

**THE SCORE**  
by Oliver Cotton

**Voltaire** Life is a shipwreck but we must not forget to sing in the lifeboats. *Au revoir, monsieur.*

**Johann** *Au revoir, monsieur.*

**Voltaire** bows and leaves. **Johann** looks at Carl.

**Carl** Congratulations. You have the approval of the greatest philosopher in Europe.

*The door opens and Emelia enters.*

**Emelia** Shall I come back, sir?

**Johann** That's alright, Emelia. Come in.

**Emelia** goes to **Johann** and takes a shirt from him.

**Emelia** Allow me, sir.

*She goes to the chest of drawers and begins to remove clothes. She folds them and starts to place them in the bags.*

**Emelia** Can I enquire when you are planning on leaving, Herr Bach?

**Johann** As soon as possible.

**Carl** Is there a coach to Luckenwalde later today?

**Emelia** I can ask. Spend the night there, Herr Bach – you could be in Leipzig by tomorrow evening.

**Johann** Anything rather than stay here.

*In the near distance a series of loud cannon shots.*

**Emelia** That'll be Babelsberg. Some manoeuvre, some war game . . .

**Johann** My son says he no longer notices it. Hard to believe, even after five years.

**Emelia** Count yourself lucky. My boy only had to hear a bugle and he'd want to enlist.

**Johann** And did he? Enlist?

**Emelia** On his fifteenth birthday. He died two years ago. Killed in action.

*A beat.*

**Johann** Where was this?

**Emelia** One of His Majesty's campaigns. Over in the East. Somewhere near Breslau.

*She continues to pack his clothes.*

He wanted to be a soldier. All his life. Franz. Growing up here – well you can imagine – there's nothing else. When he was small he'd follow behind when they drilled – all day. Up and down with a stick over his shoulder. Loved it. Christ knows why.

*A beat.*

**Emelia** So he gets to fifteen and there's no stopping him.

**Johann** How old was he when –?

**Emelia** When he got blown to bits? Eighteen. His Majesty sent his condolences. My husband wanted us to move on – get work somewhere else, but I've been here fifty years. These people are shits. Us moving won't change that. We'd just be working for different shits.

*A silence.*

**Carl** By the way, Emelia, once again – thank you for releasing me.

**Emelia** smiles.

**Emelia** Lucky I had the spare key. But you're not the only one who's free, sir.

*She points a thumb to her bosom.*

Got the boot. Dismissed.

*A shocked silence.*

**Carl** Dismissed? For unlocking a door?

**Emelia** Letting you out. Insolence, disobeying a royal order –

**Johann** That's an outrage!

**Carl** I shall speak to the King immediately . . .

**Emelia** It'll do no good, sir. His Majesty leaves that sort of thing to Herr von Meckelsdorf.

**Carl** Then I shall talk to him.

**Emelia** Please don't, sir. It's been coming for some time. I only needed an excuse. He gave me twenty-four hours to get out.

**Carl** So where will you go?

**Emelia** I don't know. This has been my home for fifty years.

**Johann** Do you have any relatives?

**Emelia** Only my sister.

**Johann** In Leipzig. Of course! Ulrike! Married to Gustav!

**Emelia** Yes, but Gustav's in jail.

**Johann** Why?

**Emelia** Some officer insulted Ulrike, and Gustav hit him. Broke his jaw. That's all I know. They've got five soldiers billeted in their house.

**Johann** Then you can stay with us!

**Emelia** Oh, Herr Bach, I couldn't –

**Johann** And you can travel with me. I'll enjoy the company. Say yes.

**Emelia** Herr Bach, I –

**Johann** Say yes.

**Emelia beams.**

**Emelia** Yes.

*Suddenly Johann picks up the shallow bowl and pours the remaining coins into a jug. Hands the jug to Emelia.*

**Johann** Here.

**Emelia stares at the money in shock.**

**Emelia** What's this?

**Johann** Just take it.

**Emelia stares into the jug.**

**Emelia** But this is a fortune! Where does it come from?

**Carl** Well –

**Johann** It would take too long to explain. Please –

**Carl takes the jug from Johann and presses it into Emelia's hands.**

**Carl** It's yours. Hide it in here.

**Johann** It might make some sense of the last few days.

**Emelia jiggles the jug, which is clearly very heavy. She stares at father and son in wonder.**

**Emelia** I don't know what to say, sir.

**Johann** Just get me that coach!

**Emelia grins. She bows and leaves, holding the jug of cash. Blackout.**

### Scene Seven

*A beautiful soprano voice is heard singing in Italian.*

*Six weeks later. Leipzig, July 1747. Thomasschule, Bach's apartment. Afternoon.*

*Summer heat. Fierce shafts of sunlight stream through the windows.*

**MASTER CLASS**  
**by David Pownall**

may be seen running at the head of the pack through the pale moonlight or glimmering borealis, leaping gigantic above his fellows, his great throat a-bellow as he sings a song of the younger world, which is the song of the pack."

