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SCHREYER HONORS COLLEGE

SCHOOL OF MUSIC

INTERVALLIC AND FORMAL UNITY IN  
SHOSTAKOVICH'S STRING QUARTET NO. 8, OP. 110, MOVEMENT THREE

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## ABSTRACT

In 1960, following his initiation into the Communist Party, Dmitri Shostakovich was sent to Dresden to write the film score for the Soviet propaganda film *5 Days, 5 Nights*. Stricken by the sights of ruin in the city following its devastating bombing during World War II, Shostakovich instead wrote the score for String Quartet No. 8, his 110<sup>th</sup> opus. Shostakovich attached himself to the piece both emotionally and motivically, saturating the piece with the DSCH motif. The purpose of this paper is to analyze the form and intervallic consistency of the third movement of String Quartet No. 8. The form of the piece will be analyzed based on the architectural principle of the rotation and intervallic consistency will be identified utilizing set theory based on intervals found in the DSCH motif. These tools clarify the work's form and reveal the unity established by intervallic consistency.

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Nothing comes from nothing, nothing ever could.

Oscar Hammerstein II, *The Sound of Music*

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## Chapter 1

### Preliminaries

In 1960, following his initiation into the Communist Party, Dmitri Shostakovich was sent to Dresden to write the film score for the Soviet propaganda film *5 Days, 5 Nights*. The film takes place in Dresden following Germany's surrender at the end of World War II, approximately three months after the city was devastated by the aerial bombing carried out by the Allied Powers. Directed by Lev Arnshtam and Heinz Thiel, *5 Days, 5 Nights* depicts exiled communist Erich Braun and a group of Soviet soldiers as heroes, recovering the art of the Old Masters Picture Gallery from the ruins of the Zwinger Palace. Over the course of the five-day expedition, Erich Braun and the Soviet soldiers encounter citizens of Dresden who happened to be involved in the war effort, listen to them as they recount their stories, and ultimately gain their trust.

While in Dresden, Shostakovich found himself stricken by the sights of ruin in the city following its devastating bombing during World War II; after all, the city and its citizens were still recovering from the decimation. Ultimately, he found himself unable to write the music to the relatively insignificant film's score and began composing a string quartet that he deemed "... of no use to anybody and full of ideological flaws" (Shostakovich, Glikman, & Philips 2001). This quartet, his 110<sup>th</sup> opus, became known as String Quartet No. 8 and represents a work of immense importance in Shostakovich's life. During and following its composition, Dmitri Shostakovich developed an intense connection with the piece, speaking of the score as his final work, considering suicide, and becoming emotionally distraught at the sound of the piece. The composer said, "... when I was writing [String Quartet No. 8], tears flowed freely as water passed

after a few beers... I've tried to play it through twice, but again the tears started flowing”

(Shostakovich, Glikman, & Philips 2001). Shostakovich formally dedicated this powerful quartet to the victims of fascism and war, particularly those in Dresden. However, in letters to Isaak Glikman he decreed the piece a dedication to his own memory following his death (Shostakovich, Glikman, & Philips 2001). When Shostakovich eventually did pass in 1975, String Quartet No. 8 was performed at his funeral, rendering the piece his farewell to life as he predicted in 1960.

### **Statement of Topic**

Shostakovich's use of the DSCH (D, E-flat, C, B-natural) motif is arguably one of the most crucial identifying factors of his works. Being derived from his own name, the motif serves not only as a source of unity between his works, but also as his signature on his artistic creations. String Quartet No. 8 is no exception to this rule; in fact, a significant portion of String Quartet No. 8 is built upon either the DSCH motif or intervals found within the motif. Because the DSCH motif is so deeply ingrained into this piece, it is worthwhile to question the extent to which the motif is used, explore the compositional techniques used by Shostakovich to incorporate the motif, and ultimately establish the role served by the motif. Specifically, these topics will be explored with regard to movement three of the piece, a movement that relies particularly heavily on the motif. The form of the movement is also worthy of mention, as it serves as a tool to differentiate both the large-scale sections of the movement as well as smaller-scale recurrences of melodic material based on the DSCH motif. Through the exploration of the



aforementioned topics, the role of the DSCH motif in movement three of String Quartet No. 8 becomes clear.

