**Festive Overture**

Instrumentation: piccolo, 3 flutes, 2 oboes, 3 clarinets, bass clarinet, 2 bassoons, contrabassoon, 4 horns, 3 trumpets, 3 trombones, tuba, timpani, percussion, strings.

Duration: 7 minutes.

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**THE COMPOSER** – DMITRI SHOSTAKOVICH (1906-1975) – A second denunciation by the Soviet government greeted Shostakovich in the late 1940s. He was, along with Prokofiev and Khachaturian, accused of “formalism” and the misuse of dissonance. However absurd it may seem today, this was no laughing matter under Stalin. Shostakovich knew that an artist who did not “resemble the leader” often “disappeared forever” and that the “crude words” of his music could make that fate a literal one if he wasn’t careful.

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**THE HISTORY** – *Festive Overture* was born during this touchy political time when Shostakovich was approached in 1954 by the conductor of the Boshoi Theater Orchestra with a doubly impossible proposition – write a work in celebration of the October Revolution and do so in three days! Who could pull off such a feat? Mozart could, and so could Shostakovich. He set to work in haste, apparently laughing to himself while the ideas flowed briskly from brain to paper. One imagines that Shostakovich didn’t do much laughing during those heavily scrutinized, mid-20th-century years so the idea of him writing something like *Festive Overture* with a mischievous smile on his face is appealing. The speed of the Overture’s composition is matched by the breakneck musical pace of the work in performance. Many annotators have drawn comparisons to Glinka’s fabulous *Russlan and Ludmilla* Overture and, though we don’t know for sure if the earlier work was in Shostakovich’s mind while he toiled so feverishly, the two pieces share a certain controlled recklessness that has proven both immediately fetching and lasting. Shostakovich was a nervous man publicly, but was often very brave creatively and, though history often applies and unreasonable amount of coded protest to his compositions, it is rewarding to hear the *Festive Overture* in the context of his status of the time. Was it indeed suitable proof of his rehabilitation for Stalin’s goons while, at the same time, evidence of his enduring sense of humor in the face of such a surreal existence? Who knows and, in the end, who cares? Listen and enjoy.

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**THE WORLD** – Marilyn Monroe married Joe DiMaggio in 1954. Also that year, Alan Turing committed suicide, the Frist Indochina War ended, the first *Godzilla* film was released in Tokyo and William Golding published *Lord of the Flies* in England.

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**THE CONNECTION** – Festive Overture was last played by the CCSO in 2010 under John Giordano.