinization. This is an imaginary process that does not exist physically but determines what does exist in the real world. To make it clear, before having the means of achieving the process, there should be a mental process of contemplating the process. Of course, de-Stalinization is a retrospective consideration but one cannot deny the fact that the composer should have it somehow in his mind in “de-Stalinizing” Stalin’s rule in order that his music will thus demonstrate it. The third level consideration does not only concern with this process, however, but the thinking process of perceiving the composer’s mental process in achieving de-Stalinization. In other words, how the audience perceives the thinking process of a composer (Shostakovich, in this paper): how and why, and the meaning behind the composer’s mental process. This is, of course, not concrete at all, but as I mentioned above, it determines what the music is, not only how the composer writes the music, but also how the music is perceived.

Therefore, there is circularity in these three levels of considering de-Stalinization: from the means (musical and non-musical), to the overall process, to the mental process that determines the means and how we perceive the means, and back to the means contributing to the overall process. As a result, not only does the process of de-Stalinization concern with the composer, but also the important role of the receiver, and that is also what narrative expansion emphasizes on.

All in all, this paper provides historical and musical perspectives in analyzing Shostakovich’s compositional meaning, but evidently, the composer’s compositional style did not change, as shown in his early piano work. Shostakovich is an opinionated and self-assertive person who voices himself out of his own will. His compositional style is contingent on his volition and the meaning that he intended to convey. Shostakovich composed the first piano trio with clear tonal centers, dedicating it to his lover. In 1944, Shostakovich, with circumspect analysis of his music, did not truly follow the state requirement but disguised dissenting extra-musical political meaning in his second piano trio. Apart from showing the process of de-Stalinization, Shostakovich’s music is nevertheless not a mere disguised protest against Stalinist rule combining tonal and atonal elements, as stated by Volkov (1979), but a kind of music sui generis: it is Shostakovich’s
music that stands no comparison to any other kinds of music.

Of course, there are limitations in this paper and room for future studies. First, only one aspect, harmony, among all musical elements, is analyzed. And this paper only examines the first movement of the second piano trio, which is completely on my personal opinion and can be challenged, but not the entire trio, which is a huge gap for future scholarships.

Moreover, since de-Stalinization is an important concept in this paper, future scholars can conduct more comparative studies on, not only Shostakovich, but also other Russian composers to trace the process. Perhaps the time gap between the two piano trios is too huge that the process of de-Stalinization may be affected by many other factors in this study, but it is still worth doing it due to the fact that Shostakovich only writes two piano trios in his life. Future studies may perhaps focus on the change of his piano work and symphonies since many recent studies preoccupy with the particular meaning in a symphony, for example, his Symphony No. 5. Of course, other composers, especially Prokofiev, are also under-researched. I hope my current study will contribute to the scholarship in Shostakovich’s music, if not Russian music as a whole.

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