### **Methodology**

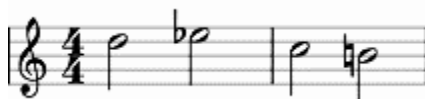
An effective strategy for analyzing the form of this movement is viewing it in terms of rotational structures: the statement and subsequent repetition of a sequence of musical ideas (Hepokoski & Darcy 2006). Rotational structures provide a sense of circulatory or cycling motion throughout a piece of music, or in this case a particular movement. The structure of this movement is well suited to the concept of the rotation. The movement is split into three primary parts (**Example 1**). The movement begins with the first rotation, which lasts until rehearsal number forty-four. Within the rotation is a series of unique and recurring themes which serve as a source of identity. A contrasting section follows in which a new theme, texture, and tonal center is introduced while themes from the rotation cease to appear. In addition to the new theme and texture is the introduction of the whole tone scale, which does not appear in full during the rotation and serves to further differentiate the contrasting section from the rotation. The second rotation begins at rehearsal number forty-six and lasts until the introduction of transitional material that leads into the next movement. By utilizing this concept of form, Shostakovich clearly defined the sections of the movement and made them easier to identify in terms of their beginnings, endings, and their function within the whole.

Rotation 1														
intro	a	a	trans. (intro referenced)	a	trans. (intro referenced)	b	b	trans.	a	trans.	c	c	d	trans. to section of contrast
35	36	37	38	39	40	41	42	43						

Section of Contrast		Rotation 2								Transition to Movement IV	
		intro	a	trans. (intro referenced)	b	a	trans.	c	d		
44	45	46	47	48	49	50	51	52			

Example 1. Shostakovich, String Quartet No. 8, III Form

In addition to form, the consistency of intervals throughout the movement is a crucial defining characteristic not only of this piece, but of the composer in general. In the context of this movement, the consistency of pitches is derived from the composer's musical monogram, otherwise known as the DSCH motif. This motif is comprised of initials derived from the German transliteration of the composer's name, which reads as D. Schostakowitsch. In German notation, E-flat is represented by "es" and B-natural by the letter H, while D and C remain representative of themselves. Thus, the German transliteration of the composer's name as well as the German system of notation provide the pitches for the motif that is present in many of the composer's works, but especially in String Quartet No. 8: D, E-flat, C, and B (**Example 2**).



Example 2. DSCH Motif

For the purpose of identifying how Shostakovich uses the DSCH motif, set theory is an effective tool. By this analytical means, the intervals found in the motif become more clearly isolated and variants of the motif are more easily located throughout the movement. To begin, the prime form of the motif must first be identified. Prime form is the most condensed form of the set arranged in ascending order, including inversional equivalency. The prime form of the DSCH motif is (0134). It now can be clearly seen that the motif is comprised of two half steps, one whole step, two minor thirds, and one major third (interval vector  $\langle 212100 \rangle$ ). This interval set is important because it explains both the incessant use of the half step interval as well as the recurring conflict between the major third and the minor third at various points throughout the movement.

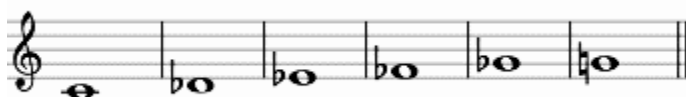
## Chapter 2

### Literature Review

There is a considerable amount of existing literature that discusses Shostakovich's music. For the purpose of this paper, select literature pertaining to his string quartets, the DSCH motif, and harmonic language has been consulted.

#### Dolzhansky 1967

Alexander Dolzhansky researched the harmonic language of Shostakovich beginning in the 1940's, namely basing his research on prominent works such as the Fifth, Sixth, and Seventh Symphonies, the Piano Quintet, the Second Piano Sonata, and the banned opera *Lady Macbeth*. Dolzhansky based his research on the pitch content of the melodic lines found in these pieces, which deviate from the common practices of major and minor. Dolzhansky's research serves as a tool to define the unique sense of modality utilized by the composer.



Example 3. Alexandrian Pentachord

In his essay, “The Alexandrian Pentachord in the Music of Shostakovich”, Dolzhansky states that the best way to conceptualize Shostakovich's use of mode is to view it in terms of lowering intervals with regard to the tonic. However, this modal lowering results in an unusual interval between particular scale degrees: the augmented second. Shostakovich avoids this interval by inserting an additional pitch between said scale degrees, resulting in the double-usage

of one scale degree. In other words, within a scalar segment, one scale degree appears twice with a different accidental on each occurrence. Dolzhansky refers to this phenomenon as an “Alexandrian pentachord”, which occurs when a scalar segment spans a fifth but contains six pitches (**Example 3**).

