

Music UNDER **SOVIET** RULE

We are very sad to announce the death of Ian MacDonald, the creator of the musov site. His contributions will long be appreciated and his genius missed. [You may click here to read his obituary.](#)

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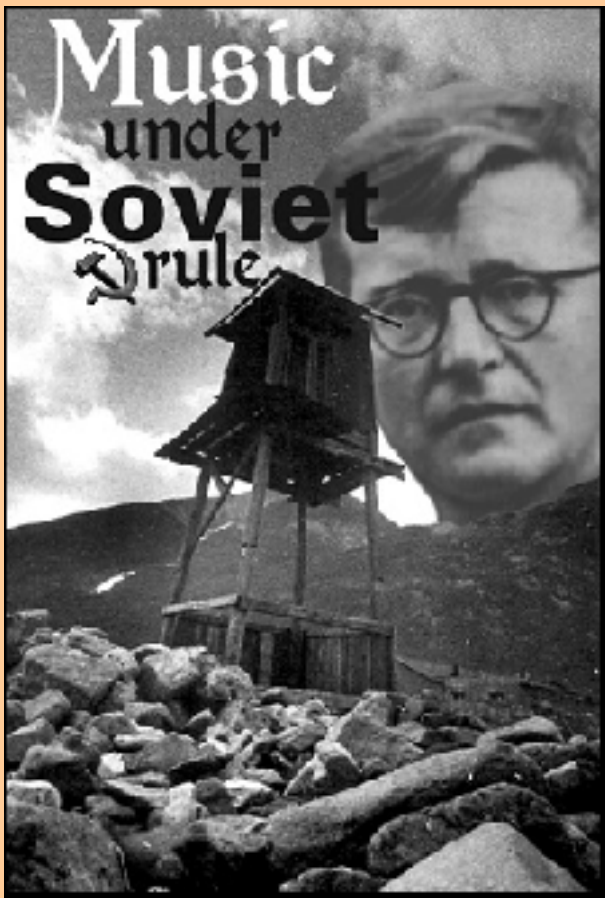
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A WWW Resource

compiled by

Ian MacDonald

This ongoing [collection of documents](#) is offered to travellers on the World Wide Web who happen to be drawn to the classical music made in the former Soviet empire, or by composers and musicians who were active within its borders between 1917 and 1991. The opinions expressed here, whether by the author/collator or those he quotes, are set out for consideration by all, whatever their beliefs or prejudices. Their simple availability is the primary reason for this site.

Some of these pieces have appeared in journals either inaccessible to general readers or now out of print. Here they are online for access at any time anywhere in the world. This might have appeared futuristic to most of us only a few years ago; to the former inhabitants of "Soviet information space" it would have seemed a bitterly laughable pipedream (indeed the Web as we know it post-dates the fall of the USSR).

Under Soviet rule, freedom of information was an alien concept. The Soviet state ordained truth through its total control of the Soviet media, a control which ran to revising this truth, often in quite contradictory ways, whenever the necessity arose. (Orwell's [Oceania](#), with its Ministry of Truth forever adjusting an officially decreed "reality", was intended as a satirical projection of Stalin's USSR in 1948-50, and was received as such in post-war Soviet-occupied Europe.) Because of this, no official statement emanating from the former Soviet Union, whether proclaimed by a department of the state or signed by an individual citizen, can be taken as anything but an ingredient in this totally-controlled official reality. Whether as propaganda, disinformation, or apparent free comment, such material is, by its very Soviet origin, distorted - a fundamental misrepresentation.

For most of the post-war period, this much was understood by most Western political and literary commentators on the USSR; yet, for various reasons, such knowledge was rarely current among the majority of Western musical pundits. Hence a radical misunderstanding of "Soviet music" took root in the West, distorting the image and intentions of many of the USSR's leading composers. The most seriously obscured in this way was the Soviet Union's musical laureate designate [Dmitri Shostakovich](#); in fact, it is only in the last fifteen years, beginning with the publication in the West in 1979 of *Testimony*, "The Memoirs of Dmitri Shostakovich as related to and edited by Solomon Volkov", that

music critics have begun to comprehend the full significance of his major scores.

However, the progress of this reassessment is still unnecessarily mired in contradictory claims, and (at least so far as the Western musicological community is concerned) remains stalled by a basic lack of acquaintance with the living details and atmospheric nuances of the Soviet politico-cultural background - a background which fundamentally shaped (and distorted) the lives and music of Shostakovich, Prokofiev, Myaskovsky, and most of their colleagues. Many Western academics, for instance, are used to pronouncing judgement on Shostakovich's music in ways that assume an understanding of his political and moral predicament which they do not begin to possess.

To take one typical example, Eric Roseberry, author of a short biography of Shostakovich (1982), has recently voiced doubt about the post-*Testimony* conception of the finale of Shostakovich's Fifth Symphony as expressive of a forced, and therefore hollow, rejoicing. "After all," he writes (in "Some Thoughts after a re-reading of *Testimony*", in *melos* 4-5/summer 1993), "Shostakovich's original pronouncements on this symphony at the time of its Moscow première made no mention of such a hidden agenda." To anyone familiar with even the bare minimum about the situation in Russia during 1937-8, the assumption behind this sentence - that no hidden agenda Shostakovich might have had at that time could have been serious enough to hide - will seem ludicrous, while the idea that he could have openly confessed such an agenda during Stalin's Terror (or, come to that, at any time prior to the "thaws" of the Sixties) verges on the surreal. Russians to whom I have read this passage have been amazed that an "expert" on Shostakovich could have so little comprehension of the general subject-area of which the composer was a part. Yet it would be a simple matter to fill this page with similar examples from the writings of other Western "experts" on Soviet music. (For instance, the commentaries by Richard Taruskin, Laurel Fay, and Malcolm Hamrick Brown are marred by an astonishingly high incidence of crass historical inaccuracies, misinterpretations, and misrepresentations.)

