RED ENVOY TO VISIT BOSTON

BOSTON, April 15—(AP) Andrei Gromyko, Soviet ambassador to the United States, will make his first visit to Boston next Saturday, where he will be special guest of the Boston Symphony Orchestra at a performance of the Shostakovich Eighth Symphony.
Shostakovitch's Eighth
As It Arrives in Boston

By Winthrop P. Tryon

Symphony No. 8, by Dmitri Shostakovitch, according to promise of the show bill of the Boston Symphony Orchestra, takes on presentation at Symphony Hall tomorrow afternoon and Saturday evening, interpreted under the baton of Serge Koussevitzky. The idea of the work's importance may, indeed, be insufficiently indicated by such a routine designation as Eighth Symphony. Its merit may be such as to deserve the name of Number One symphony of the century. Any such mark should be put on, however, in pencil, the better to be erased next week, if necessary.

Yet who knows? Shostakovitch issues forth, perhaps, the greatest composer of the modern era. He may be the one man of today entitled to a ranking place in the classic line. His Symphony No. 8 may be what we have been listening for since the exit of Brahms from the musical scene. It may prove to represent—as would be required of it in the character of the Number One article—a synthesis of two centuries of the art of tone, not only in Russia, the composer's native country, but in the world.

To bring up the subject of the Shostakovitch Eighth is to remark upon something with which radio listeners have made acquaintance: for the music only two Sundays back was sent over the air from Carnegie Hall, New York, where it was brought out by the Philharmonic-Symphony Orchestra, Artur Rodzinski conducting. From report of those who heard, a guess can be made that at least two portions of the hour-long piece will enchant more or less permanent interest—the first movement, Adagio, and the last, Allegretto. That leaves three of the five movements, the second, Allegretto, the third, Allegro, and the fourth, a sort of revival of the old-school Passacaglia, a little in doubt.

But here we may be certain of one thing. Listeners of exceedingly classical predisposition will take pleasure in the Passacaglia. To do that is to be in the fashion. It may be a pose, granted on a concertgoer's part to show a liking for a passacaglia, for nobody quite knows what the thing is anyway; but if there comes a passage somewhere along toward the wind-up of a symphony where the basses growl out a persistent and sustained theme and the lighter instruments do pretty tricks of melody at the same time, you can say "passacaglia" and be near enough right.

Then, for another episode to gratifying the sophisticated, there comes at a proper distance from the close to bring realization of climax, something that can be called a fugue. Bach might not think so: but the strict fugal mechanism of Bach does not fit into a symphonic cycle. Only an adaptation of it may be appropriately employed.

A thoroughgoing symphonist of today looks back over the whole range of architectural styles of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, taking in Bach, Mozart, Haydn, Schumann, Tchaikovsky, and Brahms, and rears a structure in a style that is all his own and yet that recalls something of them all. This he is pretty sure to do, unless he is meditating a tone poem or simply doing, as often happens, a mere extended exercise in instrumentation. Everything depends on whether expression or display of technical powers is the object. With Shostakovitch, expression seems to be the purpose; and it is a long time—nearly 60 years—since the Brahms Fourth Symphony was brought out.

The Christian Science Monitor
April 20, 1944
Dmitri Shostakovitch

Whose Eighth Symphony will be performed by the Boston Symphony Orchestra this week for the first time in Boston.

The Boston Herald
April 22, 1944
Boston Symphony Orchestra

By CYRUS DURGIN

Serge Koussevitzky conducted the Boston Symphony Orchestra in the first Boston performance of Shostakovich’s Eighth Symphony, yesterday afternoon, and a large question mark grew smaller. This gargantuan work formed the balance of a nearly all-Soviet program that included Aram Khatchaturian’s Piano Concerto, again with young William Kapell as soloist; the new Soviet National Anthem by Anatole Alexandroff, and “The Star Spangled Banner.”

After hearing the Western Hemisphere premiere of the Shostakovich Eighth, over the air nearly three weeks ago, one had only scattered impressions of a vast musical canvas. A second hearing indeed reduces the size of one’s mental question mark, and also an individual estimate of the work.

Apart from the more or less philosophical and sociological aspects of the Eighth—which have nothing whatever to do with intrinsic musical value—the Eighth now seems overblown and pretentious. One had expected more of a very gifted artist who has given us great pages in his previous symphonies and other music.

Mr. Koussevitzky traveled the score in one hour and three minutes. Such exhausting length does make a certain impression, just as a large man is more conspicuous than a small one. But sheer length cannot conceal the tiring reiteration of ideas which in themselves are hardly significant.

