

The Conductor

Production Pack



Based on the novel by **Sarah Quigley**
Adaptation by **Mark Wallington**, with **Jared McNeill**

2 Actors, 1 Pianist

Featuring the music of the
Symphony No. 7 in C major, Op. 60 (Leningrad)
by
Dmitri Shostakovich

Arranged and Performed by **Daniel Wallington**
With **Joe Skelton, Deborah Wastell**

Directed by **Jared McNeill**

English Language
Running time: 70 minutes
Best-suited for Adults/Young Adults
Contact: ConductorPlay@gmail.com

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The Leningrad Metronome

The “Leningrad Metronome” has taken on an almost mythic status among the stories told of the siege. Before the war, it was set to a constant 55 Beats-Per-Minute, and would play the silence between programs on the Leningrad radio. By the time the air raids had become regular, the metronome was being used as an alert device, increasing to 155 Beats-Per-Minute in the moments before the skies opened, with the hopes of warning listeners as to the coming offensive. When the attack had subsided, the metronome would ease back down to that steady, constant, 55. This steady tick became the “heartbeat of the city.” As long as you heard it, you knew the city stood, and you knew that you were still alive.

It is hard to imagine a time when a mass of people clung so dearly to sound.

The Question

Why was Karl Eliasberg and his Radio Orchestra of Leningrad chosen to perform one of Shostakovich's most important works?

We could say that the more prestigious Philharmonic had been evacuated, and that there was no one else to get the job done. But, even then, why had Eliasberg's Radio Orchestra not been deemed “valuable” enough for evacuation?

Perhaps the answer is in the result: on August 9, 1942, the symphony enjoyed its Leningrad premiere in front of the very people for whom it had been composed: the ones left behind to starve, and to die. Ordinary people, whose only weapon of defense had become their own survival; their preservation of some of the human dignities so easily lost in face of the inhumane.

And the symphony was performed by the Radio Orchestra.

People who listened in the darkness that night, to the slow, steady, rhythm of a metronome ticking into silence and unknowing, also listened as the silence was broken, and as that music came to let them know that they were not forgotten.

“Art” and “History” can suffer from the same hazards of exclusion. Content without connection to the here and now leaves a narrow chance to be moved. We set out to prove, as I believe was Shostakovich's intention, that this music, and this story, could belong to anyone. That has been, and continues to be, our aim.

There are times, and I believe we are living in one, where art, music, and history, may serve to elevate us all beyond our pains and prejudices. Even momentarily, for glimpse of what could be, if we just set ourselves, with diligence, at the task of mining echos for resonance, and seek some pre-historic elements that unify us all at our foundations. Perhaps then, we may re-discover our own heartbeat. Our own sense of renewed life, and light, within our darkest hours.

If we just listen.

"This is how I hear war."

In 1941, troops surrounded the city of Leningrad, in what would come to be known as the Leningrad Blockade, a siege of more than 2 years, and one that would claim the lives of more than 1,000,000 men, women, and children.

In the midst of this devastation, composer Dmitri Shostakovich worked tirelessly to complete his 7th Symphony, a "symphony for the people."

The symphony went on to be played across the front lines of the Russian resistance, and today serves as the sound that lifted an entire city in its darkest hour, instilling renewed faith in our capabilities as individuals, as well as the dignity and power that art may serve.

"What use is art in the face of all this?"

This is more than a story of war.

It is the story of how, on August 9, 1942, Dmitri Shostakovich, Karl Ilitch Eliasberg, and his battered, starving Radio Orchestra of Leningrad, all with nothing left to lose, brought music to the people when they needed it most.

It is a story of familial bonds tested under the threat of annihilation. It is a story of how ordinary individuals, flawed and hopeless, may yet carry the spark of extraordinary deeds.

"A few years ago, my husband was interrogated. They asked about his meetings with other musicians. They asked if they talked about politics. When Dmitri said he couldn't remember, he was simply told he must remember. My husband lives in fear, not of the whistling bomb, but of the knock on the door in the night, the knock that will take him away from us forever. It's not Hitler who inspired him. It was Stalin."

-Nina Shostakovich

It is the story of one's right to life.

It resonates today in all the ways we try, for fear, for ignorance, or just for being human, to ignore the dangers of our world, until those very same dangers come knocking at our doorsteps.

All those who stayed behind; who would not, or could not, be evacuated.
They made an offering of every bit of energy inside them.

Every bit of love and hope.

They did not know why they suffered, nor what more they had to live for.

They did not know when help would come, nor from where.

They watched the skies, waiting for anything to lift their spirits and their hearts.

This is the story of how, for a moment, their prayers were answered.

The Conductor

Production Stills



Pictured: Joseph Skelton, Deborah Wastell

"You're the Radio Orchestra Conductor."



Pictured: Daniel Wallington

"Listen. He's working on something new."



Pictured: Daniel Wallington, Joseph Skelton

"I was born without a heart."



Pictured: Daniel Wallington, Deborah Wastell

"He's a nightmare when he's working on something new."



Pictured: Joseph Skelton, Deborah Wastell
"Maybe they will keep us safe."



Pictured: Joseph Skelton
"What use was art in the face of all this."



Pictured: Daniel Wallington, Joseph Skelton

"We were no longer simply musicians."

UPCOMING...

November 10-11 – Teatro Due (Parma)

November 12 – Teatro Off/Off (Roma)

November 15 – Piccolo Teatro degli Instabili

Production Timeline

February 2016 – Developmental Rehearsals (London, UK)

June 2016 – Further Developmental Rehearsals and Revisions (London, UK)

July 2016 – Developmental Performances (Edale, UK)

July 2016 – Premiere at Buxton Festival Fringe (Buxton, UK)

September 2016 – Feedback Presentation for friends and professionals (London, UK)

December 2016 – Performances, Sands Film Studios in Rotherhithe (London, UK)

June 2017 – Developmental Rehearsals (London, UK)

June 2017 – Performances, Royal Tunbridge Wells, UK

July 2017 – Performances, Galway, Ireland

July 2017 – Performances, Exeter, UK

September 1-3, 2017 – Gothenburg, Sweden (Teater Trixter)

September 7-8, 2017 – Leicester, UK (Upstairs at the Western)

September 13-15, 2017 – Rome, Italy (Villa Mercede)

October 7, 2017 – Falmouth, UK (Tolmen Centre)

February 27, 2018 – Chipping Norton, UK (Theatre Chipping Norton)

March 1-3, 2018 – Clermont-Ferrand, France (La Comedie de Clermont-Ferrand)

March 12, 2018 – Nottingham, UK (Theatre Royal and Concert Hall)

March 25, 2018 – Sarah Thorne Theatre (Broadstairs)

April 28, 2018 – Bickerton Village Hall (Cheshire Rural Touring Arts)

May 10, 2018 – Aberystwyth Arts Centre

May 12, 2018 – Bridport Arts Centre

May 25, 2018 – Neston Town Hall (Cheshire Rural Touring Arts)

June 6, 2018 – Exeter, UK (Cygnet Theatre)

The Conductor

Critical Feedback

Winner of the Buxton Festival Fringe 2016 JOHN BEECHER AWARD

"The coveted John Beecher Award for original, challenging work with high production values went to *The Conductor*."



