

# Symphony for the City of the Dead: Dmitri Shostakovich and the Siege of Leningrad by M. T Anderson.

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## ***Symphony for the City of the Dead: Dmitri Shostakovich and the Siege of Leningrad by M. T Anderson (review)***

Elizabeth Bush

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REVIEW

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**In lieu of an abstract, here is a brief excerpt of the content:**

Reviewed by:

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*Elizabeth Bush*

ANDERSON, M. T. *Symphony for the City of the Dead: Dmitri Shostakovich and the Siege of Leningrad*. Candlewick, 2015 [464p] illus. with photographs  
ISBN 978-0-7636-6818-1 \$24.99  
Reviewed from galleys R\* Gr. 9-12

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Consider a Venn diagram of twentieth-century history. What stories might lie within the set where music, war, and state-sponsored terror intersect? Surely this one, in which an upcoming composer, imbued with youthful enthusiasm for the promise of a revolution's progressive new order, is body slammed with the reality of Stalinism, and his every word and every note are scrutinized for nonconformity. This was the plight of Dmitri Shostakovich; the praise and censure heaped upon his works through and beyond World War II chart the deadly vagaries of life under Mother Russia's unhinged dictator. The climactic focus is Shostakovich's Seventh Symphony, the "Leningrad"; this piece was composed while the city, left defenseless due to the decimation of the Red Army by Stalin, starved under siege. The symphony is clearly a work of incredible courage, and there is still hot debate over its possible covert meaning or message, the possible damage done to its composer via its positive reception in the West, and its influential role in rallying the citizens of the beleaguered city itself. Anderson brings his narrative A-game to this dense work of nonfiction, blending the complex strands of the story into a satisfying whole. Embellished with scores of photographs and peppered with the author's own commentary on the symphony, the text and supporting materials supply historical background for music enthusiasts and musical interpretation for history buffs. Source notes, index, and bibliography will aid report writers, but the most appreciative audience is likely to be engaged readers who settle into the tragic yet uplifting story of a suffering nation and its musical documentarian.

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**BADGER, HILARY** *State of Grace*. Switch, 2015 [304p]  
ISBN 978-1-63079-015-8 \$17.95

Reviewed from galleys

Ad Gr. 7-10

Wren lives in a perfect world: a garden setting full of teenagers who believe they are newly created and whose only job is to pick one bag of perfect newfruit each day as an offering to Dot, their god. Aside from a couple of prohibitions, they are free to enjoy themselves according to the Books of Dot, which teach them that their world is the only one, that all of Dot's creations are good, and that she loves them unconditionally because they, too, are dotly. The problem, though, is that Wren is starting to have dreams of other places and people that leave her feeling unsettled ("precalm," in the lingo of their world). When Blaze, a boy experiencing similar dreams, confronts her, she denies everything, but when a young boy stumbles into their garden and tells them of a gate and an outside world, Wren is forced to confront her growing uncertainty about the teachings of Dot. Wren's firm belief that she is being tested by Dot wears a bit thin in its repetition, but her insistence aids the book's broad criticisms of religious belief whether dangerous fanaticism or more tempered comfort. Echoes of many familiar narratives surface throughout this dystopian tale as the setting begins to look less like Eden and more like a similarly designed but more benevolent *Hunger Games* arena or *Maze Runner* Glade before taking on shades of *Lord of the Flies* violence and *Fred's* capitalist corruption. Wren has clearly suffered a trauma, and the reveal of who and what is behind Dot offers her an ethical dilemma: learn to live with her guilt and pain, or take the escape of



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