Where Shostakovich’s Seventh was vital and melodic, the Eighth is inclined to dryness and lack of motion. There is no memorable tune like that of the brilliant march in the Seventh. No advance in style or idiom is apparent: the composer seemed to have little new to state, and he said it in terms of his Fifth, Sixth and Seventh symphonies. It is true, however, that there are magnificent sounds and some terrific dynamic climaxes. No one will deny Shostakovich’s orchestral mastery or his remarkable facility in establishing and extending musical moods.

The Friday audience received the Eighth Symphony quite cordially, recalling Mr. Koussevitzky to the stage several times, but they reserved their warmest applause for the Khatchaturian Concerto, which seemed a plenary masterpiece by comparison. Last October Mr. Kapell was most cordially applauded when he first played the Concerto with the Boston Symphony. His brilliant, muscular performance yesterday aroused no less approval. He is indeed a greatly talented musician.

Many beautiful orchestral effects abound in the Concerto, although it is fabricated in a mixture of styles recalling both Rachmaninoff and the Oriental touches of Rimsky-Korsakov, as well as numerous touches of dissonant modernism. The main virtues are the work’s vitality and condensation.

C. W. D.

The Boston Globe
April 22, 1944
SYMPOXY CONCERT
BY WARREN STOREY SMITH

The Eighth Symphony of Shostakovich was well received in its Boston premiere at Symphony Hall yesterday afternoon, but the cheers with which the Seventh, or "Leningrad" Symphony, was hailed a year and a half ago were missing. These came, however, at the curtain call of the famous violinist William Kapell in performance of the Khatchaturian Piano Concerto. This last is a taking piece, but a bit on the superficial side.

The Eighth was not lacking for publicizing, it has had, no such build-up as its predecessor, nor were its origins so picturesque and appealing as those of the Seventh. If predominately stirring and heroic, the Eighth is for the most part contemplative and ends in peaceful calm. Both works are charged with something for the amount of real interest they contain. The opening Adagio of the Eighth, for instance, lasting close to half an hour, could well be cut in two, and some might favor scrapping it altogether.

This amputation effected, the remaining four movements would constitute a very good symphony, complete with a slow movement—the fourth division is a Largo and a better slow movement than the first one. Most immediately effective is number three, a moto perpetuo that could well stand alone. The second movement is also march-like, but makes considerably less impression on the legs.

The pastoral finale may owe its origin to the fact that the symphony was completed in rural surroundings. Not yet 40, Shostakovich is too young a man to have written himself out. However, there are indications that he has done that very thing. He tends more and more to repeat himself, to rely on formulas; though since these last are of his own creating, they give his work the stamp of individuality. We must guard against an inflexibility of his technique and his mastery of his art assumed yesterday. "The Star-Spangled Banner" is good without anything in particular to say. For my part I did not drag it, appropriately enough.

The Boston Post
April 22, 1944
hailing the Red Army and the Red Fleet as "Defenders of the Motherland"; and listed six Soviet composers whose music had been performed at these concerts. This week there is no written salutation from the conductor, but the list of Soviet composers has grown to nine. It is also reported that the Soviet Ambassador will attend tonight's concert.

But what of Shostakovich's music? His Eighth Symphony is the second of a projected triology. The first of them, his Seventh, represented Defense, this one stands for Attack, and the third is expected to celebrate Victory. The Eighth has much in common with the Seventh, although naturally it contains more of repose. Its first movement is an Adagio which occupies one-half of the hour required to perform the work. The second is an Allegretto which lasts 10 minutes. The third, fourth and fifth, joined together, take up the rest of the time. The second and the third movements are both in common time, both march-like, and both in Scherzo style. The fourth is a Largo and the fifth another Allegretto.

That is to say, the Eighth, like the Seventh, is badly proportioned and lacking in balance and contrast as between the movements. Again, the Eighth is remarkable for containing passages of great beauty alongside the most banal material and obvious procedures. In this it resembles many another work of Shostakovich. Finally, the symphony is much too long for the musical ideas it advances. It would be easy, and meaningless, to provide a "program" for this symphony. Mr. Burk was discerning when he quoted in his program notes the composer's account of the philosophical content of the work: "Life is beautiful. All that is dark and ignominious will disappear; all that is beautiful will triumph."

By L. A. Sloper

Soviet Russia is being honored at this week's concerts of the Boston Symphony Orchestra, the last pair but one of the season. The Eighth Symphony of Shostakovich had its first performance here at yesterday afternoon's concert. The second number on the program is Khatchaturian's Piano Concerto, introduced last fall, with William Kapell again as soloist.

