

NAXOS

# FILM MUSIC CLASSICS

## Shostakovich **NEW BABYLON**

basel sinfonietta

**Mark Fitz-Gerald**



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# Dmitry Shostakovich (1906-1975)

Music for the film

## New Babylon (1929)

CD 1	43:15	CD 2	48:08
<b>1</b> Reel 1: General Sale. 'War – Death to the Prussians'	9:02	<b>1</b> Reel 5: Versailles against Paris. 'Paris has stood for centuries'	10:21
<b>2</b> Reel 2: Head over Heels. 'Paris'	10:01	<b>2</b> Reel 6: The Barricade. 'The 49th day of defence'	14:51
<b>3</b> Reel 3: The Siege of Paris	10:51	<b>3</b> Reel 7: To the Firing Squad. 'There is peace and order in Paris'	10:39
<b>4</b> Reel 4: 18th March 1871. 'On the morning of 18th March the workers still guarded their guns'	13:21	<b>4</b> Reel 8: Death. 'The trial'	8:11
		<b>5</b> Reel 8 (continued): Original ending	4:07

(see the back page of the booklet for a scan of the manuscript page where the original ending was cut)



**BASEL SINFONIETTA**





**Dmitry Shostakovich, 1929**

Photo: M. Nappelbaum / DSCH Archive, Moscow

## Dmitry Shostakovich (1906-1975)

### Music for the film *New Babylon* (1929)

#### Editorial note

The post-production history of *New Babylon* and its last minute re-editing is complex and confused. Access to the original 'lost' manuscript full score has enabled us to make the world première recording of the complete surviving music but, in discussing the film and the music, our note-writers have arrived at different conclusions about the process and implications of the re-editing, and this is reflected in their respective notes.

### The Factory of the Eccentric Actor [FEKS] and *New Babylon*

*New Babylon* – the film directed by Grigori Kozintsev and Leonid Trauberg, with its inseparable companion score by the young Dmitry Shostakovich – represents a climactic event in a brief and beautiful golden age for the arts, that was nevertheless at this very moment coming to its end.

The time and place of this enchanted era of art was the Soviet Union in the 1920s. From today's perspective, when we look back on seventy-four years of Russian Communism and Stalinism, we do not see it as one of the most glorious epochs in human history. In terms of art alone, we remember too many stories of artists who were censored, silenced and even liquidated. Leonid Trauberg and Dmitry Shostakovich themselves in time fell victims to Stalin and the crippling artistic dogma of "Socialist Realism".

And yet, in the first few years after the Revolution, alongside violence and brutality, famine and privation, there was still idealism and hope for a new utopia. Lenin recognised the importance of the arts in educating people to the brave new society he envisaged. His most brilliant stroke was to appoint as his Commissar for Enlightenment a man of extraordinary culture and intelligence, Anatoly Vasilyevich Lunacharsky, a brilliant art critic and journalist. Fluent in six languages and with a vast knowledge of art history, Lunacharsky was open to every new tendency,

everything that might provide new forms of art to suit a new society. So the way was clear for anyone with ideas and energy. Nobody was too young, too new, too avant-garde, too outrageous.

Ready to seize their opportunity were Grigori Kozintsev and Leonid Trauberg, two Jewish teenagers, both from Ukraine. Kozintsev was born in 1905 into a well-off middle-class family who were mostly involved in medicine. Trauberg, born in Odessa in 1901<sup>1</sup>, was less fortunate. A wave of anti-Semitism after the failed revolution of 1905 made it hard for him to gain admission to schools. But he was a great self-educator: he read and wrote and acquired a passion for music and theatre.

Kozintsev decided he wanted to be a painter, and took advantage of the revolutionary confusion to enrol in the studio of the avant-garde painter Alexandra Exter, in an attic which was a meeting point for all of Kiev's intellectual elite. Still only 15, he was quickly recruited to help decorate an "agit-train". When the painting was finished, he was allowed to write and help produce a play to be performed on the train, as it spread agitational propaganda around the country.

The theatre director Konstantin Mardzhanov took him on as a scenic assistant, and introduced him to another young painter, Sergey Yutkevich, a year his senior. In no time, the ambitious teenagers told Mardzhanov that they would like to have their own theatre. And in that wonderful, crazy time, it seemed quite normal that he promptly gave them one, a former cellar cabaret, where they performed the plays of Mayakovsky and created a puppet theatre to stage Pushkin's *The Priest and his Servant Balda*, which Shostakovich would later score for an animation film.

Everything moved at great speed. Yutkevich transferred to Petrograd, where he formed a friendship with a fellow-student in Meyerhold's theatre classes, Sergey Eisenstein. Kozintsev soon followed, and there met Leonid Trauberg, four years his senior, just arrived from Kiev.

The young friends all shared a fascination with popular entertainments – circus, music hall, cabaret, boxing, *commedia dell'arte*, the *balagan* fairground booth show, gags, comic songs. Surprisingly to us now, in the light of later Soviet history, their greatest passion and inspiration was America. In transatlantic technology, they were enchanted by industrialisation, Fordism and speed; in art by Mack Sennett comedies and, supremely, Charlie Chaplin.

Kozintsev very movingly summed up those times: “All these experiments, all these quests for new forms came because we had an intense feeling of an extraordinary renewal of life...”

“What we were doing then we were doing in the cold and the famine of a devastated country. The conditions of life were very hard. The State, occupied with a full-scale Civil War, was undergoing enormous difficulties.

“Yet the dominant sentiment was the affirmation of life. The young artists felt life in all its richness and colour, and artistic forms seemed naturally to take on the artistic forms of a great popular carnival.”