### **O’Loughlin 1968**

In his article, *Shostakovich’s String Quartets*, Niall O’Loughlin discusses the treatment of form and thematic unity in Shostakovich’s string quartets. With regard to treatment of form, O’Loughlin states that Shostakovich “treats the classical forms with respect *and* flexibility” (O’Loughlin, 1968). This idea of respect and flexibility of form are exemplified by the author in discussion of Shostakovich’s varied use of the sonata principle. In his string quartets, Shostakovich often utilized elements of form found in sonatas with modification to a particular aspect.

O’Loughlin also mentions the utilization of thematic unity in Shostakovich’s string quartets. Shostakovich’s use of thematic material serves the dual-purpose of both solidifying the form of a particular movement and creating a large-scale sense of unity throughout a movement or perhaps the entire piece. String Quartet No. 8 is mentioned directly by the author, as both the individual movements as well as the whole piece are unified by the DSCH motif.

**Brown 2006**

In his paper, “Tracing the Origins of Shostakovich’s Musical Motto”, Stephen C. Brown traces the origin of the DSCH (D, E-flat, C, B-natural) motif back to Shostakovich’s famed First Symphony. The origin identified by Brown occurs several years earlier than the origin discussed by most writers on the topic, which dates only a few years before Shostakovich’s Tenth Symphony. Although the act of seeking the exact origin of the DSCH motif is not exactly pertinent to the topic of this paper, the author addresses techniques of incorporating the motif that are relevant to the analysis performed in this paper.

Brown identifies three compositional techniques used by Shostakovich to produce the [0134] tetrachord: modal lowering, modal clash, and scalar tightening. These terms expand upon the ideas presented by Dolzhansky in his essays about Shostakovich’s music. Modal lowering is the act of flattening additional scale degrees within a mode, a practice utilized frequently by Shostakovich in many of his works. Modal clash occurs when two forms of the same scale degree occur simultaneously or in close juxtaposition. Finally, scalar tightening occurs when there is no suggestion of a mode or tonal center, yet contracted forms of scalar segments are utilized over a narrow span of time. Through the use of these techniques, Shostakovich incorporated the DSCH motif into his works.

## Chapter 3

### Analysis

The first rotation, which begins the piece, is comprised of an introduction followed by four unique themes. In the introduction, the DSCH motif is introduced in a fanfare-like fashion and followed by a waltz-like chromatic melody in the first violin part (**Example 4**). In this



Example 4. Shostakovich, *String Quartet No. 8, III*, mm. 4-16 (Violin I only)

chromatic melody alone, the consistency of pitch based on the motif is established. The melody contains several instances of the (0,1) half step interval from a note-to-note basis as well as across a series of measures. The melody also foreshadows the major third versus minor third conflict in mm. 8-11. In m. 8, the downbeat of the bar is a B-natural, which is followed by an ascending chromatic line on the downbeats of measures 9 and 10 that leads to a B-flat in m. 11. Although the introductory material does not have a strong tonal center, it leads into a waltz theme in the key of G minor. Thus, the modal clash between the major and minor third in the following section of the rotation is established through the motion from the B-natural to the B-flat in the introductory material.

The introduction leads to the A theme — a sour waltz in G minor. The waltz begins with a four-bar introduction before the melody enters in the first violin part. The melody of the A

theme states the DSCH motif verbatim five times and ends with a four-bar chromatic descent.

The A theme also features half-step motion in the accompaniment line, particularly in the cello part, that is derived from a variation of the DSCH motif that makes several appearances throughout the whole piece (**Example 5**). After four bars in G minor, the



Example 5. Variation on DSCH Motif

harmony shifts to an A-flat diminished triad. The most crucial aspect of the harmony change is the half-step motion from G to A-flat in the cello part. Not only does it contain the half-step motion that is consistent throughout the movement, but it also contains the exact pitches found in the variation of the DSCH motif, establishing an additional sense of unity between the movements of the quartet.

Another important characteristic of this movement is the conflict between the major third and the minor third, which is most prevalent in the A theme of the rotation. This conflict occurs immediately upon the entrance of the melody. The accompaniment is firmly in G-minor, with a B-flat found in the viola part. The melody, however, insists on G-major, with a B-natural found in the first violin part (**Example 6**). This conflict is not particularly noticeable aurally because the sounds of the B-flat and the B-natural do not initially occur simultaneously. However, in m. 25, the conflict between the two pitches becomes especially apparent to the listener because it is the first instance in which the B-flat and the B-natural occur at the same time. The second violin part contains a trill with B-natural as the primary sounding pitch while the melody in the first violin part contains the B-flat. This is the most obvious instance of the conflict between the major third and the minor third that can be found in the movement.