[Pause. PROKOFIEV lightly plays the Wolf theme again in a jocular way]

STALIN: You're a thousand miles away with that. No wonder you can't get through to ordinary people. They know what the power of Nature is. They feel it.

[STALIN goes to a huge wall mirror]

PROKOFIEV: Do you worship Nature?

STALIN: I was taught to worship God. They were hard men who taught me. They used force. We can all become God if we grind away at it. That's Christian teaching.

[STALIN stares into the mirror]

PROKOFIEV: And the wolf? Can he become God?

STALIN: The animal is always holy. That was the first work of God, the beasts. Grrr! Bahooo! White Fang! Red claw! Grrroah!

PROKOFIEV: Tariel, the oversexed Georgian outmoded militarist, a man in the peak of condition, climbs a sharp gradient [Improvises] encounters a lion and tiger in the act of bestial coition and Jack London with an enormous wolf on a lead. Tariel is not confused. Being an educated man his mind turns to thinking how to exploit this galaxy of sexual opportunities. But what's this? The lion, the tiger and the wolf have set up a ménage à trois and are tearing the seats out of Tariel's and Jack London's trousers. "My God!" the humans cry and run home to their respective mothers. Meanwhile, back in the Kremlin, Ivan the Terrible is growing hair all over his body... there's a full moon... madness...

[Pause. They look at STALIN who is grimly silent. Then ZHDANOV suddenly roars with laughter. STALIN leaves the piano and goes over to ZHDANOV. For a moment it looks as though he might hit him but he merely slides his arm round ZHDANOV's shoulder then steals his drink. They sport like a couple of boys]

ZHDANOV: Get your own!

STALIN: Come on, meanie!

ZHDANOV: Get off me! I want my idea discussed seriously. I'm the one who has to go back and chair that bloody conference tomorrow and I must have something to tell them, be able to show we've made some progress, taken a few decisions. Let's move the whole thing to Siberia.

STALIN: Too crowded!

ZHDANOV: Too crowded!

[They roar with laughter, holding on to each other. PROKOFIEV nods and smiles, playing gentle music on the piano. SHOSTAKOVICH sings quietly. STALIN balances a glass of vodka on his forehead, gyrating slowly]

SHOSTAKOVICH: My woeful heart is a caravanserai, serai, serai, serai.

ZHDANOV: All those who want this arsehole of a poncy, cock-eyed, idiot knight transferred to the bloody tundra say aye! [Pause] Aye!

PROKOFIEV: I'm easy.

SHOSTAKOVICH: Me too. You can send him to anywhere you like as far as I'm concerned. It's the story that matters. It's man against Nature. That's the theme. It's very sad.

STALIN: You always did write miserable music.

SHOSTAKOVICH: Did I?

STALIN: What have you got to be miserable about?

SHOSTAKOVICH: It just seems to turn out that way.

STALIN: Answer the question. Why do you write such miserable, whining, complaining dirges all the time?

[Pause. ZHDANOV disentangles himself from STALIN]

SHOSTAKOVICH: I write from what I feel. Maybe I'm a depressive.

STALIN: You abuse your status. People look up to you. And what do you do for them? You unload your own self-indulgent misery on them. You make them unhappy. That can't be justified.

PROKOFIEV: Perhaps it is melancholy rather than misery?

ZHDANOV: Don't split hairs, you fucking dilettante! Here he is, living in the most stirring times Russia has ever seen, and all he does is make people want to commit suicide. What right has he got to do that? Why don't you cheer the buggers up for a change?

STALIN: I know why he does it. He's disappointed with the way things have gone. He hates the Government. He feels out of place.

SHOSTAKOVICH: That's not so...

STALIN: Yes it is! You're undermining us! Sit down. Play us some of your miserable, horrible music so we can all have a good cry. Go on. I'm in the mood for it.

[SHOSTAKOVICH sits down at the piano. PROKOFIEV gives him a pat on the shoulder and moves away]

STALIN: Come on, make us miserable. We all want to die. Russia is a failure. The great experiment has been a disaster. All happiness has been destroyed.

SHOSTAKOVICH: I don't believe that.

ZHDANOV: Play or I'll smash your head in! My life's work being pissed on by a neurotic nancy-boy like you! Go on, tell me. Make me cry.

[SHOSTAKOVICH starts to play a piano theme from the 14th prelude from Op. 34 - 24 Preludes for Piano. At first he falters but he becomes involved with the music and strengthens his playing]

ZHDANOV: Boo hoo! Everything's a mess.

STALIN: Shut up, you ignorant pig! [Pause] Who is this music for, Shostakovich?

SHOSTAKOVICH: For the dead.

[He plays on. STALIN drinks more. He leans against the mantelshelf]

STALIN: Do you know how many died? I hardly dare think of the number. I could not bear to see it written down. Should I whisper it to you?