It was a time of “-isms” – Suprematism, Constructivism, Futurism. The teenage friends joined in the frenzy and invented “Eccentricism”. They launched the movement with two noisy public debates – with clown costumes and painted faces – and in July 1922 published *The Eccentric Manifesto*. Signed by Kozintsev, Trauberg, Yutkevich and the stage director Krizhitsky, this was a heady mixture of provocation, nonsense, wit and surreality, with such declarations as “Charlie Chaplin’s buttocks are more precious to us than the hands of Eleonora Duse” or “YESTERDAY – sitting rooms, salons, barons. TODAY – shouts of newsboys – scandals – police truncheons – noise – shouting – stamping – running.”

Yutkevich and Krizhitsky soon went off to new horizons, leaving Kozintsev and Trauberg to set up the “Factory of the Eccentric Actor” (FEKS) with a faithful group of pupils and disciples, most of whom were to stay with them and eventually collaborate on *New Babylon* – including the designer Yevgeny Enei and the actors Sergey Gerasimov, Yelena Kuzmina and Pyotr Sobolevsky.

By 1924, Trauberg was 23 and Kozintsev 19, and the cinema – the newest art of the 20th century – was irresistible and inevitable. Their first two short films, *The Adventures of Oktyabrina* (1924) and *The Mishkas Against Yudenich* (1926) – both evidently full of Eccentric gags and craziness – are lost, but their first full length film, *The Devil’s Wheel* (1926), still survives. It is a lively melodrama about a sailor who meets a girl in Petrograd, fails to return from shore leave, but redeems himself by unmasking a gang of criminals. Eccentricism abounds, with scenes in a fairground, an acrobat who hurls himself from the roof of a house, and a positive onslaught of quick-fire images.

This was followed by *The Overcoat* (1926), adapted from two stories by their 19th century idol (and fellow eccentric) Gogol – a model of literary adaptation in finding visual equivalents to the writer’s verbal style, which can be considered their first masterpiece.

Their last subjects for silent films were more directly suited to official cultural policies. Both took as their subjects historical revolutions which, though unsuccessful, were now embraced by the Soviet political and cultural authorities as portents of the 1917 October Revolution.

*SVD – The Club of the Great Deed* (1928) was a drama about the failed “Decembrist” Revolt of 1825 by a group of army officers demanding a more liberal regime and the abolition of serfdom. Kozintsev and Trauberg strove to avoid the traditional conventions of Russian historical films with their stress on props and uniforms and thousands of extras, characterised by the lavish but conformist *Decembrists*, which came out a few months before their film. As in *New Babylon* (1929) their concern was rather with the atmospheres and attitudes that motivated these historical phenomena.

*New Babylon* – under its preliminary title *Assault on the Heavens* – was originally proposed by the studio, presumably as a result of *SVD*, which the great critic Victor Shklovsky had called “the Soviet Union’s most elegant film”. At first Kozintsev and Trauberg were not enthusiastic to make a third costume picture – after all, they were still only 23 and 27 and deeply committed to the new age which had shaped their artistic careers. However, as they

read contemporary accounts of the Paris Commune by Karl Marx and the communard journalist Prosper-Olivier Lissagaray, they recognised the possibilities of what Kozintsev called “a social generalisation ... a collective portrait of the epoch”. Embarking on their script they conceived their own tragic story, along with elements from Emile Zola – *L’Argent* and *Au Bonheur des dames*. Eccentricism left its legacy, in the frenzied, sell-out department store of the title which serves as a metaphor for the Third Republic, and in the grotesque characters and erotic cabaret that people it. Thanks to their cameraman Andrey Moskvín they were able to give the film a uniquely distinctive pictorial style. Working with a portrait lens, Moskvín characteristically places the sharp-focussed foreground action against backgrounds whose texture recalls *pointilliste* painting.

It is evident though that a major transformation of the concept came in the final weeks, with the encounter with Shostakovich. With the marriage of the film and the music the directors recognised a new quality, virtually a new medium. The driving force of the work now became much more expressionistic than explanatory.

This discovery seems to have been the motive of the radical editing that took place in the two weeks before release, rather than any draconian instructions from the Moscow Cinema Committee, who had in fact judged the film as “a poem on the Paris Commune recited in brilliant cinema language. The Central Rehearsal Committee has registered *New Babylon* as a first category film, that is, it is ranked alongside the best Soviet films.” The directors’ own later statements indicate that it was their own choice to re-edit the film in a way that would heighten the audio-visual drive – in its way operatic, and yet unique in its effect – even while risking moments of incomprehensibility in the narrative.

As we know, for a variety of reasons, the première screenings of *New Babylon* were such failures that the film and its music were to be virtually forgotten for more than half a century. And at the very moment of its appearance, the golden age of Soviet art had already passed. Only two months before the release of *New*

*Babylon*, an official decree had demanded “proletarianisation” of art, which must now be comprehensible to the millions. This was the first onset of the killing Stalinist dogma of “socialist realism” – and FEKS chose this moment to announce its official termination. But *New Babylon* remains.

**David Robinson**

<sup>1</sup> Trauberg revealed in the 1970s that he was born in Odessa on 17th January 1901, but that during the civil war his father had bribed an official to alter the date on his registration card to 1902, in order to postpone Leonid’s conscription to the army. The deception persisted for much of the rest of his life.

## The Historical Contexts of New Babylon

When his father died in 1922 Shostakovich became a cinema pianist and though he quickly grew to dislike the work it clearly influenced pieces including the *First Symphony*. In 1926, that work’s success launched an international career and allowed him finally to escape the cinema pit, he thought for good.