To commentators of this kind, the image at the head of this introduction - in which the face of Shostakovich appears, ghosted behind a Gulag watchtower in Kolyma - will appear "vulgar" and "sensationalistic". In the end, this does not matter. Truth will out. These pages are directed not at such hopelessly redundant pundits but at the man or woman in the street who, loving the music, senses its inner resonances and wishes to come closer to understanding what these might signify.

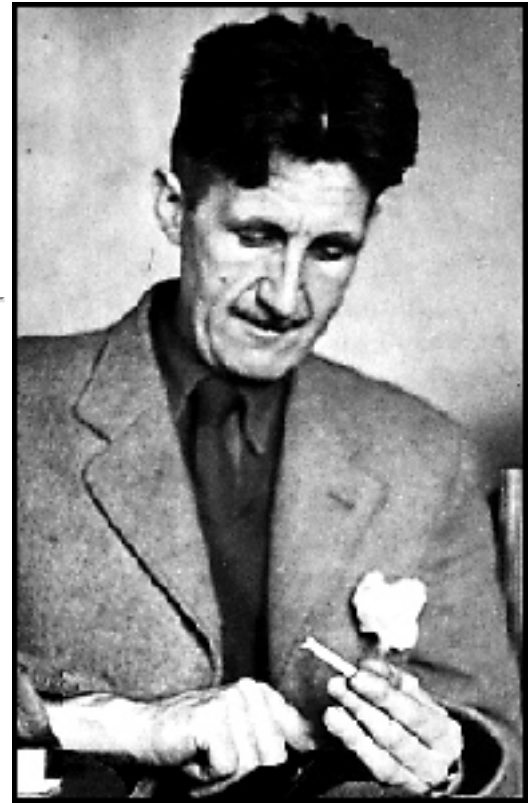
Disagreements will persist, if only because there are no real experts on Shostakovich for the simple reason that no one writing on him currently possesses the requisite grasp of music theory, the Russian language, and the adjoining fields of Russian/Soviet music, politics, history, high and low culture, drama, and literature. All that can be done for now is to set forth as much as can be said about this very subtle complex and pursue necessarily polemical debates based on our expositions. Any pretence of Olympian objectivity is, at this stage, just that: a pretence. By paying due attention to background, however, I believe that we will at least be talking a little less "off-topic", as they say in the newsgroups - while conceivably the focus of context will gradually lead to a cessation of critical hostilities and some measure of reasonable agreement about the subject in hand based on a more realistic assessments of the various contextual factors involved.

The stakes, however, are high - not least in terms of the significance the "Soviet music" debate holds for modern Western ideas of what music is. Ideas on this and several other basic issues will be found amongst the material assembled here). Please note, though, that this is not a discussion group and that no email address is given. Anyone wishing to debate questions raised in these pages should do so on Usenet via alt.fan.shostakovich.

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Oceania/USSR

Stalinism and *Nineteen Eighty-Four*



It is, perhaps, useful for Westerners unfamiliar with the Soviet background to know that a book which many of them will have read, George Orwell's *Nineteen Eighty-Four*, gives what many insiders consider to be a remarkably accurate satirical picture of Stalin's Russia around the time the novel itself was written (1946-48).

Three years older than Shostakovich, Orwell shared several characteristics with him: discipline, honesty, physical aloofness, a populist taste in literature, a preference for plain language, and a political outlook predicated on decency. Driven by a strong sense of obligation, both men identified with the worst-off in society and worked hard for the cultural departments of their countries' national broadcasting systems during the war.

Just as Shostakovich, under stress, tended to retreat in his work to memories of his happy childhood, so Orwell returned often in his writing to an idyllic vision of pre-1914 rural England - the "Golden Country" of *Nineteen Eighty-Four* (revisited at length in *Coming Up For Air*). Likewise, both men suffered towards the ends of their lives from illnesses which some critics see as having accentuated the pessimism of their later works. (The intensity of the torture scenes in *Nineteen Eighty-Four* and the "waves of pain" in Shostakovich's Thirteenth Quartet have alike been ascribed to the unpleasant medical tests each went through shortly before writing these passages.)

While Orwell, unlike Shostakovich, could write what he liked, he chose to disguise the message of his two masterpieces, the tragi-satiric anti-Communist allegories *Animal Farm* and *Nineteen Eighty-Four*, by setting them in fictional worlds, much as Soviet satirists like Zamyatin, Bulgakov, and Platonov did under duress. Banned for forty years in the USSR as counter-revolutionary propaganda, these books were published there during the late 1980s as part of Mikhail Gorbachev's drive to discredit Stalinism. Long famous by repute throughout the Communist bloc, they would have been known of by Shostakovich, though he is unlikely to have read them.

