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October 21, 1962

Dear John:

Leinsdorf certainly gave a rousing performance of the Shostakovitch Tenth. But why the mystery of the motto? It is simply Shostakovitch's musical signature. It appears first in the violins at the opening, in the form of initials, D.S. (Es), is trilled a lot at the climax when drums come in fortissimo, significantly marked espressivo. The ascending semitone of the motto is thematic in the second movement. The expanded signature appears in permutation in the main subject of the third movement (C,D,Es,H) and is explicitly stated in the tutti (D. SCHostakovitch). In the finale it is trumpeted and tromboned solo, and finally appears in the horns fortissimo, accelerating in diminution. From then on, the motto assumes sweeping proportions. In the coda, timpani solo pounds it out, D, E flat, C, H.

Shostakovitch's Eighth String Quartet, composed in 1960, is based entirely on the D. SCHostakovitch theme, rarely departing from the actual notes spelling his initials. The anxious contrapuntal developments against the motto may be of biographical significance: Shostakovitch experienced during this period a personal loss (the death of his wife) and other misfortunes. But his basic dualism - from darkness and gloom to light and joy, with the synthesis on the assertively optimistic note - has remained in these "signature" works.

Cordially,