Meanwhile Grigori Kozintsev and Leonid Trauberg, barely older than Shostakovich, had formed the Factory of the Eccentric Actor (FEKS), a theatre company whose manifesto enthused about Chaplin and technology, decried libraries and museums, and promised to “fling a galosh into the mug of anyone who deserved it”. In early 1928 Sovkino commissioned FEKS’s seventh film, *New Babylon*. It was about the Paris Commune of 1871 when, following France’s defeat in the Franco-Prussian War, the working class rose up and temporarily took control of the city.

When Prussia besieged Paris in July 1870, the French government initially supported a civilian force, the *Francs-tireurs*, but on 18th January 1871 the government capitulated. Parisian workers’ long-standing grievances were exacerbated by the mismanagement of the war: for example, there had been no rationing during the siege so

that, while the wealthy had fared well, others had been reduced to eating pets, then rats and eventually zoo animals. Discontent rose further when the new National Assembly had a monarchist majority and Prussia occupied the city. When the workers, continuing the resistance, requisitioned the French cannons the government, unnerved, tried to wrest them back on 18th March but the disillusioned army did little to enforce it.

Over the years there had been many calls for a Parisian local authority but central government resisted them for fear of losing control of the capital. Some of the workers' other demands were less specific but the newly formed Commune Council formulated a set of social democratic policies. Though few could be implemented in the time available, those that were included the separation of church and state, the right of employees to requisition abandoned businesses, the return of pawned goods to their owners, and improved pensions. But its policy of devolving power downwards, meant that each area had different priorities, encouraging ideological splits.

Military operations against the Commune (aided by POWs released by the Prussians) were directed from Versailles, but the Commune's localism meant that there was no coherent planning and in turn each area fell. The bloodiest fighting occurred in the biggest workers' areas to the city's east, culminating in the last week of May, *la semaine sanglante* ('the bloody week'), when tens of thousands of Communards were killed in fighting, summarily executed or tried and deported or shot.

The Commune was a hugely important event for the Left: for Engels it was the first "dictatorship of the proletariat". Marx's initial assessment was that it was undermined by patriotism leading to the question of whether the failure indicated that stateless Communism was possible even with strong grassroots activism. Marx's daughter Eleanor actually had a long relationship with the exiled Prosper-Olivier Lissagaray whose eye-witness account of the Commune she translated into English. Lenin agreed with Marx that patriotism was part of the problem but reiterated two further problems: the Communards didn't take control of institutions such as the

banks (which would have cut off their enemies' funding), while "excessive magnanimity" meant they failed to push home their military advantage. Later, Stalin – unsurprisingly – thought it lacked centralised control.

While these analyses were important for political theoreticians hoping to avoid the Commune's mistakes and ensure the success of the next uprising and the continuance of Socialism, they might seem irrelevant to artists. However the Commune was a regular theme for artists – ironically, while FEKS were planning *New Babylon*, their mentor Konstantin Mardzhanov was making his version of the story: *The Communard's Pipe*. All of these presentations would have been expected to present a 'historically accurate' view of events.

For *New Babylon*, Kozintsev and Trauberg chose to counterpoint the Commune with a sale in the titular Parisian emporium, underlining the battle between capitalism and quasi-anarchist socialism, and allowing ironic comments about people and things being for sale. The film stars Yelena Kuzmina as the shop assistant Louise and her husband Pyotr Sobolevsky as a soldier, Jean. Louise adheres to her principles, becoming a very active Communard and is tried and shot, but Jean, despite his disgust and disillusion, cannot bring himself to rebel and has to face the fact that he has contributed to her death and the fall of the Commune by his failure to act.

The Soviets had not yet developed sound-film technology but their debates about cinema music had concluded that it was inadequate. Apart from the music's general style, there was the question of how the images and the music should interact. Kozintsev and Trauberg had already had enough of scissors-and-paste accompaniments and, as Gogol was one of FEKS' heroes, the fact that Shostakovich had just written an operatic version of his story, *The Nose*, was recommendation enough. Sovkino Studio felt he would write "worthy and serious music ... and keep in mind the specific features of working with music in the cinema."

Trauberg, almost six years older than Shostakovich, remembered his apparent youthfulness but even Kozintsev, with just eighteen months' head-start, recalled



**Woman on the barricades**  
(possibly played by Tamara Makarova)

Courtesy the BFI



**On location on the set of *New Babylon*,  
Odessa, Summer 1928.**

**L-R: Grigori Kozintsev, Andrey Moskv  
(cameraman), Jean (Pyotr Sobolevsky),  
Leonid Trauberg.**

Courtesy the BFI



him as “just a boy to look at”. They were delighted when he agreed that the music should be integral to the film but should not “illustrate the frame”; it would be “linked with the inner meaning rather than the external action and [develop] contrary to the events, independent of the construction of the scene.” It was a fateful decision.

Having watched the rough cut, Shostakovich accepted the assignment, though he only signed the contract three weeks later, on 28th December 1928. The film was to open on 18th March 1929 – the fifty-eighth anniversary of the Commune. He was to deliver a 90-minute score for something between 14 and 20 musicians, with versions for trio and solo piano for less well-appointed cinemas. The piano score was due in a month, on 1st February, and the arrangements a month after that, on 1st March. The fee was 2,000 rubles, about fifteen months of the average salary. Together with his other work, Shostakovich was very well off.

