

SYMPHONY FOR THE CITY OF THE DEAD

A Note from Author M. T. Anderson

This book is a hymn, I hope, to a composer I love and to the power of music in general. It began when my interest was piqued by the idea of a symphony considered so important that it was transferred onto microfilm like some dossier in a spy novel and smuggled halfway across the globe. Over the years, my sense of the project has deepened far beyond that, to a real passion for the larger story of the struggle of the Soviet people, trapped between Hitler and Stalin — two of the most terrifying dictators the world has ever known.

Why did I decide to write the book for teens, instead of adults? I think it goes back to two moments in my youth. The first is my memory of reading John Hersey's Hiroshima in eighth grade and having my mind blown by the realization that war was much more complicated than I had ever understood before. War was not just a simple clash of good and evil. The second moment was years later, when I was eighteen or nineteen. I heard a piece by Shostakovich (one of his cello concerti), and suddenly the harmony swerved in a way I'd never heard before. Like that engagement with Hersey's WWII reporting, I felt my world broadening; I suddenly recognized complexities I'd never even suspected before.

Now I'm an adult, and I'm used to dissonance and to the unbearable crimes of war. I take them for granted. But I shouldn't. So I wanted to write this book for readers who still feel outrage at discord, who still dream of a more harmonious world.