Many features of Orwell's imaginary superstate Oceania are ironic translations from Stalinist reality: the puritanical Komsomol (Young Communists) appear as the Anti-Sex League, the young informers of the Pioneers turn up as the Spies, Soviet Five-Year Plans shrink into Oceanian Three-Year Plans, and state-

regulated vodka metamorphoses into Victory Gin. Soviet jargon, though sometimes parodied - bourgeois individualism becomes "ownlife" - is more often taken over unaltered. Thus, like Stalin's USSR, Oceania has its "renegades and backsliders" who are arrested at night, questioned by relays of interrogators, "unmasked" and "unpersoned" for "counterrevolutionary activities" and then either sent to the "saltmines" or "vaporised" (liquidated).

To avoid such a fate, Orwell's hero Winston Smith adopts an "expression of quiet optimism" so as not to be accused of "facecrime" - a genuine Stalinist misdemeanour defined by the critic Ronald Hingley as "the inability to simulate an adequate degree of righteous indignation". As in Russia, the "comrades" of Oceania are regaled with news bulletins consisting almost entirely of lists of industrial production figures, most of which are triumphantly announced as "overfulfilled" and none of which are believed. As in Russia, there are constant powercuts and shortages, all essentials being obtained through the underground "free market".

The only thing in Oceania unknown under Stalinism is Orwell's two-way telescreen; the only aspect of Stalinism left out of Oceania is compulsory collectivism (instead of living in a communal apartment, Winston Smith has his own flat).

Winston's job is that of "rectification" in the newspaper section of the Ministry of Truth (known as Minitrue, in accordance with the Soviet penchant for modern-brutal abbreviations like "orgburo" and "diamat"). In this building - whose "enormous pyramidal structure" symbolises the organisation of the Communist Party - books and periodicals are rewritten and photographs altered to reflect the "correct" (i. e., the latest) view of past events.

Often taken by Western readers to be a flight of surrealist fantasy, this is a barely inflated parody of what actually happened under Stalinism. Soviet defector Arkady Shevchenko has written of his student days that "facts and concepts were always being 'corrected' in textbooks and lectures. As policy shifted at Stalin's whim, men and nations who had been in favour became pariahs overnight; established dogma turned into heresy. It could be disastrous to miss a lecture where the revised truth of the day was proclaimed for us to copy down".

Stalin's most outrageous "correction" of the past, the Soviet-Nazi pact of 1939, is satirised in *Nineteen Eighty-Four* as the alliance of Oceania with its arch-enemy Eurasia against its former ally Eastasia. ("Oceania was at war with Eastasia: Oceania had always been at war with Eastasia.") Orwell's observation that, in Oceania, the same updating of reality applied to poetry as political writing is similarly based on Stalinist fact.

Big Brother, the all-seeing leader who murders his rivals, decrees "a new, happy life" and, from ubiquitous posters and hoardings, broods over a populace conditioned by terror to love him, is, of course, Stalin "the Omniscient, the Omnipresent" himself. ("Big Brother" is what the East European

satellite nations began calling Russia just after the war.) Just as in Soviet mythology the quasi-supernatural Lenin "lives", so in Oceania "Big Brother cannot die". Equally perpetual is Oceania's devil figure Emmanuel Goldstein, counter-revolutionary author of "the book", against whom the State wages an endless struggle:

"Always there were fresh dupes waiting to be seduced by him. A day never passed when spies and saboteurs acting under his directions were not unmasked by the Thought Police. He was the commander of a vast shadowy army, an underground network of conspirators dedicated to the overthrow of the State."

This is the way Trotsky was portrayed to the Soviet people during the Thirties, a political myth which allowed Stalin's NKVD to repress millions for the imaginary crime of "Trotskyism" just as Big Brother's Thought Police repress the alleged followers of Goldstein. (Goldstein's book is a probable allusion to Trotsky's *The Revolution Betrayed*.) On the subject of Oceania's purges, Orwell is particularly literal, shifting Big Brother's Terror from the Thirties to the Sixties, but otherwise reproducing the pattern of events in Stalin's Russia with great precision. Last of Big Brother's rivals to survive are the prominent Party members Jones, Aaranson, and Rutherford:

"As so often happened, they had vanished for a year or more, so that one did not know whether they were alive or dead, and then had suddenly been brought forth to incriminate themselves in the usual way. They had confessed to intelligence with the enemy (at that date, too, the enemy was Eurasia), embezzlement of public funds, the murder of various trusted Party members, intrigues against the leadership of Big Brother which had started long before the Revolution happened, and acts of sabotage causing the deaths of hundreds of thousands of people. After confessing to these things they had been pardoned, reinstated in the Party, and given posts which were in fact sinecures but which sounded important. All three had written long, abject articles in *The Times*, analysing the reasons for their defection and promising to make amends ... A little later all three were rearrested. It appeared that they had engaged in fresh conspiracies from the very moment of their release. At their second trial they confessed to all their old crimes over again, with a whole string of new ones."

Jones, Aaranson, and Rutherford probably stand for Kamenev, Zinoviev, and Radek, to whom the events described by Orwell most closely apply. They confessed to spying for Japan, murdering Kirov, trying to murder Stalin, wanting to have murdered Lenin, and general "Trotskyite sabotage" - crimes for which they apologised at length, accompanied by fulsome expressions of admiration for Stalin, in *Pravda*. Rubashov's similar confession in Arthur Koestler's novel of 1940 *Darkness At Noon*, is a genteel affair compared to the ordeal inflicted on Winston Smith, but there is good reason to suppose Orwell's crueller picture was closer to the truth.