Special Award for Highest Artistic Merit at the 2017 Roma Fringe Festival

"Rediscovering the historical events of the Siege of Leningrad through the music of Dmitri Shostakovich and his Symphony n. 7, blending together art, music, and civil theatre, in defense of the dignity of every human being."

"Jared McNeill carries it and sanctifies it with a stripped power, an almost intimidating asceticism."

Roland Duclos, *Bachtrack*

"...an emotional *tour de force*..."
"The audience is *swept along by excellent performances* and, for 70 enthralling minutes, *sees Leningrad*..."

-*Wild Times*, Tunbridge Wells

"...thrilling and almost incomprehensible to experience the devotion to this music. The talented actors led, by director Jared McNeill, did an outstanding job with this story which is quite inspiring to behold."

-Da Coy, *Galway Arts and Fringe Review*

"I had no connection with Shostakovich's music before this evening. *The Conductor*, as well as telling the story of the creation of the symphony also explains the narrative of the music. I think I will appreciate this piece a little more now."

-*Western Park Gazette*

"This is a fine show."

Michael Quine, *Buxton Fringe Review*

"The full house absolutely adored it."

Stephen Walker, *Fringe Guru*

The Conductor

Our Team

Deborah Wastell

(Mother, Nurse, Nina Shostakovich, Nina Bronnikova, Head of Arts)

Deborah trained at The Bridge Theatre Training Company and then followed that up with a variety of short courses at RCSSD, RADA, and The Actors Centre. Recent theatre credits include *The Conductor* at Buxton Fringe, Beatrice in *Much Ado About Nothing*, one woman show *A Shadow That Remains Cast*, and Gwendolen in *The Importance of Being Earnest*.

As a voice-over artist, Deborah has recorded an audio tour guide of Lake Como for Touring Italia, and commercials for, amongst others, Women's Aid and Relate. She has appeared in several short films, internet virals, rehearsed readings, and training videos. Deborah has recently completed filming on Feature Film, 'Ghost Stories', due for release next year.

Joseph Skelton

(Karl Eliasberg)

Joe is an actor and playwright. He has most recently been seen playing Prospero in The Three Inch Fools' production of *The Tempest*, which toured England and Scotland 2015-16. Previous roles include: Vladimir (*Waiting for Godot*), Ginger (*Jerusalem*) and Tom Wingfield (*The Glass Menagerie*), all staged in the Assembly Rooms Theatre, Durham.

His writing credits include *The Noctambulist* (Edinburgh Fringe, 2014), *Inside* (Hotbed Festival, Cambridge, 2015), *The Druid's Horse* (Roundhouse Radio, 2016), *Zoe and the Fox* (The Arts Theatre, 2016) and *Fat Jewels* (Southwark Playhouse and The Old Red Lion Theatre, 2016).

Daniel Wallington

(Dmitri Shostakovich, pianist)

Danny Wallington has performed in more than ten countries over five continents. His invaluable experience with Peter Brook's Théâtre des Bouffes du Nord gave him the spotlight at The BAM Harvey Theater in New York, Cidade das Artes Rio de Janeiro, Dadong Arts Centre of Taiwan, and The State Theatre Company of South Australia.

Trained at Trinity College Of Music, BBCNR Paris and Chetham's School Of Music, Danny has performed four piano concertos, one of which was composed by himself, and performed with musicians from The Chetham's Symphony Orchestra. He has also given recitals at St Martin's at the Fields, Bridgewater Hall, and Sheffield City Hall. This year Danny has been on the road with Finger and Thumb Theatre's production '*Carnival of the Animals*', as well as Theatre Alibi's '*Fish Eye*'.

Jared McNeill
(Director)

Jared McNeill has toured internationally in works by Young Jean Lee and Peter Brook, including most recently *The Suit*, *The Valley of Astonishment*, and *Battlefield*. He has worked on stage with a number of great writers and directors including Tarell Alvin McCraney, Kenny Leon, Peter Dubois, Robert O'Hara, Tea Alagic, Phylicia Rashad, and Lucie Tiberghien, and Tim Supple.

Sarah Quigley
(Author, Novel *The Conductor*)

Sarah Quigley is a novelist, short-story and non-fiction writer. She has a D.Phil. in Literature from the University of Oxford. Publications include novels, short fiction, a creative writing manual and poetry collections, many of which have been published internationally. She is a previous winner of the Commonwealth Short Story Award (2001) and the Sunday Star Times Short Story Award (2004), and short-listings for fiction include the Bridport Prize and the Fish Short Story Prize. Sarah's novel *The Conductor* (Random House NZ, 2011) was the highest-selling adult fiction title in New Zealand in 2011, staying at Number One for twenty weeks. It was subsequently widely translated, long-listed for the International IMPAC Dublin Literary Award and short-listed for the Prix Femina in France.

Since 2000, after winning the inaugural Creative New Zealand Berlin Writers' Residency, Sarah has been based in Berlin. As well as writing fiction and a monthly column for Next magazine (for which she won Best Columnist Award, NZ Magazine Publishing Awards 2015), she works as an editor for Cornerstones Literary Consultancy in London, and for art and architecture publishers in Europe.

Mark Wallington
(Playwright)

Born in Swanage. A writer, well-known for his humorous "Boogie" travelogues, both serialised on BBC Radio Four.

Began his writing career working with Dick Fiddy, submitting sketches to '*Not the Nine O'clock News*' and '*The Dave Allen Show*'. They later scripted the BBC sitcom '*All Night Long*'. In 1982 Wallington walked the South-West coast path with his urban dog, Boogie. He wrote up the journey in *500 Mile Walkies* which became a best seller. *Boogie up the River* followed in 1989. In 1991, Wallington published a novel, *The Missing Postman*, and then scripted the TV series of the same name. His second novel, *Happy Birthday Shakespeare*, was also turned into a TV two-parter.

Wallington's further TV work includes '*Station Jim*' (2001) and '*The Man who Lost his Head*' (2007). In 2005 he published *The Day Job*, an account of his gardening days, and in 2012 *The Uke of Wallington*, the story of his journey through Britain with a ukulele.