[SHOSTAKOVICH plays on, shaking his head]

STALIN: Twenty million. Don't tell anyone, will you? Twenty million. My heart is a caravanserai. To him who has been struck in the liver by a snake treacle is better suited than red candy. To him who is dying of poison antidote is everything. Twenty million. An entire generation.

[SHOSTAKOVICH stops playing. STALIN goes over to him and takes his hand. He kisses it]

STALIN: Do you know why your music isn't liked any more?

SHOSTAKOVICH: No, no.

STALIN: Remember before the war how they all loved you?

SHOSTAKOVICH: Yes, I do.

STALIN: You have lost that audience. Not your fault. They were the ones who died in the war, the twenty million.

SHOSTAKOVICH: I know, I know.

[SHOSTAKOVICH lowers his head]

STALIN: Now there are only old folk and children. All the life has to come from me. [Pause] You must stop mourning for the dead. Give the old folk and children what they need to cheer them up. They have to work hard these days.

[SHOSTAKOVICH lowers his head until it touches the keyboard]

STALIN: The old folk prefer old music. The children learn from the grandparents because their fathers and mothers are dead. So, it is old music we need - Tchaikovsky, I'm afraid, Rimsky, all the old favourites, Do it for me.

[SHOSTAKOVICH weeps. STALIN sits next to him and plays the theme from the Pathétique]

SHOSTAKOVICH: All I can hear is their silence. I don't know what they are saying. It's all been washed away.

ZHDANOV: They're saying get on with it!

STALIN: Prokofiev, you must face it as well. Your greatest fans are in the graveyard.

PROKOFIEV: I'll be joining them before long.

STALIN: Don't keep writing for them. You can compose like anyone you want. If I told you to imitate Beethoven, you could do it, and better the original.

PROKOFIEV: Could I? Beethoven was a German. If I don't feel like writing like a German. Is that surprising?

STALIN: You know what I mean.

PROKOFIEV: We are already servants of one compulsion - our work. What you are asking would put us into a double servitude. Why not take what is Caesar's and leave us something to write with - a small freedom which is, after all, something of a secret.

STALIN: I don't like secrets. You'll do as you're told.

PROKOFIEV: You're expecting too much of us.

STALIN: Why? All I'm asking you to do is go back to being a student again. It's never too late to learn.

ZHDANOV: Do it for the cripples running the factories, the children in the fields twelve hours a day. Make sense of their drudgery. It will take fifty years for us to recover from the war. Extend our traditions of music to cover that period and Russia will be grateful.

STALIN: Exactly, Andrei, exactly. Well done. That's put it in a nutshell. They can do it. They're geniuses, these two. If you're a genius in the Soviet Union today you have terrible responsibilities - as I know, to my cost.

[Pause]

All those unfulfilled lives wasted in war are my destiny. I must live them out. I'll survive to be a thousand, a thousand thousand. In the stalks of young gooseberries is a substance that prolongs life. Georgian gooseberries, of course.

[Pause]

ZHDANOV: So you two know what you must do.

STALIN: They're good men. I trust them.

ZHDANOV: We'll go back to the conference and sort this out. I'm not going to stand up there and say - everyone has to write old music.

STALIN: Tsarist, bourgeois, capitalist music. Get it right. [*Picks up the icon*] Old friends are best. Old enemies are better.

ZHDANOV: I'm not going to say that. I'll find a way of putting it over. But I need your help with the decree. Am I going to get it?

[*Pause. STALIN sits down, holding the icon to his chest*]

PROKOFIEV: We will do what we can, within reason. Our kind of reason.

ZHDANOV: That's not enough...

STALIN: That is enough. They're going to write music like Tchaikovsky from now on. I know them. They're good Russians. They'll sacrifice their individuality like I have. Who am I now? I don't exist any more as a man. Stalin died in the war. Two lives I've lost. God lives in light, alone.

[*STALIN falls asleep. Pause. ZHDANOV looks at him, turns and looks at the composers, putting his fingers to his lips. He takes off his jacket and covers STALIN up with it. Pause. He holds out his hand for PROKOFIEV's and SHOSTAKOVICH's jackets. They take them and hand them over. ZHDANOV covers STALIN with them, then beckons the composers to leave. They wait for him by the door. ZHDANOV turns out the light*]

PROKOFIEV: Please pass our thanks to Comrade Stalin for a most instructive and helpful evening.

ZHDANOV: See you at the conference tomorrow. Good night.

PROKOFIEV: Good night.

SHOSTAKOVICH: Good night.

[*ZHDANOV ushers them out, then exits himself, closing the door behind him. STALIN sleeps on in the darkness. Bix Beiderbecke plays O' Man River on his cornet again as total blackout closes in*]

THE END

## MUSIC TO MURDER BY

*For Julian Leigh*