In *Let History Judge*, for example, Roy Medvedev quotes the deposition of Mikhail Yakubovich in 1967 concerning his alleged participation in the All-Union Bureau of Mensheviks. The trial of this non-

existent counter-revolutionary organisation took place in 1931, six years after the last Mensheviks had been liquidated. Yakubovich, a Bolshevik, was understandably reluctant to confess to membership of this imaginary party and, though tortured on "the conveyor" (i.e., driven continuously between interrogation cells by blows), he refused to comply with his captors' demands until the State Prosecutor himself, Nikolai Krylenko, paid him a visit.

Summoning Yakubovich before him in the Butyrki Prison, Krylenko told him: "I have no doubt that you personally are not guilty of anything. We are both performing our duty to the Party - I have considered and consider you a Communist. I will be the prosecutor at the trial, you will confirm the testimony given during the investigation. This is our duty to the Party, yours and mine... Have we agreed?" Yakubovich recalls: "I mumbled something indistinctly, but to the effect that I promised to do my duty. I think there were tears in my eyes. Krylenko made a gesture of approval. I left."

Confused, like Winston Smith, by beatings and sleep-deprivation, the NKVD's victims rarely had any will left to argue with their interrogator's nonsensical assertions. In fact, many were so bamboozled by propaganda and Stalin worship that they confessed instantly to whatever crimes they were accused of, preferring on principle the Party's version of their past to their own. The eager confession of Orwell's burlesque character Parsons ("Of course I'm guilty! You don't think the Party would arrest an innocent man, do you?") is only partly a joke. Eugenia Ginzburg heard similar sentiments expressed by imprisoned Party members while she herself was in the Butyrki between 1937 and 1939.

Readers behind the Iron Curtain often express amazement at Orwell's minute familiarity with their way of life: the scarcity of telephone directories, the unavailability of any books published more than twenty years previously, the material privileges enjoyed by the Soviet nomenklatura (Oceania's Inner Party), the use of swearing as an antidote to officialese, the routine corruption of the labour camp system, the employment of criminals to supervise political prisoners, and so on. Some of this trickled through to the West via the newspaper columns of foreign correspondents and Orwell evidently kept his eye out for such data.

For example, he incorporated the raising of the maximum Soviet hard labour sentence to twenty-five years when Tass announced it in 1947 while he was writing *Nineteen Eighty-Four* on Jura. Similarly, O'Brien's claim that the Party was above the laws of nature is likely to have been based on newspaper reports of Trofim Lysenko's speech to the Congress of the Soviet Academy of Agricultural Sciences in August 1948. Otherwise, he depended on talking to visitors to and defectors from the Soviet bloc and on the books and pamphlets by such people he amassed in his personal library. Much of the verisimilitude of the novel is owed to writings of this kind, including the famous formula $2+2=5$, derived from an "acceleration slogan" of 1929 (indicating that the targets of the First Five-Year Plan were achievable a year early) which he found in Eugene Lyons' *Assignment in Utopia*.

How far the theoretical apparatus of *Nineteen Eighty-Four* - Newspeak, Doublethink, and so on - was

taken from accounts of Socialist Realism is difficult to say, since much of the thought behind the technical side of Orwell's book derived from his own critical essays on language and politics. There is, though, a discrete step between imagining a mode of discourse in which ready-made phrases block free thought (Communist examples of which he collected avidly) and a language in which a word or phrase means the exact opposite of what it seems to mean. Paradoxical concepts like "democratic centralism" (meaning totalitarianism) may have given him a lead, as may the convolutions of Socialist Realist theory, but essentially Newspeak appears to have been an inspired deduction - the closest *Nineteen Eighty-Four* approaches to science fiction.

(Not that this has prevented the Poles from recognising in it a satirical projection of their own brand of officialese and taking it into their language as "nowomowa". Nor, indeed, are Orwell's theoretical constructs by any means regarded as fanciful by Soviet intellectuals. A Russian acquaintance of Orwell's Tribune colleague Tosco Fyvel told him in 1982: "With his Newspeak and Doublethink, Orwell wrote for us! No Westerner could understand him as intimately as we in the Soviet Union felt he understood our lives.")

Further instances of Orwell's logic leading him to endow Oceania with features in advance of its Stalinist model include "reality control" (a concept paralleled thirty years later by the doctrine of Soviet "information space") and O'Brien's insistence that Winston is insane (twelve years before Soviet courts started sending dissidents to psychiatric wards). Even Orwell's "exaggerations" have more often than not turned out to be justified. The Two Minutes Hate, for example, is anticipated by a piece in *Pionerskaya Pravda* for 17th December 1932 announcing that the paper's main educational mission to Soviet youth was "the cultivation of hatred". More extraordinary still, recent research (George Leggett, *The Cheka*, p.198) shows that in 1921 the Kiev secret police were executing captives with rats, much as occurs in *Nineteen Eighty-Four's* ghastly Room 101.

