seiji ozawa

8/9/75  9:50 P.M.

MAESTRO ROSTROPOVICH ASKED ME TO TELL YOU VERY SAD NEWS TONIGHT
THAT THE COMPOSER OF THE SYMPHONY SHOSTAKOVICH DIED THIS EVENING
7 O'CLOCK MOSCOW TIME. WE WOULD LIKE YOU TO STAND WITH THE ORCHESTRA
AND TO HAVE A MOMENT OF SILENCE WITH US.
Statement regarding death of Dmitri Shostakovich:

Shostakovich belonged to the entire world and today the whole world is mourning this great loss. In his music he gave not only the sense of great beauty but also the feelings of the great contradictions of the epoch in which he lived. He lived a saturated and difficult life and until the last minute continued to create. His creative genius overcame everything which stood in his path. Death carried him away at the very pinnacle of his creativeness and fame. For a human being who left so much to the world, one cannot say he is really dead. But for close friends the knowledge is terribly hard to live through. In eternal memory.

Galina Vishnevskaya
Mstislav Rostropovich
SHOSTAKOVICH/ROSTROPOVITCH

On Saturday, August 9th, the great Russian cellist, Mstislav Rostropovich arrived at Tanglewood to fulfill one of his first engagements as a conductor in this country. The Maestro was already on stage conducting Tchaikovsky's tone poem 'Francesca da Rimini' when Seiji Ozawa arrived. Mr. Ozawa immediately went into the Shed to listen to the performance, and at the close of the work, went backstage to embrace his colleague and guest. At that moment, Mr. Rostropovich gave Mr. Ozawa the sad news of the death of his friend, Dmitri Shostakovich. Just hours before the concert, Rostropovich had received a call from the composer's family in Moscow to break the news.

The second half of the evening's concert, following a performance by Mr. Rostropovich's wife, Mmeo Galina Vishnevskaia of the Letter Scene from Tchaikovsky's 'Eugene Onegin', was to be devoted to Shostakovich's Fifth Symphony - a monumental and inspiring work. At 9:40 p.m. the two conductors went on stage together where Mr. Ozawa, a sympathetic arm around the shoulder of his grieving friend, announced the death of one of this century's great musical figures. The announcement was greeted with a shocked gasp from the audience. Mr. Ozawa then said: 'We would like you to stand with the orchestra to have a moment of silence with us.' At the close of an emotion-packed performance of the late composer's symphony, Maestro Rostropovich, with tears in his eyes, kissed the score and replaced it on the conductor's stand.
Shostakovich/Rostropovich

A member of the audience threw a bouquet of red roses onto the stage, and Rostropovich placed some of the roses on the closed score where they remained until the audience had left and the stage was darkened. Victor Alpert, the Orchestra’s Librarian, picked up the Maestro’s score and baton, as is customary, and finding the roses there, brought them along to the conductor’s dressing room where they were packed together with the score, to travel with Maestro Rostropovich to his temporary home in Lenox where family and friends joined him in his hour of mourning.

An interesting sidelight was that the concert took place at a time when all Moscow news sources were shut for the night. The first word of Shostakovich’s death came to this hemisphere via Rostropovich and through him and the Boston Symphony to the world. Official confirmation of the composer’s death was received in the Washington AP News Bureau at 3:30 A.M. on Sunday morning.

(original Rostro/Vishnev. statement reproduced - as typed on TDP’s old machine)

Do we mention the circumstances of its ‘typing, as The Executive Director, Thomas De. Perry received the following statement over the telephone from Maestro Rostropovich on Sunday morning and typed it himself on his well-worn Remington (Underwood??) typewriter:


and then we had the next piece. It was surreal. And it was one of the great moments. Everybody applauded after each of the pieces, including the resignation.

There was more drama to be had the following season. Mstislav Rostropovich and his wife, soprano Galina Vishnevskaya, had recently fled the Soviet Union. Ozawa, who considered the cellist to be a musical brother, had invited the couple to come to perform at Tanglewood. During the intermission of one of their concerts, Rostropovich got word from the Soviet Union that Shostakovich had just died. Oliver Knussen was in the audience that night.

There was a concert in 1975 with Rostropovich, one of the most extraordinary psychical events I have ever come across. I forget what was in the first half, but something tells me it was the Tchaikovsky Romeo and Juliet. Then Vishnevskaya comes out and does Tatiana’s Letter scene—at which point there was applause. She went off and came out again. Everybody went silent and she sang an unaccompanied dirge with no explanation. Can you imagine?

During the intermission the news that Shostakovich had died got out from backstage and traveled around the audience. This strange mood swept over the Shed, which was full, of course. And then we thought, Christ, the Shostakovich Five is in the second half. What is going to happen?

So then Tom Morris came out and announced it. And then Rostropovich, with one of the great acts of emotional bravery I've ever seen, came out and conducted the most staggering performance of the Shostakovich Fifth I have ever heard and proceeded at the end to take just one bow, put a flower on the score as a spontaneous manifestation of collective mourning. And that was it. Everybody burst into tears.

Twenty-four hours later the official Soviet new agency Tass confirmed the news of the composer's death, but Tanglewood audience was the first in America to hear of it.

That same year a new conducting phenomenon with a specialty in Beethoven, Brahms, and Bruckner arrived. Between 1975 and 1982, Klaus Tennstedt made a big splash. Almost no guest conductor there got such rave reviews as Tennstedt. Leighton Kernors of the Village Voice thought his Beethoven Ninth’s Adagio was “simply the most beautiful I had ever heard.” Richard Dyer of the Boston Globe gushed that “when he is at the BSO, the orchestra sounds more consistently at its best than it does under any other conductor. . . . The crowds fill the night with bravos before the concert even begins when Klaus Tennstedt conducts, and they throng to the front of the stage, applauding still louder, when the concert is done.” He even had a clique and a fan club, the International Klaus Tennstedt Society—known familiarly as the Klausketeers.