Dmitri Dmitriyevich Shostakovich

(Composer)

(1906-1975) One of the 20th century's most highly regarded composers, Shostakovich represents a story of persistence. Many characterize him as an “acquired taste” for his atonal constructions. Like Wagner, his phrases are unpredictable. He sets up a line that the listener's ear will finish before it has ended, and sure enough, before that line has ended, one step of deviation will lead it to a completely new place.

For more, we invite you to view our video clips:

Trailer 1: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=azgPlfvqCkw>

Trailer 2: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=cYAc41Lu9xc&t=5s>

Performances:

For a full video of the performance, please contact us at:

Contact: ConductorPlay@gmail.com

[Facebook.com/theconductorplay](https://www.facebook.com/theconductorplay)

🕒 March 29, 2019 📁 Reviews 🔖 Daniel Wallington, Deborah Wastell, Jared McNeill, Joanna Hetherington, Joseph Skelton, Mark Wallington, Sarah Quigley, The Conductor, The Space



The Conductor

The Space

Reviewed – 28th March 2019



“achieves a sensitivity and drama which fills the theatre and rouses our emotions”

In the besieged city of Leningrad in 1941, a conductor, against all odds, gathers together an orchestra of starving and weakened musicians to give a momentous performance of Shostakovich's 7th Symphony. Even though he is said to have planned the work as a general comment on terror, slavery and oppression, its timing means that it is remembered as a force of psychological warfare against Nazi despotism by the battered spirits of a tyrannised society. In an elegant adaptation by Mark Wallington and Jared McNeill, based on Sarah Quigley's novel, 'The Conductor' tells the story of the 'Leningrad Symphony' and how the devastating circumstances of World War II gave Karl Eliasberg the opportunity to rise from the shadows of mediocre musical standing and conduct the first performance there. With dramatic and evocative musical illustration, it shows the power of artistic expression fighting to overcome the surrounding atrocities. Who knows why these men in such dire physical state agreed to sacrifice their health and, in a few cases, lives for that concert? Possibly the extra rations offered to them but, more likely, to restore a sense of dignity in their souls and those of their fellow citizens.

Occupying half the stage, the composer sits at his grand piano, engrossed in composition as Eliasberg describes his own modest upbringing and aspirations and his admiration for Shostakovich's genius. Joseph Skelton plays a conductor who wins our sympathy with his quiet, unassuming nature; describing himself as 'cold' and 'good at keeping time', he displays acceptance rather than bitterness. Deborah Wastell, with dexterous change of accent creates a handful of peripheral characters, adding detail to daily life – the mother who refuses to be evacuated, Shostakovich's long-suffering wife, the dancer who befriends Eliasberg. And while we build an image of the hardships through Eliasberg and the people around him, Shostakovich appears detached

from reality, absorbed in his own world. Daniel Wallington portrays this remoteness while evoking the moods of war, reminiscence and victory with his extraordinarily passionate piano playing.

‘The Conductor’ is a unique piece of theatre. It cleverly infuses the music into the narrative and completes the background picture with perceptive minor roles. Jared McNeill’s direction captures the contrast between the musicians and the trepidation in the atmosphere but as the action evolves (notably after the intense musical episodes) Eliasberg’s thoughtful pauses break the flow and the tension relaxes rather than heightens towards his ‘glory of fame and grief of loss’. While the piano is unable to recreate the textures and colours of a large orchestra, in this case it fits perfectly into context and Wallington achieves a sensitivity and drama which fills the theatre and rouses our emotions.

Reviewed by Joanna Hetherington



The Conductor

The Space until 13th April

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The Conductor at The Space – Review

MARCH 29, 2019 LAST UPDATED: MARCH 29, 2019 1:20 AM BY [CHRIS OMAWENG](#)

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At some point as a schoolboy, my classmates and I were under instructions to keep a weekly diary, even during the school holidays. There was a degree of self-censorship because the diary entries were to be written in a school exercise book and marked (or, rather, read) by the teacher. Evidently the purpose was to help pupils develop creative writing skills, though I remain ignorant to this day as to what exactly was so creative about writing down the significant events of the past week – unless there was supposed to be economical with the truth. Anyway, about halfway through the performance of **The Conductor**, the play's narrative brought to mind that diary (which was unceremoniously banded into a paper recycling receptacle many years ago), because I still recall being bizarrely brought to task for writing that I had been moved by a piece of music, when in fact I hadn't, physically speaking, 'moved' an inch.



The Conductor at The Space

is quite an achievement, I think, for the music in this production to have moved me. Dmitri Shostakovich's (1906-1975) Symphony No. 7, was written for orchestra, but excerpts of it are played in the show by David Wallington on the piano with no other musicians for company. The conductor of what was then known as the Leningrad Radio Orchestra, Karl Eliasberg (1907-1978) (Joseph Skelton), stayed on in Leningrad – the city now known as St Petersburg – when it was under siege by the Nazis. The Soviets had evacuated who they could, prioritising the weak, the elderly and children. Eliasberg's mother (Deborah Wastell, who also takes a number of other characters during the play) was one of those people who wouldn't budge even though she was eligible for evacuation.

There are history books and online resources aplenty that can give as many details as one requires as to the catastrophic impact the Siege of Leningrad had on its population. This is a most unusual play set in wartime, focusing on Eliasberg's attempts to have Symphony No. 7 performed in its composer's home city, rather than the military movements and/or political activity. Subjects like the (im)morality of war and the reconstruction of post-war Leningrad are for another time, which seemed fair enough given the plight of Leningrad's people. Members of the orchestra had to overcome extraordinary odds just to stay alive let alone play instruments – for that reason, if someone were to ask me whether I enjoyed the play, I would have to go with “No”.

That, of course, is not a bad thing in context, and there's no denying that this is a triumph over adversity story. But it's also not unlike one of those unsettling movies where too many people meet a sorry and untimely end. Symphony No. 7 is, fundamentally, a war symphony, and some of it, as performed in this production, is delightfully aggressive and combative at times. In other places, though, there's a palpable feeling that the music proceeds with a mixture of fear and caution, like a Leningrader quite literally trying to get to where they are going in one piece. The latter is even more harrowing than the former.

As I never tire of saying, productions succeed when they can be understood by someone coming to see the show without having done any background reading at

beforehand. **The Conductor** is one such play: one need not necessarily know anything about classical music, Shostakovich, Eliasberg or the Siege of Leningrad to follow proceedings. When the music plays, the narrative doesn't stop, even if the dialogue does – it's very different to a song-and-dance number in a musical that stops the storyline for a few minutes. The set is kept simple and straightforward, most forcing a reliance on the script to establish time and location. A fascinating and eye-opening production.



