Wojciech Kilar
Polish composer (1932-2013)

Wojciech Kilar is a Polish composer whose most recognizable music to Americans may be his film scores for *The Pianist*, *City of Angels* and *Bram Stoker’s Dracula*. He has written pieces for over 100 Polish films as well. In his concert music, Kilar often wrote music celebrating his Polish heritage and homeland, but was also known as one of Poland’s founding members of the avant-garde music scene (avant-garde—music that is highly new, unusual and experimental).

**Orava**
composed in 1986 duration is 10 minutes

Orava is a tone poem for strings alone. A tone poem is a form of music that is a single continuous piece evoking or illustrating the content of a poem, piece of art or in this case, a landscape. Kilar’s *Orava* tone poem captures in music the Carpathian Mountains from the heart of Eastern Europe. This region is located at the border between Poland and Slovakia. The whole expanse of mountains stretch all the way from Serbia to Czechoslovakia, and crosses parts of Hungary, the Ukraine, Romania, Poland and Slovakia. The region retains its rustic, postcard-perfect charm which Kilar wanted to evoke through his music while also showing the majesty of the mountains.
**Max Bruch, German composer (1838-1920)**

Max Bruch was a German Romantic composer, writing in the style of other German Romantics like Johannes Brahms. He wrote over 200 works in his lifetime, but today he is most famous for two of his violin concertos (Scottish Fantasy being one of them) and a cello solo with orchestra called *Kol Nidrei*. He began writing music when he was 9 years old, and by the time he was 11 he had already written several chamber pieces and an overture for full orchestra. During the course of his distinguished career, the composer received an honorary Doctorate from Cambridge and won an appointment as a full professor at the Berlin Academy.

*Scottish Fantasy*  
composed in 1880, duration is 30 minutes

Bruch derived his inspiration for the *Fantasy* from his work and travels through the British Isles. He was fascinated by the Romantic tales of Scottish poet Sir Walter Scott (1771-1832). Each of the four movements of the piece is based upon a traditional folk ballad of Scotland:

1) Auld Rob Morris (Hommage to an Old Bard)  
2) Hey, the Dusty Miller (folk dance)  
3) I’m a-Doun for Lack o’ Johnnie (love ballad)  
4) Scot’s Wha Hae (wartime call to arms)

While the piece does not follow the traditional concerto form (three movements of fast-slow-fast), it nevertheless holds a revered position in the violin repertoire.

**The Last Minstrel by Sir Walter Scott**

- In peace, Love tunes the shepherd’s reed;  
- In war, he mounts the warrior’s steed;  
- In halls, in gay attire is seen;  
- In hamlets, dances on the green. Love rules the court, the camp, the grove, And men below, and saints above;  
- For Love is heaven, and heaven is Love.

**Bella Hristova, violin**

Bella Hristova is a young violinist with a growing international career as a soloist and recording artist who has been acclaimed for her passionate, powerful performances and compelling command of her instrument. *The Strad* said of Hristova, “Every sound she draws is superb,” and *The Washington Post* noted that she is “a player of impressive power and control.” A winner of many awards, Bella has enjoyed a blossoming career touring the world soloing with orchestras, playing chamber music and solo recitals. Born in Pleven, Bulgaria to Russian and Bulgarian parents, Hristova began violin studies at age six. In 2003, she entered the Curtis Institute of Music in Philadelphia. She received her artist diploma with Jaime Laredo at Indiana University in 2010. Bella plays a 1655 Nicolò Amati violin, once owned by famous violin soloist Louis Krasner.
Dmitri Shostakovich, Russian composer (1906-1975)

Shostakovich began his formal training at the Petrograd Conservatory of Music at age 13. The wunderkind aspired to become a concert pianist, and eventually won ‘honorable mention’ in a prestigious Chopin Competition at Warsaw in 1927. But it was his desire to compose that had truly dominated his creative spirit. By age 19, the success of his First Symphony would be noted by famous conductors across the world. With such an auspicious debut, the young composer should have enjoyed major support from his native Russia. Unfortunately, while still in his twenties, after the premiere of his opera Lady Macbeth of the Mtsensk District, Shostakovich fell under the censorship of Josef Stalin and the dreaded ‘culture police’ of the Soviet regime. However, although the scrutiny continued until the tyrant’s death, Shostakovich managed to create a catalog of nearly 200 works.

Symphony No. 5
composed in 1937, duration is 45 minutes

At the time that Shostakovich wrote his Symphony No. 5, he was under intense scrutiny from the Soviet regime. The ‘culture police’ watched over all artists within the country (musicians, composers, painters, authors, etc.) to make sure that the work that they produced matched the regime’s agenda. All art was supposed to reflect positively on the government and the conditions of the Soviet people and to serve as optimistic propaganda for the Soviet party. Artists who expressed any other sentiments in their work were censored, their works banned and sometimes, they themselves were sent to gulags (forced labor camps) or even murdered.

The genius of the 5th Symphony is that Shostakovich seemed to have found a way to walk the line between following the Soviet party’s orders of presenting simplistic and overly positive musical themes while also expressing the suffering and intense grief that the Soviet public felt under Stalin’s regime. It was received by the party officials as an appropriate piece of propaganda and also became beloved to the people as an accurate portrayal and expression of their plight.

In words attributed to Shostakovich, allegedly spoken in the 1970’s he says, “I think it is clear to everyone what happens in the Fifth. The rejoicing is forced, created under threat. It’s as if someone were beating you with a stick and saying, ‘Your business is rejoicing, your business is rejoicing …’”

This refers to the final movement of the piece which is a militaristic march that, to this day, people wonder whether he wrote to show solidarity with Stalin’s regime or mock it.
Many scholars still wonder whether Shostakovich was trying to show support of the oppressive Soviet party through his music or if he was secretly encoding hidden messages of protest for the people to hear. Considering that he feared not just for his career but for his life, he was continually putting himself at risk by writing anything at all.

Do you think that Shostakovich was, in his own way, bravely protesting the oppressive government? Was he showing his support for the regime? Or do you think that people just heard what they wanted to hear in Shostakovich’s Symphony No. 5 (the party officials heard compliance with their propaganda requirements and the Soviet people heard a true expression of their suffering)? Why do you think that?