But he had also agreed to write music for Mayakovsky's bitterly satirical play *The Bedbug*, which was to open on 13th February. He wrote 23 pieces for the play, some of which, unsurprisingly, also turn up in *New Babylon*.

On 20th February he played *New Babylon* on an awful piano to a filthy screen in Sovkino's dilapidated basement. The directors loved it and the studio enthusiastically endorsed it.

However, a week later Moscow's Cinema Committee told the directors to re-edit the film and, though it is unclear how specific the instructions were, they removed 500 of its 2,600 metres. The worst affected reel was the third, which was slashed by over a third, but the most crucial excision was the very end, turning the film from a bitter comment on state power to a glorification of a noble failure.

Part way through the arrangements, Shostakovich had to completely refashion the score. While suffering from flu, he sat in bed, sending the score off page by page, and overseeing the proofs and parts. Unsurprisingly it was all too much and it was littered with errors.

A week before the première Shostakovich wrote an article explaining their idea of not illustrating the frame:

“For example, at the end of the second reel the important episode is the German cavalry's advance though the scene ends in an empty restaurant. Silence. But the music, in spite of the fact that the cavalry is no longer on screen, continues to remind the audience of the approaching threat. I constructed a lot of the music on the principle of contrast. For example when Jean comes across Louise at the barricades he is filled with despair. The music becomes more and more cheerful, finally resolving into a giddy, almost ‘obscene’ waltz reflecting the Versailles army's victory over the people of the Commune. [...] While the rehearsal of the operetta is on screen the music plays variations of Hanon's piano exercises which take on different nuances in relation to the action; [...] Based on a wide variety of sources, the music maintains an unbroken symphonic tone throughout. Its basic function is to suit the tempo and rhythm of the picture and make the impressions it produces more lasting.”

Shostakovich later told Isaac Glikman: “I very much like the combination of the *kankanchik* [“can-can-ishness”] with the elevated.” *New Babylon*'s most extraordinary moment is the counterpart of the *Marseillaise* and the *Can-can* from Offenbach's *Orpheus in the Underworld*. It is strikingly reminiscent of a passage in Dostoevsky's *The Devils*:

“The little piece was actually rather entertaining and bore the comic title *Franco-Prussian War*. It began with the menacing strains of the *Marseillaise*. [...] But suddenly mingling with the masterful variations on the national anthem [...] came the trivial strains of [the 17th-century Viennese song] *Mein lieber Augustin* (sic).”

Dostoevsky ‘anthropomorphises’ the themes until “the horrible waltz” (i.e. *Oh, du lieber Augustin*) completely subdues the *Marseillaise*:

"[I]t was Jules Favre [the French Foreign Minister] sobbing on [the Prussian Prime Minister] Bismarck's breast and giving away everything, everything.[...] [O]ne had a feeling of countless barrels of beer, the frenzy of self-glorification, demands for millions, expensive cigars, champagne and hostages. [...] The Franco-Prussian War was at an end. Our young people applauded."

The music's title, the counterpoint and the fact that Dostoevsky was one of Shostakovich's favourite writers leave little doubt that this passage was in the composer's mind, though Trauberg later claimed it was his idea.

Up to a point *New Babylon* did follow a Marxist-Leninist line: the Communards' complacency and failure to build on early victories led to their downfall, though counterpointing the *Marseillaise* and the *Can-can*, symbolising the Revolutionaries and the Republicans might imply that they shared the faults. But the Stalinists' condemnation of the Commune's lack of centralised control began to be reflected more widely across the Soviet state and in March 1928 a Party-led conference on the film industry looked at issues including how to produce ideologically correct films and how they related to entertainment films.

A year later *New Babylon* opened provoking a political and artistic storm. The film journal *Kino* saw it as properly Marxist and the Russian Association of Proletarian Writers defended it, but Communist Youth International called for the makers to be put on trial. Sovkino recanted, saying that art should be "intelligible to the millions" but Trauberg denounced this mere "agreeableness in this battle with public taste".

There was also the problem of the music. Leningrad had many excellent musicians: the pool of superb trumpeters included Yakov Skomorovsky, who was equally at home in the Leningrad Philharmonic and Leonid Utyosov's Tea-Jazz Band and Alexander Schmidt, who would later accompany Shostakovich in premiering the *First Piano Concerto*. Perhaps the composer expected this level of musicianship for *New Babylon*; it is extremely challenging

and its difficulty made orchestras keen to replace it with old-style pot-pourris, while conductors, with a couple of honourable exceptions, resented losing their arranging fees and quite possibly sabotaged it. At 'discussion sessions' Shostakovich's basic competence as a composer was called into question. But he fought on. Writing to the conductor of the Moscow première he revealed that in Leningrad reels 4 and 7, presumably having defeated the orchestra, would be accompanied by piano.

Eventually the score was listed as 'lost', though when the New York Museum of Modern Art enquired about it in 1973, Shostakovich refused to send the score as making it fit the film "required more work", implying that he knew where it was.

In the 1980s the film's reputation was boosted by performances, attended by Trauberg, of a version prepared by the British Film Institute. Since then there have been several ideas on how to make the film and the music match, including a version by Marek Pytel which restores all the censored footage.

After *New Babylon*'s failure, the makers had to prove that their hearts, as the increasingly popular phrase had it, "beat in unison with the millions." They proposed a film about a Soviet worker, but it was turned down; it would eventually become the *Maxim Trilogy*. Their next idea was for a story about a teacher. Again Shostakovich would write the score and it would be their first proper sound film: *Alone* (Naxos 8.570316).

## Synopsis

*New Babylon* is structured in eight 'acts' – each one corresponding to one reel of the film.