Review by Chris Omaweng

1941. Troops have surrounded the city of Leningrad, in what would come to be known as the Leningrad Blockade, a siege of more than 2 years and one that would claim the lives of more than 1 million people. In the midst of this devastation, composer Dmitri Shostakovich worked tirelessly to compose his “symphony for the people.”

Based on the best-selling novel by Sarah Quigley, and adapted by Mark Wallington and Jared McNeill (Peter Brook's international company), this is the true story of a band that lifted an entire city in its darkest hour.

THE CONDUCTOR

3 MAR – 13 APR 2019

<https://space.org.uk/>

Summary

Reviewer	Chris Omaweng
Review Date	2019-03-29
Production	The Conductor
Author Rating	★★★★☆

WHAT'S ON REVIEWS CONCERTS OPERA DANCE FESTIVALS GOODS

AT HOME



Music on the brink of silence: McNeill's *Conductor* at the Comédie de Clermont-Scène National

By Roland Duclos , 06 March 2018

The other face of music, this "moment on the brink of silence": Jared McNeill carries it and sanctifies it with a stripped power, an almost intimidating asceticism. To stage Shostakovich's *Leningrad Symphony* from Sarah Quigley's novel, without the dreaded excesses of a hyper theatricality, is to mean the unspeakable. It is to bring out the unspeakable in its fragrances. It is to give flesh and soul to the unthinkable. Attempts in this hybrid field are numerous but few conclusive successes in the end. The music of Stalin's beast is his own scenery, his best exegesis. She assures and assumes her staging. It is self-sufficient without parasitic intermediaries. Given as a unique French performance at the Comédie de Clermont-Scène National McNeill's *The Conductor* is a welcome exception to this rule.

Comédie de Clermont-Scène National

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Daniel Wallington

For music, that of Shostakovich, is indeed this solid space, gaping over the emptiness of existence, over the obscenity of the war which the director opens to us. His vision is punctuated by a temporality of tragedy built on the immensity of a predatory threat that observes us when the misleading waiting for passages that have been delicately pacified sets in. Emblematic in this sense, is this *7th Leningrad Symphony*, started under the bombs, ended in the forced exile of its author. Three characters, two chairs, a piano all trapped beams of a harsh light. From this austere emptiness, from a few words, from a naked word, held on the edge of anguish, appears the superhuman will of the composer, pressed by the urgency of the inspiration and the stake. Incredible performance than that of Daniel Wallington. He achieves less the feat of a stricto sensu transcription for piano than a scrupulously refined sublimation of this monument of symphonic music. Wallington-performer, slips into the shoes of Wallington-comedian for this troubling incarnation. It is here

incidentally to tend to a physical resemblance, notwithstanding its success, that to confer a thickness and a psychological truth to the character.

McNeill pushes his interpreters to the essential, imposing this beleaguered absence which surrounds them, this sonorous tellurism which overwhelms them, to the inconceivable imperative of resistance. The music becomes en masse. To speak of an inhabited touch is euphemistic about the organic and relentless frenzy that the pianist unfolds. A tense game, frightening in her heroic madness. Through Wallington's long sonic march, a whole people of shadows is advancing, a whole city resisting. It is also filigree Shostakovich's passion that is written. That of a creator harassed and humiliated by a dictatorial power. One does not embody such a character: Wallington lives it in the proud distress and fragility that make the greatness of his character.



Joe Skelton and Deborah Wastell

Pathetic despair at the head of Karl Eliasberg in charge of constituting an orchestra in a devastated universe, among a population of undead, condemned to the unthinkable hope of music. Actor Joe Skelton raises this phantom army of bows and winds that will constitute bloodless desks of men encircled, hungry, stupefied by bombing until the atony. But standing men who testify that if "life is worthless, nothing is worth the life" to take again the sentence of Malraux. It is in the omnipresence of death between silence of forbidden words and absurd expectation, that the music rescued from the disaster is reborn and that man fights thanks to it. A music that also says the horror of hunger in the unbearable discovery of mutilated bodies when the snow recedes in the spring. Shostakovich's music erects the backdrop of the unbearable occupation of nothingness persuades us Jared McNeill. Between her two companions in misery, in this abyss without salvation, Deborah Wastell walks the desert of the plateau, in turn wife, mother, lover and political commissar. The only survivors of a holocaust without an executioner, all three draw, haggard, the gulf that embraces them, ironing constantly over the insane geometry of their distress, only suspended from the lightning inspired by the pianist.

The music becomes a cry, a clamor, a resistance against the dance of battle macabre. He stages the insane hope of this desire to live one day the ultimate deliverance through sacrifice.

The Conductor : March 12 Nottingham Royal Theater; March 17 Neston Town Hall and March 25 Sarah Thorne Broadstairs Theater.

"A stripped power, an almost intimidating asceticism"

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Reviewed at National Clermont-Scène Comedy, Clermont-Ferrand on 3 March 2018

PROGRAM

Jared McNeill ,*The Conductor*

Works by [Shostakovich](#)

PERFORMERS

Daniel Wallington ,*Piano*

Joe Skelton ,*Actor*

Deborah Wastell ,*Actor*



[MORE CONCERT REVIEWS](#)

The Conductor - Rome Fringe Festival 2017, Villa Mercede (Rome)

 Written by [Alessandra Quintavalla](#) Saturday, 23 September 2017

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"The Conductor" presented by the British company "La compagnie des divins animaux" the Rome Fringe Festival on 13, 14 and 15 September and the winner of the Special Mention Laici.it, it is a stage adaptation of **Mark Wallington** is **Jared McNeill**, directed by the same McNeill. The work is inspired by the novel **Sarah Quigley**, from which it takes its title. Interpreted by **Joseph Skelton** is **Deborah Wastell** and embellished by the music of **Dmitri Shostakovich** Live-played **Daniel Wallington**, the show tells the story that lies behind the creation of the Symphony # 7 (in C major, Op.60, 'Leningrad') written by the famous Russian composer in 1941 during the siege of Leningrad. A little known but true story that shows how, despite the bombing and all the atrocities of the war, the music of Shostakovich enabled people to save their hope.