With this level of incisiveness, Orwell's masterpiece was bound to make a major impact in Europe where, in the words of its publisher Fredric Warburg, it was "the most powerful anti-Soviet tract that you could find - and treated as such". Robert Tucker, now Professor of Politics at Princeton, was on the staff of the American embassy in Moscow after the war and read *Nineteen Eighty-Four* soon after it appeared. In his opinion, the novel, far from being a fantasy about the future, was then happening in reality outside the embassy compound. Oceania "actually existed" in Russia in 1949.

For some years, *Nineteen Eighty-Four* was little more than a legend behind the Iron Curtain. Referring to the novel in *The Captive Mind* in 1953, Czeslaw Milosz observed that "because it is both difficult to obtain and dangerous to possess, it is known only to certain members of the Inner Party. Orwell fascinates them through his insight into details they know well... (They) are amazed that a writer who never lived in Russia should have so keen a perception into its life."

Fifteen years on, *Nineteen Eighty-Four* was sufficiently familiar to the Russian intelligentsia for Eugenia

Ginzburg to make casual allusions to it in her memoirs. The Polish philosopher Leszek Kolakowski has since praised its analytic brilliance while, in their recent history of the Soviet Union *Utopia in Power*, Aleksandr Nekrich and Mikhail Heller single out Orwell as "perhaps the only Western writer who profoundly understood the essence of the Soviet world".

Note (1995):

This piece was originally published in *Arena* in 1988 and, slightly altered, appeared as Appendix 1 of *The New Shostakovich* in 1990. When I wrote it, I hadn't seen Robert Conquest's similar essay "Orwell: 1984", originally published in 1961 and reprinted (in *Tyrants and Typewriters*) in 1989.

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Other matters

Click the hammer-and-sickle...



Democracy Wall

Scraps and squibs (for those with ears to hear)



Oceania/USSR

Stalinism and *Nineteen Eighty-Four*



Alfred Schnittke

A review of Alexander Ivashkin's biography



Mikhail Nosyrev, composer

"Good God, what was going on deep in his heart!"



The BBC's *People's Century*

Outdated views and misleading half-truths



Russian and Soviet Names

A rough guide to pronunciation



Chronologies

Lives and works of Shcherbachov, Mosolov, Shebalin, Popov, Sviridov, [Vainberg](#), [Ustvol'skaya](#), Lokshin, Nosyrev, Denisov, Boris Tchaikovsky, Schnittke, [Kancheli](#), Sil'vestrov, Tishchenko...

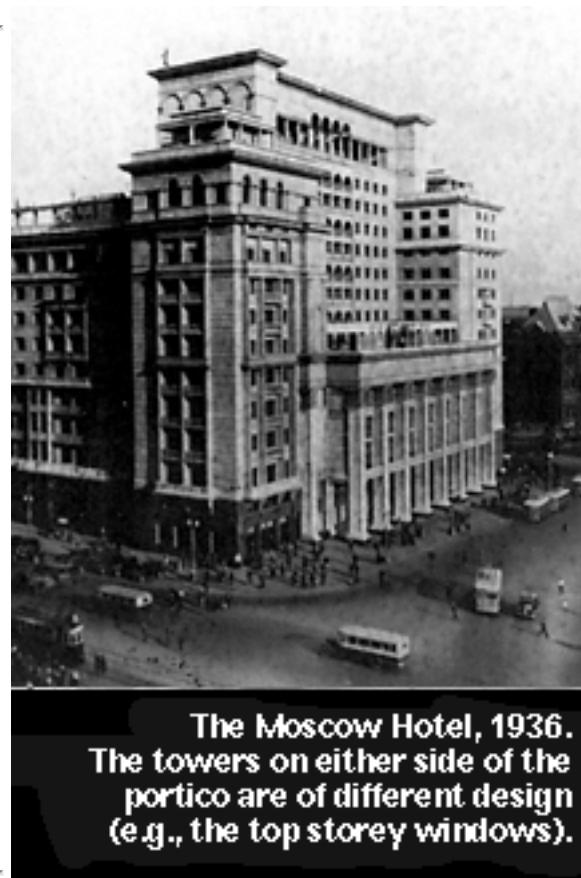
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...DEMOCRACY WALL...

Faulty Towers

From *Art Under Stalin*
by Matthew Cullerne Brown
(Phaidon Press, 1991):

"The Moscow Hotel is of particular interest because its facade, for no clear aesthetic reason, is asymmetrical. Legend has it that Stalin himself, when presented with a drawing that incorporated, on either side of a vertical axis, two alternative designs for the facade, placed his signature in the centre of the sheet, apparently approving both variants. No one dared tell him - whom the Union of Soviet Architects addressed as 'Chief Architect and Builder of our Socialist Motherland' - of his oversight, if oversight it was."



Lenin in a Hut

Excerpt from interview with Mstislav Rostropovich
by Douglas Kennedy
The Daily Telegraph, 4th November 1994

"In the brave new free market world of the Russian Federation, an entire generation of *apparatchik* composers (who were once supported by the state solely on the basis of their Party membership) find themselves out in the cold. And Rostropovich is caustically funny about the bad old days of the Union of Soviet Composers: 'For decades, a composer completely devoid of talent could go to the Ministry for Culture and say, "I have an idea for an oratorio called *Lenin in a Hut*", and they would immediately offer him a commission, because how could they refuse? So he was paid for his terrible music and as soon as it was finished it was buried in some basement. I would be fascinated to know where all this garbage is hidden today.'"

