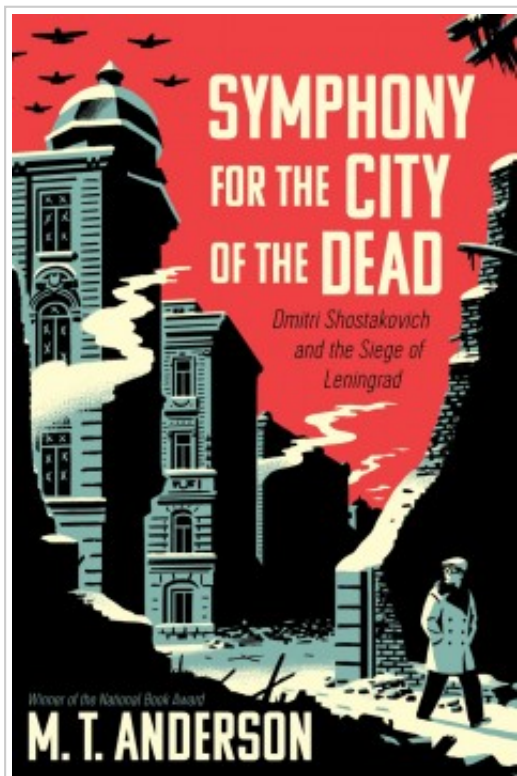


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## Symphony for the City of the Dead

by M.T. Anderson

**Price: \$25.99**(Hardcover)

Published: September 22, 2015

Rating: 0.0/5 (0 votes cast)

**From the Publisher: National Book Award winner M. T. Anderson delivers a brilliant and riveting account of the Siege of Leningrad and the role played by Russian composer Shostakovich and his Leningrad Symphony.**

In September 1941, Adolf Hitler's Wehrmacht surrounded Leningrad in what was to become one of the longest and most destructive sieges in Western history—almost three years of bombardment and starvation that culminated in the harsh winter of 1943–1944. More than a million citizens perished. Survivors recall corpses littering the frozen streets, their relatives having neither the means nor the strength to bury them. Residents burned books, furniture, and floorboards to keep warm; they ate family pets and—eventually—one another to stay alive. Trapped between the Nazi invading force and the Soviet government itself was composer Dmitri Shostakovich, who would write...

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## What We Say

No serious reader I know cares about genre: is it mystery, sci-fi, romance, literary fiction, graphic novel, young adult, a chapter book, a biography, a history, poetry, play? Who cares? Is it good? That's all that matters. The foolishness of labels has never been more apparent than in the astonishing career of M.T. Anderson, who has produced a string of sophisticated, witty works under the label of "young adult." That term has covered his dystopian sci-fi, horror, contemporary teen, historical fiction and now this work of biography. Since "young adult" also encompasses the masterpiece "Adventures Of Huckleberry Finn," as complex and involving a work as there is, he should happily embrace it. Essentially, "young adult" means there is (probably) a young adult at the heart of the story. And yet, "young adult" indicates one initial audience for this work and that may explain why it's so particularly good. Anderson has especially wowed with "Feed" and his landmark two volume work "The Astonishing Life Of Octavio Nothing," fiction that captures the Revolutionary Era, shines a fresh light on the horrors of slavery and presents our nation's founding from such a novel perspective readers may never think of it in quite the same way again. It's intensely detailed and utterly convincing. So now we have a work of nonfiction about composer Dimitri Shostakovich and how he created his Seventh Symphony during the Siege of Leningrad. It's a delight; no surprise since Anderson has evinced an enthusiasm for music almost as joyful as Shostakovich's love of soccer. What makes this book so good is that Anderson doesn't simplify the tale for its presumed audience. But he does CLARIFY the story in an elegant manner that any historian or biographer should envy. With seeming ease, Anderson tells of Shostakovich's life, the unceasing terror of Stalin's reign, the invasion of Germany, the horrors of the siege, cannibalism, despair and the role of music and why it mattered so much. He also deftly captures the moral complexity of Shostakovich's life, surrounded as he was by friends and family who were murdered by the state or turned against him to protect themselves or depended on him for their survival. A children's book? Hardly. And definitely. Any lover of good history or classical music or a tale well told should embrace this work. Memorable scenes abound. Musicians in the besieged Leningrad, trying to rehearse the symphony but fainting from hunger. Shostakovich called for an interview by officials, convinced that finally he was going to be executed like so many others before him, only to discover his interviewer had himself been arrested and thus Shostakovich was free to go. The circuitous, world famous journey of the microfilm that contained his score which literally traveled around the globe to get to the US for its American premiere. This isn't dumbed down history. Indeed, more traditional doorstops about history might now seem clogged up, overstuffed as they are with unnecessary dates and detail when Anderson -- with a vivid image and pointed line -- can make his case with directness and verve. It leaves you with one exciting question: what will Anderson do next? -- Michael Giltz

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## What Others Say

The storytelling is captivating, describing how Shostakovich began composing the symphony under relentless bombardment in Leningrad and later finished it in Moscow, its triumphant performance in Leningrad during the siege, and how it rallied worldwide sympathy for Russia's plight. Music is at the heart of the story. As Anderson writes in the prologue, "it is a story about the power of music and its meanings," and he communicates them with seeming effortless in this brilliantly written, impeccably researched tour de force. A triumphant story of bravery and defiance that will shock and inspire.

—Kirkus Reviews (starred review)

In a gripping narrative, helped along by ample photos and shockingly accurate historical details, Anderson offers readers a captivating account of a genius composer and the brutally stormy period in which he lived. Though easily