La Compagnie Des Animaux Divins *presents*

THE CONDUCTOR

adaptation of Mark Wallington *is* Jared McNeill

novel by Sarah Quigley

with Joseph Skelton *is* Deborah Wastell

music by Dmitri Shostakovich

Live-played Daniel Wallington

directed by Jared McNeill

Terrible thoughts buzzing in the heads of the protagonists, almost convulsively. On stage are three actors, but the characters are many more. There are a chair and a piano. **Just a few jokes, references, hot words, not Italian, to give us with elegance and simplicity and the complexity of the time when we fell.** Faces, names, memories. A musical genius crushed by the burden of totalitarianism. The people dying in the streets on fire by bombs. The main characters are ordinary citizens, artists, who are in a world to which they are not prepared: do not know how it moves us into the sad scenario which they live, they have no power to change the situation. But the sense of powerlessness will not stop them ...

What is immediately striking about this story, very well represented by the British company, it is the use that was made of art to deal with everything that was happening. The music of Shostakovich, played in the play, **He allowed people to take along a journey steeped in paranoia, disappointment, fatigue and sadness, but directed toward salvation.** This music did not stop the siege of Leningrad, but offered people the chance to go beyond the suffering of the moment and feel that life still existed in them.

The spectacle of American director **Jared McNeill**, than the broader novel **Sarah Quigley**, focuses on some reports narrated by history, like that including **Dmitri Shostakovich** and **Karl Eliasberg**, time radio conductor of the Leningrad. The two met at the conservatory, but Shostakovich soon surpassed his companion, becoming the

first composer of Leningrad and somehow the Soviet Union. Eliasberg envied and at the same time admired Shostakovich, who managed to succeed even in the emotional sphere, unlike the first that instead spent their entire lives with his elderly mother. **The show explores focusing on the intersection of these two fates:**

'Like' the two individuals met, 'because' their stories are intertwined, and the miracle that was born from the union of their limbs, but also of their being routinely imperfect.

Karl Eliasberg could be any man: egotistical, proud, envious, stubborn and vulnerable. Shostakovich did anything questionable risking their lives and those of his family (he was a fireman during the bombing) to stay in Leningrad and finish his seventh symphony. **but yet the exploits of these two men became extraordinary: Shostakovich wrote his Symphony and Eliasberg spreading and holding together the orchestra dying of hunger and fatigue.** People needed to feel alive again. The war was destroying their faith. "This nightmare can not go on forever". "I do not want to take our city, they want to take our hope!" They say on stage. "Perhaps in other circumstances would not be considered the 'heroes', but life has given them the opportunity to do something extraordinary," explains Jared MacNeill.

The work also refers to an article published in 1936 on Pravda, the official newspaper of the Soviet Union's ruling party. The critics accused the work of Shostakovich's "Lady Macbeth of the District Mtsenk" (first acclaimed) to go against the principles of Socialist Realism, which were very hard. The works had to be realistic representations of ordinary life, understandable to ordinary people. But above all, they had to support the views of the State. And if they represent reality in a significant way, universally understandable it threatened to disturb the equilibrium of the system, what happened? With regard to the work of Shostakovich, in the article in question it reads: "It is a game of clever ingenuity That may end very badly" ("It's a brilliant game of ingenuity that may end very badly").

Dmitri Shostakovich continued to seek an acceptable language but also realistic in the siege. "I will write our history in music ... that's how I feel the war," says the composer during the show. **This was no longer just music. It seems to listen to him even opponents understood.** It is said that hearing the Seventh Symphony, during the first in Leningrad - the music came up to the front - the German soldiers realized that they would never have taken the city. "They listened to the 'Symphony of the heroes'" he says McNeill.

If at that time you were asked what was the meaning seek some truth in music, there probably would be no symphony, and would prevail the sense of helplessness that we all feel in the face of large and obscure problems of the world. But this story teaches us that **no action is ever truly insignificant. In fact, if done while looking for the truth, it can become even extraordinary.**

Villa Mercedes - Via Tiburtina 113/115, Roma (San Lorenzo)

shows Hours: stage C 22:30 Wednesday, September 13, Thursday September 14th 19:30, Friday September 15 22:30 Tickets: Free

entrance to Villa Mercedes, food & drink area, market area; 6 shows ticket euro Article by: Alessandra Quintavalla

Thanks to: Marta Volterra, Press Rome Fringe Festival On the web: www.romafrirefestival.it

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Alessandra Quintavalla



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The conductor

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A true story, the memory of the atrocities of the siege of Leningrad through the music of Dmitri Shostakovich and the relationship, stormy but necessary, with mediocre Eliasberg: an intense show, where acting and music background perfectly

"What is art in the face of all this"? To fully understand **"The Conductor"**, the spectacle of the British **"Divine Compagnie des animaux"**, We have to know the story around which this excellent show is based. In

1941 the Russian composer **Dmitri Shostakovich** began work on what would become his most famous work and represented: the **Symphony no. 7 in C major Op.60 'Leningrad'**.

The composition of this masterpiece is interwoven in glove with the composer's life and with the advance of **Nazi troops** in Soviet cities. When submitting a part of his work on the radio, in September of that year, **Shostakovich** He said: **"Yesterday morning I finished the second movement of my new symphony. Why do I speak? I do it because all know that, despite the threat of invasion in our cities things go as usual."** Romanzando historical events, the show starring **Karl Eliasberg**,

Director of Radio orchestra, classmate and neighbor of Shostakovich. Just the personal stories of Eliasberg is Shostakovich They intertwine and serve as the backdrop to the war. The representation proceeds smoothly, despite the **language barrier**. Indeed, it appreciates the effort of these British actors to play parts in our language, in order to facilitate understanding to the public less accustomed idiom of his majesty. The **stormy relationship between Eliasberg is Shostakovich** It is very well built: **the first is a figure that lives stormed their condition of 'mediocrity'** compared to the most famous composer, which is almost always stationary shown his intent to piano playing and composing. Because composing music at such a difficult and tragic? **"Because music is the sincerest language I know."** The artist does the only thing he can do: communicate through his art, which is the only language she knows. In doing so, he becomes a witness of his time: he becomes immortal.

Karl Eliasberg, against his will and pushed by the war, it will contribute to the success of this work. The spectacle of the British company deserves **special praise** for telling a **difficult and little-known story**, alternating cleverly acting to music. The notes consist of **Shostakovich** strike and tell the other side of the coin, earning the title of: **"Protagonists added."** A great representation of who has graced the this program **Rome Fringe Festival 2017**. Intense.

In 1941, the city of Leningrad was under siege. During the bombing, a composer working on the completion of his Symphony for people. The true story of the music that lifted the whole city and how art inspired people to renew their faith in their dignity and in their own strength.



CLERMONT ■ Encore ce soir et demain, à la Comédie, The conductor

Là, ici, avec Chostakovitch



HIER SOIR. Un plateau quasi-nu. Deux comédiens et un magnifique pianiste pour The Conductor. PHOTO PIERRE COUBLE

Parce qu'il faut avancer, créer, de toute façon. Parce que c'est tout simplement vital, peut-être même plus. Parce que c'est d'art dont il s'agit.