Last season, when Roy Harris' Fifth Symphony, dedicated to the Soviet people, was performed, Dr. Koussevitzky opened the concert with what he described as the Russian National Anthem. It turned out to be the "Internationale." Yesterday's program listed "The National Anthem of Soviet Russia." But this meant something else. The Kremlin has abandoned the "Internationale" along with the Comintern, and the Russian National Anthem now is really national, though not, we suppose, Tsarist.

At last year's concert celebrating the Soviets' 25th anniversary, the program book contained a message from Dr. Koussevitzky...
MUSIC
By RUDOLPH ELIE, JR.

Symphony Concert

The Boston Symphony Orchestra, Serge Koussevitzky conducting, gave the 23rd concert of its 63rd season in Symphony Hall yesterday afternoon. William Kapell, pianist, was the soloist. The program was as follows:

Symphony No. 8, Op. 65 — Shostakovich
Piano Concerto — Khatchatourian

It is a little to be regretted that so many eyes are focussed upon Mr. Shostakovich's labors in the symphonic vineyard. The poor fellow can write a fine symphony, that no one will deny, but if there were ever the signs of the uneasiness which goes with being a "great" composer whose every scratch of the pen is reported to the public in a sort of awed whisper, those signs are apparent in the Eighth Symphony.

This is not to say it doesn't have its moments. Time and again there are pages of soaring beauty as each voice strives to rise to greater heights of expression, all combining at last in a passage of great nobility. And then, as if haunted by the vision of the musical world breathlessly buzzing "what will he do next?" he either launches into the most gigantic concatenation of orchestral sonorities ever achieved at the expense of the brass and percussion players, or he repeats the whole thing twice as slowly, or he extends it through incredibly diverse manipulation of contrapuntal devices. For the symphony is an extraordinary example of thematic unity. In short, and to be perfectly blunt about it, it amounts to what the New Yorker so wonderfully labels Infatuation With The Sound of One's Own Words department.

It is clear that Shostakovich, whose every new symphony requires more time than the last, is leaning ever more heavily on sheer length to reinforce the grandeur of his conceptions. It is as though he felt the audience believes that the longer anything is, the greater it is. Mahler, to some extent, felt this, and 30 years after his death he is far more discussed than performed. Yet he, too, wrote some of the finest and most moving passages in music. Shostakovich, whose kinship with Mahler goes far deeper than the deployment of his forces, seems headed in the same direction.

Thus, in the Ninth (on which the composer is now employed), we shall doubtless have a work two hours in length and, if the war is won by then, a chorus of 5000.

The tendency, too consistent to be coincidence, is a pity, for Shostakovich, whether all of us are bowed over by him or not, is a very fine composer. He is writing for his times and his people, and this honestly cannot but be admired. It may be that he is writing for posterity, too, but first, he wants to speak to his contemporaries. The fact that he does succeed so well in this is attributable to the glorious miniatures with which his symphonies abound despite the elaborately cyclical nature of the whole.

In the Eighth, for example, the whole second movement is in reality a miniature march-scherzo. It is extended beyond its logical limits.

The Boston Herald
April 22, 1944
Soviet Ambassador in Hub to Hear Symphony

FIRST VISIT OF SOVIET AMBASSADOR
Andrei Gromyko and Mrs. Gromyko came to Boston for the first time to hear the Shostakovitch Eighth Symphony last night.

The Boston Symphony Orchestra’s rendition of the Shostakovitch Eighth Symphony lured the Soviet ambassador and his wife, Mr. and Mrs. Andrei Gromyko, from the busy embassy in Washington to Boston last night. The ambassador, who replaced Maxim Litvinov, had never been in the Cradle of Liberty and said he hoped to take a ride through historic Boston before his departure today.

Mr. Gromyko, the youngest diplomat of his rank in Washington, said that he could not comment on American lend-lease other than to say that “Russia was receiving it and needed lots of it.” He refused to make any predictions as to the war’s duration.

Following the concert, the board of trustees of the Boston Symphony Orchestra gave a reception in honor of the ambassador and his wife. Accompanying the ambassador was the first secretary of the Soviet embassy and his wife, Mr. and Mrs. Vladimir Bazulkin.
Soviet Envoy to United States

Andrei Gromyko, left, Russia’s Ambassador to the United States, chats, after the performance, with Serge Koussevitzky, conductor of the Boston Symphony Orchestra. He was a special guest at Saturday night’s concert on his first visit to Boston.

Unspecified Newspaper
April 24, 1944