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Shostakovich was enraptured by football from his early days. He would watch matches in the stands or on television. He would listen to radio reports broadcast from the stadium. He would study the sports newspapers and fill in his sports tables.

It is not enough to say that Dmitri Dmitriyevich could not live without football, he lived in football, as though in a special, parallel dimension.

It was an incredibly important part of his personal life, from which he gained immense strength. And even though this facet of his life also had its disappointments, when, for example, his favourite team lost, or a skilful combination failed right in front of the goal posts, and Dmitri Dmitriyevich would take them close to heart, their bitter taste emphasised the thrill of the game and made it complete.

Dmitri Dmitriyevich felt entirely at home in the world of football. In this terrain, he was forever young, happy and free.

Moscow, February 2018
Irina Shostakovich

SHOSTAKOVICH'S “FOOTBALL” BALLET

Football has been an intrinsic part of Shostakovich's music since he began his creative journey. It was there at the start, to use the language of sports commentators. The twenty-two-year-old composer, whose First Symphony had already been a triumphant success, began working on what can be called his “football” ballet, *The Golden Age*, in August 1929 based on Aleksandr Ivanovsky's script *Dinamiada*.¹

The Russian theatre had been actively cultivating sports ideas since the beginning of the 1920s. Vsevolod Meyerhold's productions were full of elements of physical culture, developing biomechanics based on the use of gymnastics, boxing, fencing and sprinting. The sports dynamic so intrigued Sergei Eisenstein that he staged a performance based on Aleksandr Ostrovsky's classical, well-known play *Na vsyakogo mudretsa dovolno prostoty* (Enough Stupidity in Every Wise Man) using gymnastics constructions consisting of athletic equipment and weight-lifting machines.

The Moscow Dramalet group performed dance suites by Asaf Messerer. Nikolai Foregger invented a theatrical-physical-training system for his actors. The performances of the numerous Blue Blouse groups were crowned with effectual acrobatic pyramids,

“Our god is the god of speed,” wrote Vladimir Mayakovsky,² the author of the play *Chempionat vseмирnoi klassovoi borby* (World Class Struggle Championship). It combined features of sports competition and political lampoon: fights between two opponents served as an allegory of battles between the political camps of “red” Russia and the “decadent” West.

The sports cult runs through the creativity of Aleksandr Rodchenko, who worked with Shostakovich on a production of Mayakovsky's play *Klop* (The Bedbug). Rodchenko's wife and assistant, designer artist Varvara Stepanova, not only created costumes for Meyerhold's plays, but also, for the first time in history, made patterns for the uniforms of the Soviet football players in 1923.