Julien Dodon

A quoi peut servir l'art lorsque la barbarie semble dominer le

monde ? C'est cette question que pose The conductor, la pièce de théâtre musical de Mark Wallington et Jared McNeill que la

Comédie de Clermont accueille encore ce soir et demain à partir de 20 h 30. Chostakovitch, le déjà célèbre compositeur, donne corps à sa Septième symphonie alors même qu'en 1942, l'époque résonne d'un chaos

incommensurable. Malgré tout, il faut avancer, créer, trouver des musiciens qui seront en capacité de jouer.

Il s'agit de vivre parce qu'il s'agit là d'aller au-delà de l'horreur. Parce que la création. Parce que l'art. ■

THE PRSD

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“What use is art in the face of all this?”: Director Jared McNeill talks about The Conductor

WEDNESDAY, JULY 12, 2017 BY PRSD



The story of how Dmitri Shostakovich's life-affirming 7th symphony grew out of the devastation of the Leningrad Blockade is told in [The Conductor](#). We caught up with director Jared McNeill ahead of the show calling into the Boat Shed, Exeter on July 22, 23 to find out how the play about human will and survival came into being

How did you come across the story and why did you decide on this for an adaption?

In 2015, I had worked with our pianist, Daniel Wallington, in a tour of Peter Brook and Marie-Helene Estienne's *The Suit*. We toured Brazil, Taiwan, and Macao, together. I was assisting Peter and Marie-Helene Estienne at that point, and we only had a few weeks to re-mount the production. This meant a great deal of work focused on finding a group dynamic between the actors and musicians, and Peter and Marie-Helene gave me some freedom to explore these work-sessions in the mornings.

Month's later, I was at London's Young Vic Theatre performing Peter and Marie-Helene's *Battlefield*. This was February 2016. Danny was running up to his mid-term presentation at the Trinity Laban Conservatoire, which happened to be a monologue he had written with his father, Mark Wallington, who happens to be a best-selling author, and he writes for stage and screen as well. They had adapted this monologue from Sarah Quigley's book, *The Conductor*.

It was a monologue on music, spoken by Karl Eliasberg, Conductor of the Leningrad Radio

Orchestra, and eventual Conductor of the Leningrad premiere of Shostakovich's "Leningrad Symphony."

Daniel had asked me to come in and do much the same work that we had done on *The Suit*. Just a few hours of work all together with Danny and Joe Skelton, playing Eliasberg. We found the music and the storytelling, and it has been our aim ever since. I think after the presentation, someone said that they would be interested in seeing a fuller version. I hadn't considered it by then, just as I hadn't considered the notion of "directing." Mark worked out a fuller adaptation, I read Sarah Quigley's book, and once we all met Deborah Wastell, it just seemed right.

It's not an easy question to answer, in either of its parts. I came across the story by equal parts chance and fortune and opportunity, and I didn't decide on the adaptation so much as the adaptation revealed, and continues to reveal itself, as necessary. We follow the road as it unfolds, and until there is road no more.

What is the modern-day relevance of this true tale?

I suppose that's for anyone to say, but it does remind of a moment of dialogue from the piece: "What use is art in the face of all this?"

Is this your first time directing and how has working with Peter Brook informed it?

I have written and directed some short films in the past, but this is certainly my first time directing for stage. As an actor, I've worked pretty much exclusively on stage. Just the way things worked out.

Of course, Peter has been a huge influence. It's been almost 10 years and 4 productions with him, always new and challenging. My challenge, I think, has been to acknowledge all that I've taken from these experiences so far, while not falling into the trap of replication, in process, or in product. Not always easy.

In *The Conductor*, with the element of storytelling, I think the influence may be quite apparent, though I am careful not to produce the expectation of what they call a "Peter Brook" Production. There lies danger.

I can say that the continued search, renewal, and revision of the piece is something I have taken with me from my time with Peter. I think he is always concerned with how the piece fits within, and speaks to, the world in which it is presented, and I can say that this has also been a bit of a compass for me.

How difficult is it bringing a story about the development of music onto the stage - I'm thinking about the representing the scale of devastation combined with the internal workings of a composer?

Well, here is the trick with our piece: We are learning about Shostakovich through stories relayed by his wife, Nina, as well as the Conductor Karl Eliasberg, who was a less-celebrated contemporary of the composer and other conductors in Leningrad at the time.

This may be disappointing to some, but what I've found is that this allows the story to breathe wider than the confines one man's experience. For Shostakovich, I think, this was the people's symphony, and it was how he heard war as he composed it. The internal workings are in the music, and in the storied experiences of the people for whom it was written. That shift in perspective disallows us from pinning it so much to this man, this time, this experience, and

allows it all, hopefully, to sit more universally.

Is this for those who are familiar with Shostakovich's 7th symphony or should anyone come, and what should they expect?

This is a piece for anyone, with a knowledge of the music, or without. I hope the former will not be disappointed, and I am sure the latter will not be left out. I think there are many more qualified people than me to highlight the finer points of the music.

This has become a story about human will, about familial bonds, about survival, and about this man who made a grand offering, under extreme threat, and with no promise for anything in return. Everyone was offering everything they had, every bit of energy and every bit of love that remained. This was a moment where people did not know why they suffered, and what they had to live for. They did not know when help would come, or from where. I am moved by that true resilience of the human spirit. Expect nothing. Just listen.

The Conductor is on at the Exeter Boat Shed Theatre Festival on Saturday, July 22 and Sunday, July 23 at 6pm. [Get your tickets online](#) or call 01392 434 169.

ARTSCULTURE

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One dish to satisfy a thousand different mouths | The Conductor and creating work for an international audience

November 7, 2018 by [artsculture \(https://artsculture.newsandmediarepublic.org/author/newsand1/\)](https://artsculture.newsandmediarepublic.org/author/newsand1/)

Heroic, mind-boggling and beguiling; art in the face of mortal danger and against insurmountable odds. That's the story of Shostakovich's 7th symphony, written during the siege of Leningrad in the Second World War, as told in The Conductor.

The 'concert-play' itself is heroic, mind-boggling and beguiling; creating something for music lovers and theatregoers out of Shostakovich's own battles and determination.

The Conductor, says the description, is a one act play, the story of the relationship between

Shostakovich and the conductor of the Leningrad Radio Orchestra, Karl Eliasberg.

you wish.

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The Conductor has travelled, and continues to tour, through three countries, each with their own flavour for theatre. And it has defied the odds for productions, which although being perhaps of the margins, have been marginalised.