Sign Language I

Interview with Gidon Kremer by Robert Cowan
The Independent, 11th November 1994

...Cowan drew a speculative parallel between Schnittke and Shostakovich, both of whom, he felt, had, at one time or another, veered in the direction of parody...

"No, no, I wouldn't take it for parody at all, in either case," retorted Kremer emphatically. "Both composers used quotations as symbols, which in turn can be seen as elements in a collage. And yet these symbols can also have their independent meanings. If, for example, a composer quotes BACH or DSCH, or even fragments of Wagner and Rossini (as Shostakovich does in his Fifteenth Symphony), these are like so many playing cards used to develop an idea. It's not just a gimmick or a question of parody; it's more a case of provoking something in us, challenging us to look at things differently.

"Even the 'pleasing' quotations in Schnittke's music could be interpreted as a sort of alarm, warning us of all the nonsense going on around us. Schnittke isn't suggesting that his 'backward glances' recall Good Music and that all the rest is bullshit. He's reminding us that when these older styles existed, we dealt with different values - and that, nowadays, we're in a big mess.

"Take, for example, the Tango from Schnittke's first Concerto Grosso, which might initially seem like a sort of musical accident. And yet, viewed within the drama as a whole, it's as if we're suddenly looking down at the street, seeing some fool dancing there...

"The very idea of making it all seem even more ridiculous, to exaggerate things terribly, to distort something into a state of utter nonsense - sometimes that helps us to understand that a basic idea is wrong."

Sign Language II

...From an [article](#) by Polish composer Krzysztof Meyer describing his meetings with Shostakovich. This - excerpted - visit took place at Shostakovich's Moscow flat in March 1968 when Meyer was a somewhat bewildered 25-year-old...

"Suddenly, Shostakovich turned to me with a low, almost apologetic voice: 'And you have promised to play your sonata for me?'

"I sat down at the piano. When I'd finished, he remained silent for a moment, and then said: 'You play the piano very well.' He reflected for a while and added in a low as if surprised voice: 'Really

marvellously.' Then he took a look at the score, browsed through it, and added: 'Such a good sonata, a pity that it's over.' And unexpectedly he became roused: 'Why didn't you write some more, some more?!' Once again he opened the score on the last page. 'The sonata should be completed here' - he browsed through some empty pages at the end of the manuscript, moving his finger across them - 'Or here you should complete it... Or, better, here' - he moved his finger a couple of centimetres upwards - 'Or here' - he showed another spot. 'A splendid sonata, you play the piano perfectly.'

"I was in a good mood again. Meanwhile, Irina Antonovna asked us into a generously-set table in the next room for tea. Shostakovich quickly poured some wine and at one gulp emptied the whole glass. He emanated great joy and soon I found out why, when, as if incidentally, he mentioned that several days before he had finished his Twelfth Quartet. 'I was working over it at Repino. Such marvellous countryside there. It's a pity you didn't come there; we should have met there - not in Moscow but at Repino.'

"I asked him about the opus number of the new quartet. 'It's so difficult to say, so difficult. But my sister in Leningrad knows all my opuses, so I have to ask her. Oh, by the way,' he interjected, 'do you know how to say "take off the mute" in Italian? - because I have to put it in the score. Not "play without mute", but "take off the mute". Can you tell me this?'

"I wanted to find out more about the new piece, but gathered only that it was 'much more complex than the Fifth Quartet' before another subject was brought up. Shostakovich spoke faster and faster, and from time to time stopped eating and tapped a rhythm with his fingers on the table or played with a bottle-cork, tossing it from one hand to another and rolling it among plates. Then suddenly he almost burst out: 'I can't look at this lamp over us!' (It was a beautiful crystal chandelier). 'I'm always scared some part of it will fall on my head. It should be protected!' And more and more nervously he tossed the cork about on the table..."

A Movable Jest

...An Iranian critic - and Shostakovich fan - who, for reasons of prudence, wishes to remain anonymous, comments on the Russian word 'yurodstvo' and its Central Asian equivalent 'ketman', as invoked in *The Captive Mind* by the Polish writer Czeslaw Milosz...

"I prefer the Arabic word 'tashbih'. They all mean the same thing - a way of talking that sounds orthodox whilst secretly mocking orthodoxy. This is an ancient Asian tradition linked with oriental despotism, a system founded on autocratic control of irrigation systems. This despotism exists in the 'spirit' of nations like Russia, China, and Iran, irrespective of historical period, viz., Stalin, Khomeini, or the political happenings in China in 1989. The reaction of artists has always been connected with 'tashbih' and is still usual in contemporary Iranian poetry."

...The following extract, being a straightforward political joke is not, strictly speaking, of the 'yurodstvo/ketman/tashbih' type, but inasmuch as it originated in Russia - for Rafsanjani and Khomeini substitute any pair of consecutive Soviet leaders - it illustrates the international nature of satire and the universality of the despotic experience...

From "Love the revolution, shame about the reality"
an article on political corruption in Iran
by Robert Fisk (*The Independent*, 5th June 1995)

"President Rafsanjani is so worried about the collapse of the Iranian economy that he decides to telephone the Ayatollah Khomeini in Heaven for advice. But when he gets through to Heaven, God tells him that Khomeini is in another place. Mr Rafsanjani phones Hell, finds the Imam and chats to him for two hours about the state of the nation.