**Act One** Parisians cheer their troops into battle against the Prussians, while a cabaret takes place. In the long version of this film this is clearly a fund-raiser as Jean is bought onto stage to whip up support, but these shots were removed in the censored version. The directors' sardonic view is quickly apparent: the intertitle "Going cheap" refers



Louise (Yelena Kuzmina) on the barricades alongside a dummy from the New Babylon store.

Courtesy the BFI

Gustave Isnard (seated), a survivor of the Paris Commune, then living in the USSR, visits Lenfilm during the filming of *New Babylon*.

Behind him is the studio head P.M. Bykov who, as an official in Ekaterinaburg, had authorised the execution of the Romanov family in 1918. Leonid Trauberg at right; Grigori Kozintsev with camera.

Courtesy the BFI



simultaneously to the goods in the shop, the Parisian proletariat, the musicians debasing themselves in the fundraiser, and ultimately the lives of both soldiers and Communards. When Louise is approached by a manager she fears she will be sacked but she is invited to a ball. The act finishes as it began with troops being waved away to "Bleed them in Berlin!"

**Act Two** The ball continues, with a cigar-smoking female singer and a gallery of Weimarish grotesques indulging their gargantuan appetites. The boss leers at Louise and Kozintsev's wife, Sofia Magarill, coquettishly performs Offenbach's *We All Need Love*. Louise stares around mystified. The boss finds a Deputy seducing the singer but turns a blind eye when offered a large contract from the city. As the festivities become more frantic a journalist (perhaps based on Lissagaray) announces the Prussians' approach. The restaurant empties as the Prussians race through the night. Eventually only one man remains, obliviously dancing on while the curtain on the cabaret is lowered.

**Act Three** French troops guard the city, where food is scarce but donations for the war continue. Exhausted, starving, and with worn-out boots, Jean arrives at Louise's home. He sullenly accepts their bread. Eventually, the stress becomes too much and, ranting against arm life, he storms out. Originally, this act had a long section where Louise is sacked from New Babylon and Jean shoplifts some perfume.

**Act Four** The operetta rehearsals continue (*We All Need Love*) while the militia prepare to face the Prussians. Women give the soldiers milk and flatter them, before denouncing them for protecting the Second Empire. As the soldiers' resistance falters, so does the operetta rehearsal. The soldiers trudge to Versailles through the muddy night. Louise sees Jean but he refuses to desert and kisses her goodbye.

**Act Five** Commune leaders discuss tactics and the journalist rejects violence. The proletariat joyfully work for the Commune to the strains of various revolutionary songs.

Meanwhile the bourgeoisie have retired to Versailles to escape the Prussian attack. A woman asks Jean why he looks so sad and he remembers Louise. The cabaret artists perform the *Marseillaise*, ironically bolstering the bourgeoisie's resistance to the Commune, though Shostakovich undercuts it with the *Can-can* from *Orpheus in the Underworld*.

**Act Six** The besieged Communards' leaders begin to lose hope, but the people fight on. Louise loots New Babylon for anything that might be useful. Meanwhile, the bourgeoisie sit in comfort in Versailles, awaiting the fall of the Commune as an entertainment. During a lull in the fighting a senior Commune Councillor steps up to a piano that forms part of a barricade and plays Tchaikovsky's *Old French Song*, actually based on an old Jewish melody. A sniper picks him off. The fighting resumes and finally, while the bourgeoisie applaud, Jean stares maniacally into the camera, realising the depth of the betrayal.

**Act Seven** The Commune is crushed and, as 'order' has been restored, the first act's scenes of gaiety return. The Communards stand in the pouring rain looking on. A bedraggled Jean is hailed as a hero, but when he asks about the Communards' fate, he is ejected from the Empire Café.

**Act Eight** The rain lashes down as the Communards are made to dig their own graves. Jean is forced to dig Louise's. She laughs at his weakness but forgives him and the film ends with the Communards' defiance and the graffiti "VIVE LA COMMUNE" while the music brushes by the *Internationale* before ending on an unresolved chord, perhaps implying that this is a temporary setback.

That is how the censored version ends, but originally it had a far more bitter coda, for which the music, recorded here for the first time, was written. Jean is photographed for the "Album of Heroes". He is emotionally crushed, but a paternalistic sergeant tells him that he will get used to such things.

John Riley



**Louise (Yelena Kuzmina)  
and Jean (Pyotr Sobolevsky)  
kiss prior to their separation**

Photo: Leonid Trauberg, Grigori Kozintsev,  
Collection Arkeion Films

**Jean inside New Babylon  
department store (studio  
still of scene cut from  
final version of the film)**

Photo: Leonid Trauberg, Grigori  
Kozintsev, Collection Arkeion Films



## The original music

Dmitry Shostakovich's involvement with the film medium began in his youth. In Leningrad's cosmopolitan cultural atmosphere in the 1920s, Shostakovich regularly attended "evenings of modern Western music". On such occasions, he heard Expressionist and Neo-classical music as well as music in that period's jazz style, composed by the likes of Franz Schreker, Darius Milhaud, Ernst Krenek, Arnold Schoenberg, Alban Berg and Igor Stravinsky.

He was only 22 when he composed the music for *New Babylon*. Around this time, he acquired his first experiences as a piano player in various Leningrad cinemas and made contact with FEKS while handling the musical accompaniment for the organisation's production of *The Devil's Wheel* (1926).