We spoke to director Jared McNeill to see how The Conductor has developed through that artistic and geographical journey. And to get a glimpse through his international eye on the modern creative landscape.

Read More (<http://artsculture.newsandmediarepublic.org>)

ArtsCulture: **You started touring in 2016, how has The Conductor developed during that time?**

Jared McNeill: Our very first review came from Buxton, 2016, where we ran for 4 performances at festival. It suggested “director Jared McNeill and playwright Mark Wallington (who has adapted Sarah Quigley’s novel) need to resolve how best to reconcile the music and the story... the emotional punch that the story could deliver is undermined by the length of time given to the powerful music.”

Otherwise, this was a fantastic review, with elements of the piece dubbed “excellent.”

A thousand different tastes

This was our experience early on: we knew that we had something, but we weren’t sure exactly what we had. In many ways, we still don’t, and perhaps never will, but in 2016 it was like we were in the kitchen, cooking one dish to satisfy a thousand different mouths, all with a thousand different tastes, and all very vocal about what they did and did not like. This is impossible.

Our aim from the very beginning was to create something equally accessible to those who’ve no interest in classical music, much less Shostakovich, and those with season tickets to the symphony.

Music lovers could come away satisfied that they had felt the full breadth of the symphony, and theatregoers could expect to find a deeply moving, and resonant, tale. This aim has guided us in many ways, in the crafting of what we call a “concert-play.”

A hard-sought synthesis

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Funny enough, there is far more music rejected than accepted. [Read more \(http://artsandmediarepublic.org\)](http://artsandmediarepublic.org) because the music of the symphony and the telling of story seem to have found a

...know it, because the music of the symphony, and the telling of story, seem to have found a hard-sought synthesis, where one seems to spring naturally from the other, and visa versa.

Then I'd say the greatest change has been in learning what the show is, what it can be, and what it is not.

For example, we came to feel that it is not credible, and perhaps not respectful, for this group (complete with piano, chair, and music stand) to deign to show the suffering of the Leningrad Siege. There is no scenery to chew, and so it quickly devolves into watching an actor chew his or her own arm, which can become pathetic after a time.

The Conductor-Trailer LongForm



Honoring the truth

By letting go of the need to “show”, what we’ve stumbled upon is something that exists as more of a tribute, simply honoring the truth of this story, and its relevance in the modern climate. you wish. [Read More \(http://artsculture.newsandmediarepublic.org\)](http://artsculture.newsandmediarepublic.org)

Visiting an exhibition on the Leningrad Siege, I came to another realization: that this is a story about Life, and not Death. The subject of the story is not a war which puts a halt to life, but it is the lives that pushed to carry on in the face of the coming slaughter. It is an important difference. It is the difference between light closing, and light opening.

ArtsCulture: You've toured The Conductor in the UK, France and Italy. What view do you get of the health of theatre in those countries?

Jared McNeill: I can't speak to more than my own personal experience, which has been more than fortunate. I have been part of, and witness to, transformative theatrical experiences in the UK, France, Italy, and elsewhere. That will never change. The subjectivity of the exchange means that someone will always be moved, while the one sitting beside them is bored to tears. Then, in a sense, the theatre on stage will remain as healthy as the audience who've come to be a part of it.

Someone will always be moved

There are places that offer more support by way of public funds, either for the artistic enterprise itself, or for the precarious nature of the personal life of the artist. It is a pity, at times, to see that support, financial or otherwise, seemingly funneled to a few established companies or artists who (outwardly) don't need it, rather than to the many upstart companies and artists who do.

Producing theatre presents a great financial risk, and many have responded to that reality by opting to produce no risk at all.

There is a tendency to seek guarantees: bigger names, new takes on old conventions, to the point where the guarantees become more important than the subject-matter.

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I say all this, but at the same time I realize that this is the way the playing field has always been, and that navigation of the field has always been part of the game.

Recognition, fame, or notoriety...

Indeed, many of the great revelations in the theatrical form have come from the limitations provided by an exclusionary system. From my view, what I do find alarming, and perhaps more “new”, is the amount of direct pressure put on artists to attain some modicum of recognition, fame, or notoriety prior to being given any real opportunity to work.

Twice in the life of The Conductor, we have had our acceptance to a season hinge on the swapping-out of the entire team, as if bigger names could possibly be more important to the piece than maintaining the piece. It sounds ludicrous because it is.



“How many followers”

On more than one occasion, while in those same discussions, I have been asked “how many followers” do I have. Again, we are discussing bringing this piece to a theatre.

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I understand the world moves and changes, as do our needs of operation within it, but I will say this: I have a friend in the United States, who has worked as an actor for 50 years, and when I asked what the difference is between when he started, and now, he simply said, “Nowadays you’ve got to be famous before they’ll let you be talented.”

ArtsCulture: **How do you maintained your passion for theatre?**

Jared McNeill: I grew up taking all the necessary steps to become a writer. In New York, I trained and worked a bit in the lighting department. For the last years I have been on the stage, while also working as an assistant director, and now I’ve taken a turn as a director, and producer.

New challenges, vantage points and perspectives

Seeking new challenges, and new vantage points, in a realm already dedicated to the spread of new perspectives, have been a good recipe for passion on my part. I don’t mean just seeking these things in a theatre, but in life.

I think there is also the sense of relevance in what one does that can aid passion to come through the more difficult moments. And this isn’t just in the theatre, but in anything. A sense of ‘why’ is very important. A sense that you are a part of something bigger than yourself.

It’s important to keep dreaming

Passion is difficult to find in oneself, and far more difficult to maintain. When the dream meets reality, it’s easy to get lost. It’s important to keep dreaming.

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ArtsCulture: **One of the joys of being in an audience is the shared experience – those moments in time. Your take on theatre is truly international. Do you feel there's a universality to that experience?** [Read More \(http://artsculture.newsandmediarepublic.org\)](http://artsculture.newsandmediarepublic.org)

Jared McNeill: I think stories are meant to be told, and that theatre, at its simplest, is just the fire around which to tell them. It is the place with enough light and shadow to let the imagination play with figures dancing in the trees.

Stories reflect the listener

Then stories reflect not only the storyteller, but also the listener.

What can be gleaned is as random and diverse as a lifetime. And yet, paradoxically, there are elements that belong to all of us, because they belong to our very stationed existence as human beings. Collective questions we've asked since Day One, and the experiences we've collected as individuals responding to those questions. In this way, they are universal.

How can we say that a story's only limit is the imagination, and at the same time say that a story belongs only within one context?