"Three weeks later, the phone bill arrives: \$100 for the one minute call to Heaven, \$10 for the two-hour call to Hell. Mr Rafsanjani calls the post office to query the bill: 'Why so much for a short call to Heaven and so little for a long call to Hell?' 'Simple,' replies the Iranian post office accountant. 'Heaven was an international call. Hell is local.'"

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RECOLLECTIONS OF A MAN

by **Krzysztof Meyer**

English version by Ian MacDonald

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Shostakovich was a man of contradictions. The family memories collected in the monograph by Seroff convey the picture of an unusually gifted young man, incredibly hard-working, keen to improve the living standards of his family - and, simultaneously, an everyday nuisance. These inborn character features became more and more prominent as, throughout the years, his life was submitted to severe tests and experiences, when the problem was not to provide himself and his family with adequate livelihood, but how to survive and avoid repression. So, his difficult character underwent changes, which eventually led him to a state wherein it would be hard to speak about Shostakovich as a human being responding in an ordinary way, thinking rationally and acting consistently.

His behaviour was beyond unequivocal evaluation. Some people saw an opportunist in him, others judged his actions as signifying his disapproval of the Soviet authorities, still others saw him as an embodiment of a typical Russian "possessed" man who pretends to be not quite sane and, under the guise of mental deficiency, discloses to the world in an obscure manner what is true, and, by coarse, colourless, and deliberately awkward words, reveals his thoughts. Probably he was partly all of these things, and they came inseparably together in him - like his remarkable modesty and lack of belief in his own potentials, blended with his morbid (*sic*) ambition to be the first and the best.

Obviously, his behaviour and demeanour did not win people's hearts, though many considered themselves his friends. However, in his whole life he had only a few real friends; their names can be reeled off quickly: apart from Sollertinsky, there were undoubtedly Isaac Glikman and Leo Arnshtam. His friendship with Mravinsky was irrevocably broken in the early Sixties. His relations with Shebalin were also clouded, as well as with the young Denisov, whom he strongly supported for some time. Of course, he had a group of devoted musicians who can also be regarded as his friends: the Beethoven Quartet, David Oistrakh, Mstislav Rostropovich, Moisei Vainberg - but these were, mainly, artistic friendships.

This stemmed not only from the fact that, during the composer's most difficult years, people broke with

him for their own security, but also because Shostakovich used to keep people at bay. It suffices to mention that he addressed very few people by their Christian names and he would refer even to his closest friends in a formal way or by means of their patronymic. Hence, to Sollertinsky he would say "Ivan Ivanovich", to Glikman "Isaac Davidovich", although not always consistently. All of his life he used "Mister" to Mravinsky, and with Oistrakh they called each other by their first names only in Shostakovich's final years. A factor in his isolation was his latent inability to build up contacts. He himself wrote about that while recalling his first encounter with Sollertinsky; yet when raging terror created general fear, Shostakovich could become absolutely detached. The proof for that comes from the memoirs by Nicholas Nabokov, Arthur Miller, and Hans Mayer. Having few friends, Shostakovich inevitably socialised with people who played a very ambiguous role in the cultural life of the Soviet Union.

My desire to make contact with Shostakovich arose in the late Fifties. The reason why was certainly his music rather than him as a person, because what I knew from official sources in those days did not encourage one to make an acquaintance. In Poland, as in all communist countries, Shostakovich was associated first of all with pieces like *Song of the Forests* and, at best, the "Leningrad" or the Fifth Symphony (defined solely as "the answer of a Russian composer to just criticism"). Apart from such works, there were his many unbearable propaganda-ideological statements, blatantly mirroring the attitude of the communist Party, which, for a majority of the Polish intelligentsia, were enough to condemn him. Such masterpieces as *The Nose* and *Lady Macbeth* and his early symphonies (except the First) were not widely known, Soviet propaganda insisting that they were artistically degenerate. Thus, for me Shostakovich existed only as the composer of the First, Fifth, Ninth, and Tenth symphonies, the Piano Quintet, and the Cello Sonata, since, in those years, practically nothing else was performed.

The First and Tenth symphonies sufficed, however, to open to me, as a teenage music student, a fascinating new world of sound. The rarity of his music in itself made me eager to get to know as many of his pieces as possible, yet the chances to do so were extremely restricted. A few people privileged to meet Shostakovich personally brought him closer to me and, in their descriptions, an official advocate of peace and the principles of Socialist Realism was replaced by a tragic victim of the communist regime, an intimidated man, deprived of the liberty to create and act. Unfortunately, school obligations did not allow me to attend the "Warsaw Autumn" of 1959 (I lived in Cracow then), so I lost a chance to meet him in person.

Yet since his music made me more and more impressed (I got to know the then-new Eleventh Symphony at that time), I decided to write a letter to the master and unfold to him my feelings under the influence of his art. It was a long letter and I think I enclosed some of my own pieces. As I didn't expect to hear from him, my joy was great when, contrary to hearsay about his inaccessibility, a reply came after a couple of weeks, including a photo with a dedication. It coincided with my composer's debut, so, full of excitement, I described this in my next letter, simultaneously thanking him for his quick answer. Another letter arrived, this time on a piece of thin card, perhaps the remains of some package, contained these few words: "Dear Krzysztof! I congratulate you on your first concert. Wishing you creative

success. Affectionately yours, D. Shostakovich." This is how a correspondence began - as yet, of course, not intensive - between a world-famous composer and a teenage highschool pupil, later a conservatoire student. Shostakovich's letters were always very concrete and brief though warmhearted, which made me resolve to visit Moscow one day and meet him in person.