After receiving the commission to compose the music for *New Babylon* in late December 1928, Shostakovich was expected to deliver the piano score by 1st February, and to complete the entire score by 1st March. He worked day and night but less than two weeks before the screening, the two directors dramatically re-edited the film, leaving the composer six days to rewrite the symphonic score and only three to prepare the musicians' parts.

Nevertheless, Shostakovich composed an elegantly agitated collage of marches, can-cans, and carnival music. A work of witty dissonance, lilting sarcasm and brassy ebullience, the score was designed to counterpoint rather than illustrate the film's sensational imagery. The directors considered the score by Shostakovich a huge success and noted how "the film's effect is greatly heightened" by the music.

Unfortunately, the last-minute changes mandated by the Moscow Cinema Committee<sup>1</sup>, and a projectionist who ran the film faster than anticipated, left the film and its music out of sync during the première at the Piccadilly cinema in Leningrad on 18th March 1929. In addition, the music by Shostakovich, which was extremely complicated in parts, called for the use of such unusual instruments that the cinema orchestra found it impossible to play the score during the film's first screenings. The rousing,

experimental music was too much for both the conductor Mikhail Vladimirov and his pit orchestra. Furthermore the score was far from what film audiences were accustomed to expect at that time. The première was something of a scandal and people were heard to shout: "The conductor is drunk!"

Deemed unplayable and wholly "non-cinematic" by its first conductor, the score accordingly was greeted with general hostility by the orchestra. (In those days, cinema orchestras were swamped with music by Grieg, Tchaikovsky, Wagner and Rubinstein, whose works were frequently used to accompany early dramatic films.) As a result, the original score of *New Babylon* was discarded after only a few performances. From that time onward it was considered lost – until its first complete performance more than 45 years later.

Not unlike the actual film, the score is a supreme example of a composer's desire to reach beyond the music-to-action mirroring and explore the depths of a scene's meaning by reflecting and emphasizing its content rather than its visual surface. The score equally contributes to the film's message and can hardly be treated as mere background music, suffused as it is with so much emotion, wit, sarcasm and irony. The composer's inventive use of musical quotes also serves as a way of engaging additional ironic gestures. The use of the *Can-can*, to which the bourgeoisie grotesquely frolic while under invasion by the Prussians, devolves to a whirlwind of stampeding galops, reflecting the visual interplay between the dark horses of the invaders and the drunken patrons at New Babylon. Even employing the *Marseillaise* here becomes an "artistic" act of musical indignation; it is, after all, being sung by the bourgeois patrons as a way to inspire the French army to attack Paris and to take back their social riches from the Communards.

The music does more than "illustrate the frame", to quote co-director Kozintsev; the rich tonal palette brings the images to life before our very eyes. The xylophone notes and string pizzicato figures aptly reflect the frantic bargain hunters haunting the opulent department store. The simple and effective use of a quick, circular, staccato pattern in the viola part, coupled with a rolling side drum,

poignantly illustrates the workers' plight in a room full of relentless sewing machines in a clothing factory. At the same time, Shostakovich's score calls for the use of a rare percussion instrument known as a flexatone, popular in variety shows of the 1920s. The musician playing it rattles its handle and causes two wooden beaters to strike at a metal blade connected to it, producing a sliding pitch controlled by the thumb. Shostakovich tends to use this instrument at moments in the film when characters are in a state of delirium, as when the owner of New Babylon finishes gorging himself on a great meal – or when Jean and Louise kiss for the first time.

*New Babylon*, Op. 18, surely stands out as a remarkably inventive and truly symphonic film score. Much like Shostakovich's concert hall work, what emanates from the pages of the score is a mirror of the times, an accurate reflection of the progressive Soviet artist's vision of the future and all that it promises.

**Nina Goslar, ZDF/ARTE**

<sup>1</sup> David Robinson argues elsewhere in this booklet that although the committee may well have recommended shortening the film in general terms, the last-minute cutting was not done on its instructions: "From what Kozintsev and Trauberg wrote and said later, they themselves were inspired in part by the way the score interacted with the images and decided to sharpen and speed it up, almost recklessly. Many of the rejected shots are in no way censorable and I am convinced that they cut the famous last scene not because it changed the meaning at all, but because it was redundant."

## Conductor's note

### The music

After only a handful of disastrous performances in March 1929 the music to *New Babylon* had to be withdrawn, and appears to have been considered 'lost' by the composer for the rest of his life, remaining unplayed for over 45 years.

Within months of the composer's death (on 9th August 1975) Gennadi Rozhdestvensky had found a complete set of parts at the Lenin library in Moscow. The *Chant du Monde* edition of the score was published immediately and Marius Constant conducted it with the film at the Paris Film Festival on 21st November of the same year. At the same time Rozhdestvensky prepared and recorded his 6-movement suite of highlights from the work which was published very soon afterwards by *Sovetskii Kompozitor* (Moscow) in 1976. The two publications are certainly related as they share a variety of major problems. For example, many important tempo indications are missing, and in several places instruments at the top of the score are bars out of synchronisation with those at the bottom.

On 22nd September 1982 the British Film Institute and Contemporary Films screened a performance at the Queen Elizabeth Hall in London, conducted by Omri Hadari (later recorded for BBC2). By this time Boosey and Hawkes in London had acquired lithograph transparencies of the original 1929 orchestral parts and a manuscript score that seems to have been copied out from them. This version had nearly 200 more bars than the *Chant du Monde* publication. It also contained all of the missing tempo indications as well as lining up the instruments correctly and solving many other problems. (I am grateful to the late Malcolm J Smith for allowing me unlimited access to this material). By the late 1980s Thomas Nidecker had invited me to conduct the work for a number of performances with the Basel Sinfonietta. To add to the complex score situation (due to territorial rights, only the *Chant du Monde* score was available in central Europe at that time), there was also more than one version of the film. Thanks again to Malcolm Smith, I had the good fortune to be put in contact with Andrew Youdell of the BFI whose advice and knowledge were invaluable for preparing these performances.

