

PROFILES IN PERSISTENCE

Read about two composers who persisted in the face of hardship

Composer **Dmitri Shostakovich** was born in Russia in 1906. He lived through incredibly turbulent times: the Bolsheviks' overthrow of the Russian Empire, World War I, the flu pandemic of 1918, and the ascent of the Soviet Union all occurred before Shostakovich turned 20. He lost at least eight family members and friends during a period of violence in the 1930s known as "The Great Terror," a time when the Soviet secret police arrested, imprisoned, and executed millions of people. The Soviet government denounced Shostakovich twice for his compositions,



first in 1936 and again in 1948, claiming they did not uphold Soviet values. Deemed an enemy of the state, Shostakovich lived in constant fear of being arrested or killed.

Despite ongoing persecution, Shostakovich composed a wide range of works – all in his own voice, expressing what he had to say through music. Shostakovich never left his home country of Russia; he died in Moscow in 1975, at the age of 68, having created a catalogue of 15 symphonies, 15 string quartets, 16 piano works, 10 operas, 36 film scores and countless other compositions. He continues to be regarded highly for his bold voice, both musical and spoken.



Composer **Arvo Pärt** was born in Estonia in 1935. He grew up during World War II when his country was occupied first by the Nazis, and then by the Soviet Union. During the Soviet occupation of Estonia, outside influences in music and art were forbidden. Pärt openly defied the Soviet regime by composing and premiering a work in 1968 called *Credo*, which declared his Christian faith. The government banned the work, leading Pärt to take a long break from composing music and to generally withdraw from public life.

During this creative silence, Pärt joined the Orthodox Church and studied Gregorian chant. When he returned to composing music in the late 1970s, Pärt created a new genre of music with a bell-like sound, called *tintinnabuli*. The distinct technique of tintinnabuli combines a melody and triad into one musical structure, is highly concentrated, uses intentional silences, and reflects a broader ideology based on Christian values. Pärt's new compositions – including *Fratres* – caused even more controversy with the Soviet government and he and his family were forced to emigrate to Austria in 1980. Today Arvo Pärt is one of the most performed living composers in the world.



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THE COURAGE TO STAND PROFILES IN PERSISTENCE



Research and Writing Activity

Research someone past or present who has faced hardship because they stood up for something they believe. Create a profile of the person, using the items below as a guide. Share your “Profile in Persistence” with your classmates.

Background

Name:

When and where they live(d):

**What did they stand for?
What repercussions did they experience?**

**How did they respond?
How does their story inspire you?**



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