Example 6. Shostakovich, *String Quartet No. 8, III*, mm. 20-28

Following a brief transition that references the chromatic melody of the introductory material, the B theme of the rotation begins at rehearsal number thirty-nine (**Example 7**). What seems to be the primary idea of this section is the (0,1) half step motion, which can be found in all four instrumental parts to some degree. The melody is comprised of a neighboring half-step figure that rises sequentially by the interval of a perfect fifth before dwelling on the E-F-E figure for four measures. The half-step motion in the cello part is more elongated than that of the first violin part, with the primary half-step motion occurring every four bars between the pitches C and D-flat. However, it should be noted that there is also small-scale half-step motion in the cello part on the weaker beats two and three between the pitches A-natural and B-flat. The half-step motion in the viola part serves as a drone, insisting upon a three-note figure from G-natural to A-flat and back to G-natural. This figure also acts as an answer to the neighboring figures in the first violin part, occurring one beat after the half-step figures in the melody. This dialogue between the first violin part and the viola part also creates a stream of constant eighth notes on beats two and three of every measure of the section, which serves the purpose of placing emphasis on the pitches occurring on beat one in the melody, which either consist of an ending

of a neighboring figure with a half note on beat one or a beginning with an eighth note triplet on beat one. The half-step motion in the second violin part, beginning in m. 79, is slightly different from that of the other parts. Rather than consisting of a three-note pattern that rises a half step and falls back to the initial pitch, the second violin part quotes the melody of the A theme, which is a pitch-for-pitch statement of the DSCH motif. Excluding the statement of the DSCH motif in the second violin part, the half-step motion in each part is derived from intervals contained in the DSCH motif without directly stating the motif. This creates a sense of unity within the B theme of the rotation.

Example 7. Shostakovich, *String Quartet No. 8, III*, mm. 66-74

The entrance of the C theme at rehearsal number forty-two marks a stylistic change from a sour waltz in three to a foreboding march in two. The section begins with the accompaniment figure in the viola followed by the melody in the first violin part. The melody of the march is comprised of the DSCH motif both at pitch and transposed up a perfect fourth. Following the statement of the march melody is a series of chromatic lines and harmonies as well as meter changes that serve as a transition first at m. 124 into the second iteration of the C theme and then at m. 135 into the D theme. The D theme begins at rehearsal number forty-three and is similar to the C theme, maintaining the duple march style, the melody based on the DSCH motif, and the

combination of chromaticism and meter changes that serve as transitional material. However, instead of being a literal statement of the DSCH motif with a perfect transposition of the intervals, the melody is merely built upon the intervals of the motif (**Example 8**). In order to gather these intervals, the pitches of the melody must be reinterpreted enharmonically. If the C-flat is reinterpreted as a B-natural, the first interval of the melody is a minor third from D-natural to B-natural. If the G-flat is reinterpreted as an F-sharp, the interval between D-natural and F-sharp is a major third, as found in the motif. Finally, without any enharmonic reinterpretation, the interval between the last two pitches is a half-step between G-flat and F-natural. However, it is worth noting that there is one interval in this melody that is not derived from the DSCH motif: the perfect fourth/fifth between C-flat and G-flat. Excluding the inclusion of the perfect fourth/fifth in the melody of the D theme, the final two sections of the rotation remain consistent in terms of intervals based on the DSCH motif.



**Example 8. Shostakovich, String Quartet No. 8, III, mm. 140-143 (Violin I only)**

Following the conclusion of the first rotation is a contrasting section that does not return beginning at the anacrusis preceding rehearsal number forty-four. Despite surface contrasts, this section contains the same degree of motivic consistency as found in the rotation themes. The accompaniment is comprised entirely of running half-step eighth notes (0,1) at a pianissimo dynamic in the first and second violin parts that persist throughout the entirety of the contrasting section. This pattern of stepwise chromatic lines is completely symmetrical and recurs in a way

that does not define a tonal key. However, at the same time these stepwise chromatic eighth notes still suggest a tonal center on B by metrical placement, repetition, and coordination with the melody every two measures. In a sense, these running chromatic eighth notes act as ambient noise over which the melody exists, yet still have a connection to melody through the implication of a pitch center. To provide contrast with the rotation, the melody appears in the cello part rather than the first violin part (**Example 9**). Within this melody, the conflict between the major third and minor third persists. Because the melodic phrases frequently come to rest on B-natural, it can be deduced that B-natural is the tonic of the contrasting section. The conflict of thirds occurs between D-natural and E-flat, which can be enharmonically reinterpreted as D-sharp. The utilization of both pitches represents both the (0,3) and (0,4) intervals that are found in the DSCH motif. Although the two pitches never sound simultaneously, the existence of both pitches during points of emphasis create the conflict between the thirds and ultimately the modal ambiguity.