At that time we had no idea that the 'Iron Curtain' was about to fall and as a consequence a flood of hitherto unavailable material was about to start flowing out of the former USSR. By the start of the present century the composer's highly industrious widow Irina Antonova had

established a centre in Paris for the study of her late husband's life and work as well as establishing a privately funded publishing house dedicated to the publication of a new complete edition of all the composer's works in 150 volumes.

It has quickly become clear just how much music was missing from the first complete edition which comprised 42 volumes only. The *DSCH* score of *New Babylon* was published in 2004 as *Volume 122* of this edition. One of the first full size colour facsimiles to be made available at the Paris centre was the original 'lost' manuscript full score of *New Babylon* (the original manuscript itself is now housed in the Glinka Museum, Moscow) I am very grateful to Emmanuel Utwiller, Director of the Shostakovich Centre, for allowing me unlimited access to this score over a period of years, as well as to his colleague Tatyana Maximov who confirmed that all the corrections, changes and additions to this score were indeed in the composer's own handwriting. The availability of this score was obviously of immense importance as at long last we were able to check the multitude of textural queries that had accumulated over many years. However there were even more unexpected surprises in store. For the first time we had some of the composer's own indications as to how the music should synchronise with the film. One of the biggest mistakes we had made was to assume that the music started with the opening credits. In the manuscript it is clearly marked to start later at the first intertitle 'War', the opening credits being silent. Despite having to re-work several sections of the film when it was re-cut very shortly before the première (Shostakovich had 'flu at the time and had to work from his sick-bed with a temperature of 40°C!), the composer was aware that the music still did not all fit those last minute changes to the film and marked several extra cuts in this score. The biggest surprise in this newly available original score was the ending: there were nearly 130 more bars after what we had known up to that time to be the final (and unresolved) chord! Since the shooting script for this original ending had already been published in December 1928, Shostakovich must have been shown this part of the film in order to be able to write this music. However the ending

must have been cut at a very early stage, as it is not found in any known copy of the film.

We know that the composer was proud to be able to produce his score for *New Babylon* at great speed, but the re-editing of the film caused him to have to re-work some sections in an unreasonable hurry (new pages of a different manuscript paper and ink colour are evidence of this work). Unfortunately Shostakovich's noteheads are not always clearly centered, as they sometimes lie between being on a line or space (in one place spread over more than 2 spaces), and some ledger lines almost disappear into the ends of slurs. Although sharps always seem clear, some of his naturals and flats can look identical. Occasionally a crochet rest can look like a note (or vice versa). Page turns sometimes cause various problems such as a tie starting on one side of the page but not continuing on the other, and so on. I am very grateful to Pierre-Alain Biget for his help in spending so much time both visiting the score at the Shostakovich Centre in Paris and helping us with well-considered suggestions for finding solutions which we hope that the composer would have approved.

## The recording

We have recorded all the music in Shostakovich's original score, including all those sections subsequently cut, as well as those repeats integral to the structure of the work.

In 2005 (in preparation for the British première of *Odná*) I had to visit St Petersburg and took the opportunity to meet up with the composer and musicologist Vladimir Gurevich whose family and mother, Sofia Khentova had known Shostakovich well. In particular he took me to all the cinemas (nearly all still there) where the composer had worked in his youth and to those where *New Babylon* was first performed. I was surprised by how small they were, not much larger than London's Wigmore Hall, with only enough space for a salon orchestra of about 14 or 15 players. The composer would have been very conscious of this restriction while creating the work. It is also known that his music for the Leningrad Working Youth Theatre productions were sometimes played with as few as only 12



musicians. The salon orchestra of Ferdinand Krish (which played the Moscow première of *New Babylon*) had a maximum of 14 musicians. The sets of parts published for these first performances consisted of only 14 parts a set (the short piano solo being included in the highly overcued first violin leader's part). Hence our decision for this new recording to use solo string players, which immediately creates both greater clarity and enhanced character.

Due to the above limitations the original percussion part was very ingeniously created to be playable by one musician: there had to be various breaks in the part to enable the player to change instruments and sticks. For our recording in a few places we have continued the lines to their logical conclusion. Since the trumpet part is also almost unachievable by one musician, we used a second player to take over the part for some tutti sections.

Unfortunately the original manuscript of the final section breaks off abruptly at the end of a page. The original final bars are either separated somewhere or are lost. As one also often finds in the music of Sibelius, despite being totally unpredictable these last pages have an inner logic and inevitability all of their own. Who knows

what would have come next except the composer himself? In order to bring the work to some sort of conclusion we have continued the sequence by one bar then repeated four bars from Reel 4 and taken the last three bars of Lucia's *Funeral March* from *Salute to Spain*, Op. 44, both in their original scoring and key, bringing us back to the main tonality of 'C' of the first reel.