I read a book recently on T.S. Eliot, and I am probably misquoting, but somewhere in there it was written that the aim may lie in carrying a story simultaneously in opposite directions along two parallel tracks: carrying the personal until it becomes universal; and carrying the universal until it becomes personal.

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ArtsCulture: **What's next for you?**

Jared McNeill: The Conductor is completing Italian dates in November, at Parma's Teatro Due, Roma's Teatro OFF/OFF, and Assisi's Piccolo Teatro Degli Instabili.

For me, a number of workshops, and researches, and discussions.

I am also working with La Mama Umbria and conductor Claudio Scarabottini, in Spoleto, to put together a concert in February 2019, comprised of his resident amateur choral group BISSE, along with an orchestra, and music groups from Korea, to France, England, United States, and Nigeria.

Onions Make us Cry

I am working with Carole Karemera and Ishyo Arts Centre in Kigali, Rwanda, on a piece Onions Make us Cry, set to premiere in 2019.

We've just confirmed today that we will be at The Space in London (<https://space.org.uk/>), for a 3-week run in March/April 2019.

you wish. [Read More \(http://artsculture.newsandmediarepublic.org\)](http://artsculture.newsandmediarepublic.org)

keep dreaming.

ArtsCulture: **thanks Jared!**

Find out more and see the next dates for The Conductor on the Facebook page.

(<https://www.facebook.com/theconductorplay/>)

Jared has also spoken to the PRSD about The Conductor: “What use is art in the face of all this?” (<http://www.theprsd.co.uk/2017/07/12/jared-mcneill-the-conductor-interview-qa/>).

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Play Review – The Conductor
Original Book by Sarah Quigley
Adapted for stage by Mark Wallington
At: The Forum, Tunbridge Wells

The set up for the play was informal. Seats at the front, benches at the back, a few chairs on the normal stage which overlooked the ground level performance area. Such were audience numbers, swelled I have to admit by a fair few from the Wilderness Wood community, that there was standing room only at the back.

This gave an immediate intimacy. There was a piano and subdued orange and blue lighting. It was, as the enlightened person next to me commented, like being tempted into someone else's world. And what higher praise for a piece of art can there be?

The main character of the piece is Karl Eliasberg (Elias). He introduces himself directly to the audience as a man born without a heart. Immediately we listen with interest. Of course, he has a heart, but is known for his discipline when conducting. He is, we realise, the conductor of the 'second' orchestra of Leningrad (after the Philharmonic) – the Radio Orchestra.

The performance is played by only three cast members and centre stage almost throughout is Elias, played admirably by Joe Skelton. In truth it quickly becomes clear that this is less of a traditional 'play' and more of a telling of a story with dramatic flourishes. We travel with Elias through the weeks leading up to and throughout the siege of Leningrad during World War II.

We see into his home life and his relationship with his elderly mother and the ballerina Nina (both parts played with nuance by Deborah Wastell). We witness through his narrative his rise to prominence following the evacuation of the culturally elite Philharmonic Orchestra leaving him and his orchestra the main musical force in the city. We hear of the horrors of starvation

during the siege and the efforts taken by Elias to enable his weakened orchestra to deliver a final tour de force which will rally the souls of the beleaguered city.

Elias talks directly to the audience and in a small setting such *The Forum* this becomes an intimate and personal dialogue. The audience feels a true sense of connection whether being allowed into the private thoughts of the narrator or addressed as the Radio Orchestra itself with Elias as the conductor behind his music stand. Nowhere is this more evident than when he reprimands his starving orchestra with a stern "Sit up straight" which provoked a noticeable guilty bristle amongst the audience – especially in the front row.

The other dominant presence on stage is that of the famous composer Dmitri Shostakovich, played by Daniel Wallington. For much of the performance he remains at his piano, engrossed in music and working tirelessly on his seventh symphony which is what Elias must ultimately conduct. His contribution to the play is, however, crucial as he provides a live soundtrack which at times mirrors the emotions felt on stage, but crucially morphs into a stunning virtuoso performance. He speaks very little which makes what he does say all the more poignant and his "This is how I hear war" sums up vocally what his sitting at the piano does physically – his complete attachment to music.

This is an emotional tour de force set in an under-represented atrocity of the second world war. The audience is swept along by excellent performances and, for 70 enthralling minutes, sees Leningrad through the eyes of Elias. There are moments of humour to allay the human misery and this, combined with a subtext of hope against the odds, makes this a very human experience.

If you cannot get to see this excellent play which now tours at various locations both in the U.K and abroad (see *Raving Mask Theatre* Facebook page for details), I can heartily recommend the book on which it is based. *The Conductor* by Sarah Quigley is widely available and published by Head of Zeus Ltd. Price £7.99.



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The Conductor Reviewed

07-09-2017



The Conductor, based on the novel by Sarah Quigley, adapted by Mark Wallington

Review by: Paul Towers, 07 September 2017

A Raving Mask presentation with Deborah Wastell, Joseph Skelton and Daniel Wallington

Upstairs @ The Western, 7th & 8th September 2017

'educational and thought provoking.'

The Conductor is a seamless blend of fact and fiction charting the writing of Shostakovich's Seventh Symphony against the backdrop of the siege of Leningrad in 1941 as the Nazis surround the city and bomb, shell and starve it into submission as part of their assault on Russia.

Most of the cultural elite are evacuated early in the siege, but Dmitri Shostakovich, the most famous composer in Russia, stays on. At night he composes a new work, his 7th symphony.

After Shostakovich and his family are forced to evacuate, Karl Eliasberg, a shy conductor of the second-rate Radio Orchestra, and an assortment of musicians are left behind in Leningrad to face an unendurable winter and start rehearsing the finished score of Shostakovich's Leningrad Symphony.

This talented cast of three bring the story to life against a background of the fledgling music. Daniel Wallington as Shostakovich sat at an electronic keyboard and produced the most amazing grand piano sound as he coaxed the symphony into life. Joseph Skelton as Karl Eliasberg conveys the horror of living amongst the rubble of Leningrad as he tries to maintain a semblance of culture to lift the spirits of the remaining residents. Deborah Wastell swaps clothes to convey the various women in the men's lives.

I had no connection with Shostakovich's music before this evening. In fact classical music in general is anathema to me, probably because I don't understand the story behind the pieces. The Conductor, as well as telling the story of the creation of the symphony also explains the narrative of the music. I think I will appreciate this piece a little more now.

This is an educational and thought provoking story behind an iconic piece of classical music.

The Conductor is at Upstairs at The Western again on Friday 8th September

More details on twitter @TheConductorPla

Upstairs at The Western <http://upstairsatthewestern.com/>

Paul Towers: <http://ptheatre.blogspot.co.uk/>

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