Example 9. Shostakovich, String Quartet No. 8, III, mm. 153-169 (Cello only)

Although this contrasting section contains the same degree of motivic consistency as the rotation themes, there are aspects of the accompaniment that are unique to this particular section of the movement. As mentioned, the accompaniment is comprised of running chromatic eighth notes, which reflect the consistency of intervals found in the DSCH motif (0,1). However, along with the symmetrical chromatic scale, both the odd and even whole tone scales are outlined by

the accompaniment as well. The odd whole tone scale with the exception of E-flat (otherwise known as pitch number 3) is outlined by the first violin part on the downbeat of each measure while the even whole tone scale with the exception of A-flat (otherwise known as pitch number 8) is outlined by the second violin part on the downbeat of each measure. In m. 177 the first violin part switches to outlining the even whole tone scale and the second violin part switches to outlining the odd whole tone scale. It is important to note that the whole tone scales do not appear in their entirety at any point in the themes found in the rotation, thus making the whole tone scales unique to the contrasting section. This creates an additional sense of differentiation between the rotations and the contrasting section.

The second rotation commences after the contrasting section. Although the second rotation contains the same thematic material as the first rotation, it is important to note that the second rotation is an abbreviated version of the first rotation with crucial factors that differentiate it from the first statement of the themes of the rotation. For example, when the introductory material of the rotation returns at rehearsal number forty-six, the E-natural in the cello part held over from the section of deviation is sustained for a considerable amount of time, extending into the return of the A theme and ending in m. 217. This E-natural drone generates a sense of unease in the listener, as a part of the preceding section seems to linger much longer than expected. Another important difference between the two rotations is that the viola plays the chromatic melody in the introduction that the first violin played in the first rotation. Although the same melody with the same pitches is written for the viola, the timbre of the viola creates a sense of variation. Although slight, the difference of timbre between the violin and the viola sets the second rotation apart from the first rotation. These differences create variation between the two rotations that generates both interest and a sense of unease.

The movement concludes with transitional material that leads into the fourth movement. The first violin plays this transition alone, moving away from the waltz and march styles and into a slower, more desolate style. This transitional material makes reference to the *Dies irae* chant for the dead, which is referenced frequently in the fourth movement and also happens to contain the half-step, major third, and minor third intervals that contribute to the pitch consistency found both throughout the movement and throughout the entire quartet. The final note of the third movement is sustained into the fourth movement, creating a seamless transition between the ending of the third movement and the beginning of the fourth movement.

## Chapter 4

### Conclusions

The two central features of this movement are the form and the consistency of intervals based on the DSCH motif. In terms of rotational structures, the movement has three distinct sections, two of which share thematic material while one presents contrasting thematic material. The use of both pitches and intervals remains consistent throughout the movement and is based upon the pitches and intervals contained in the DSCH motif. Analysis by means of set theory makes the incessant use of the half-step, major third, and minor third intervals more distinct and easier to identify. Based on the examples provided throughout this analysis, it becomes clear that the use of intervals throughout the movement is extremely consistent and serves the function of unifying the movement both as a unit and within the context of the entire piece.

In addition to serving the purpose of establishing unity, the consistency of intervals throughout the piece deeply connects String Quartet No. 8 to Shostakovich, as the unity is derived from a representation of his own name and experiences: the DSCH motif. Keeping in mind the extensive and powerful history behind the piece, the words of David Fanning ring true about this piece and all music of Shostakovich: “The bravest composer, the most subversive, the most socio-politically challenged, or the most politically correct composer, never gained immortality on those counts alone— witness the many unsuccessful attempts by western composers to commemorate the victims of the Nazi holocaust or the atom bomb. After all, Shostakovich’s music speaks to the listeners who have never heard of Stalin’s great terror ... And if the sources of that communication- in personality, experience, and history- are undoubtedly an important concern, the very nature of the music demands that the means to communication- the musical language itself— receives equal attention” (Fanning, 1995). The

music of Shostakovich maintains its relevance and power due not only to its rich history, but its compositional soundness as well.



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