### Mark Fitz-Gerald

*I wish to thank the Kensington Philharmonic Orchestra for their help in preparing the final section of Reel 8, and Assistant Producer Pierre-Alain Biget for all his work on the project. I am also grateful to Marek Pytel for inviting me to conduct the British première of his restored version of the film, which included the first performance of part of the original ending, for Opera North in Leeds on 16th May 2009. The world première of the complete original ending took place in Zurich on 13th April 2011 with the Basel sinfonietta, in preparation for the Naxos recording. Thanks also to David Coronel, and to Gabriel Teschner of Sikorski Verlag for all their practical help.*



**Death of a Communard by firing squad**

Photo: Leonid Trauberg, Grigori Kozintsev, Collection Arkeion Films

## basel sinfonietta



Photo: Daniel Spehr

The basel sinfonietta was founded in 1980 by a group of young musicians with the goal of bringing exciting new combinations of contemporary music and works both familiar and unknown to an audience enthusiastic for unusual sounds and open to experimentation. With its unconventional, provocative approach, this large symphony orchestra has achieved a considerable international reputation. In its relatively short history, the basel sinfonietta has also carried out numerous performances with dancers, jazz musicians, cabarettists and choral groups in addition to complex projects incorporating, for instance, silent movies and multimedia. The basel sinfonietta works frequently with renowned conductors, and has participated in many education projects to attract a young audience for classical music. When not taking part in the orchestra the players perform as freelance musicians in numerous ensembles and chamber music groups. The group manages itself, which gives its members a high degree of self-determination both in artistic and organisational matters. This in turn demands

intensive interaction, which leads to a lively, fresh atmosphere in the orchestra. The basel sinfonietta is the only Swiss orchestra to have been invited four times to participate in the famous Austrian Salzburger Festspiele.

For more information visit our homepage [www.baselsinfonietta.ch](http://www.baselsinfonietta.ch) or contact us by phone 0041 (0) 61 335 54 15 or [mail@baselsinfonietta.ch](mailto:mail@baselsinfonietta.ch).

### **Violin**

Daniela Müller,  
*Concertmaster*  
David Sontón Caflisch  
**Viola**  
Anne-Françoise  
Guezingar  
**Cello**  
Rahel Künzler

### **Double Bass**

Bernd Schöppflin  
**Flute**  
Julian Cawdrey  
**Oboe**  
Judith Wenziker  
**Clarinet**  
Etele Dosa

### **Bassoon**

Lucas Roessner  
**Horn**  
Carl-Philipp Rombach  
Udo Schmitz  
**Trumpet**  
Stephan Jourdan  
Sebastian Baumann

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Thomas Nidecker  
**Piano**  
Virginia Breitenstein  
**Percussion**  
Kai Littkopf  
Ricardo Marini  
**Timpani**  
Kathi Jacobi Ofosu

## Mark Fitz-Gerald



Photo: Herbert Piel (PIEmedia Mittelrhein)

Mark Fitz-Gerald studied in London at the Royal College of Music, where his professors included Norman Del Mar, winning all the major prizes for both orchestral and operatic conducting. It was during this time that Henze invited him to take part in the first Cantiere Internazionale d'Arte in Montepulciano, as a result of which he was invited regularly to Switzerland as Guest Conductor of the basel sinfonietta. From 1983 to 1987 he was Artistic Director of the RIAS Jugendorchester (West Berlin) where his innovative Filmharmonic Concerts received much acclaim and were later made available on CD. He returned there to continue the series with the Berlin Rundfunkorchester in 1992. Since then he has performed the very specialised task of accompanying silent films live with orchestra, with much success in many countries and festivals throughout the world. Described as "one of the indispensable Shostakovich interpreters of our time", he has performed the Trauberg/Shostakovich classic *New Babylon* (1929) to great critical acclaim, in particular at the Japanese première of the work (opening concert of the Tokyo Summer Festival in 2000) and the Rotterdam

Gergiev Festival 2001. With the help of Mrs Irina Shostakovich and Krzysztof Meyer he has restored the complete score to another Trauberg/Shostakovich film, *Odn*a (1929), and conducted the world première (the first Shostakovich première for over twenty years) in Holland and later in Paris, with enormous success. He conducted the United Kingdom première at the Barbican centre in 2006 and his restoration is now published in the new complete edition of the composer's works. His critically acclaimed recording of *Odn*a (8.570316) was followed by a no less successful Shostakovich's *The Girlfriends* and other previously unrecorded works (8.572138). His most recent recording features Ernesto Halffter's music for the 1926 silent film *Carmen* (Naxos 8.572260). His accompaniment of the 1927 silent film *Wings* with Carl Davis' score at the 2010 Pordenone Festival was so successful that it led to an immediate re-invitation by the Festival's director, David Robinson. In 1986 he was appointed Music Director of Kentish Opera, with whom he has conducted many successful productions. He has assisted regularly at the Vienna Staatsoper, as well as the Vienna Kammeroper. In 1992 he made his début at the Vienna Volksoper with *The Cunning Little Vixen*, and in 1994 conducted the world première of an opera by the Mexican composer Victor Razgado at Spoleto in conjunction with the Italian producer Luca Ronconi. In 1994 he conducted *The Nutcracker* for the Vienna Festival Ballet. His career has brought guest engagements with orchestras throughout Europe and in Japan. From 1989 to 1993 he was Associate Conductor of the Orquesta de Porto (Orquesta Classica do Porto, Portugal). He was Assistant Conductor in Strasbourg both at the Philharmonic Orchestra and at the Opéra du Rhin from 1997 to 2002. At the end of 2011 he will make his début with the Brandenburger Symphoniker, and in 2012 with the Orquesta Ciudad de Granada and the Malaysian Philharmonic Orchestra. During 2012 he will also give the Swiss première of Debussy's opera *The Fall of the House of Usher*. His début with the London Philharmonic Orchestra is planned for the 2012-13 season.

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Col. li

C. ba. si

15

Tram. ba

Col. li

C. ba. si



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