

Dmitri Shostakovich spent his life trying to survive oppression in Stalin's Russia. He composed his intensely personal eighth string quartet in 1960 with a handwritten dedication "to victims of war and fascism." That this was written in Dresden, the site of intense allied firebombing in World War 2, makes his intention clear. Germans were also victims of fascism, maybe even those who were mindlessly complicit in the atrocities committed by Nazi leaders in their name. Like Shostakovich, people learn how to survive.

Today, we are witnessing a level of wanton destruction not seen since World War 2. Many people are rejecting anything Russian because of Putin's aggression, even Tchaikovsky. To me, this attitude is understandable but misplaced. Tchaikovsky is no more related to Putin than Beethoven is to Hitler. Great music transcends national borders. The eighth string quartet by Shostakovich is an icon of Russian culture. For Ukrainian-born musicians to perform this work to benefit their fallen heroes is a victory of art over hatred and an American way of giving Putin the finger.

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