In those times, a trip abroad - even to the so-called countries of the people's democracies and the Soviet Union - was an exceedingly difficult undertaking. Private trips were basically not allowed and places in group excursions were hard to come by. After a couple of months of various problems, I finally succeeded in arranging the formalities, and wrote to Shostakovich that I was coming to Moscow and would be delighted to see him there. On the eve of my departure I received the following letter: "... Unfortunately I will not be able to meet you, since at that time I will be away from Moscow..." Yet I did not drop out of my trip and when I reached Moscow, I made up my mind to try my luck come what may.

I went to the office of the Composers' Union where Khrennikov's personal secretary informed me with forced politeness that Dmitri Shostakovich was at home (!) and would stay in Moscow for a week, but that he was too busy to receive visitors. Giving me his telephone number was out of the question. I sensed that my wish to meet him was not welcome among the officials of the Union - yet I never managed properly to assess the extent and depth of their resentment towards Shostakovich. When in the late Eighties I asked one of the more polite high-ranking Union functionaries to hand over a small parcel to the composer's widow, I found out after several months that it had not been delivered because "no one knows where Mrs Shostakovich is". Meanwhile the "unobtainable" person lived four floors above in the same building throughout all that time!

The following year, having wasted several weeks on arranging passport formalities I set off again to Moscow. At that time the composer did not dwell in Kutuzovsky Prospect, but in the very centre of Moscow in a small street previously called Brusovsky Close, for years inhabited by many outstanding artists. Among others, Vsevolod Meyerhold lived there from 1928 till his death. In this street there also lived the outstanding singer Antonina Niezdanova, whose name the street assumed after her death. Here too stands a small Orthodox Church, one of a few not closed down even during the worst years. Niezdanova Street is an offshoot from one of the main Moscow traffic arteries, Tverska (renamed Gorky Street when Gorky was still alive) and ends near Herten Street, known for the Conservatoire with its famous Piotr Tchaikovsky Great Concert Hall. The first part of Niezdanova Street is connected by a small alley to the equally small Ogariiev Street which runs parallel with it. In the late Fifties this alley was built over by a complex of many-storied edifices in the Socialist Realist style. This wing of Niezdanova Street was occupied by the Soviet Composers' Union and its branch, the Russian Republic Composers' Union, which for eight years was headed by Shostakovich.

Here also was the editorial office of the *Sovetskaya muzika* monthly, a concert hall, the department of foreign contacts, and a low-priced but (by Moscow standards) elegant restaurant open only to Composers' Union members. Those blocks of flats were inhabited by over a hundred families belonging

to the country's most eminent composers, musicologists, and performers - among them, on floor 6, Shostakovich, and a floor below him, Aram Khachaturian and Dmitri Kabalevsky. Nearby there also lived Mstislav Rostropovich and Leonid Kogan.

That time I was in luck. It turned out that not only was Shostakovich in Moscow but he agreed to spare some time to meet me. Before this happened I wasted much time finding his phone number, since in the Soviet Union there have been no phone directories for years, and to get any number required detective skills. A meeting could be held only after settling the date on the phone, which in fact was not easy due to the endless composers' duties. The appointment finally took place after several days and a dozen or so phone conversations with his secretary at the Composers' Union. Finally, she notified me that I was to appear at such and such an hour a.m. and to be absolutely punctual. (As I learned later on, punctuality was demanded and observed to an extreme degree by Shostakovich, which, by the way, was one of the few characteristics he shared with Prokofiev.)

The appointment was to take place at his office in the Russian Republic Composers' Union. When I arrived at the arranged time and entered the building, a typical Russian *babushka* sitting in the corridor at the gate entrance asked me my business. (Almost every Moscow tenement-house employs a concierge.) After a lift had taken me to the second floor (Shostakovich lived four floors up), I entered a spacious secretarial office, as busy as a large post office. Despite the crowd of clients and general confusion, the employees clearly had complete control over everything because a secretary, who knew exactly who I was and why I'd come, immediately approached me. A half-opened door to the left led to a big office. Far ahead, at the end of this room two people were standing, one of whom seemed to resemble Shostakovich. I had barely managed to take off my coat before this man approached me - and it was indeed Shostakovich.

He was shorter than I'd imagined. Despite the early hour, he was dressed in an official dark navy blue suit and snow white shirt, but, in contrast to his immaculate attire, he was unshaven. He spoke to me in a muffled, faintly hoarse, and unexpectedly high voice, chaotically uttering the following words: "A vi, kak govorytie - tak skazat, po russky? Sprechen Sie Deutsch? Parlez-vous francais? Do you speak, tak skazat, English?" These questions sounded bizarre since for three years we had carried on our correspondence in Russian - and afterwards I found out that, apart from a bit of English, Shostakovich spoke no foreign language!

With a hand gesture, he invited me into the big room on the left. He did it in an extremely formal manner, full of reserve, without any polite facial expression. Only later on was I to learn that towards the people whom he hardly knew, he was always stiff and inaccessible. Shostakovich immediately took a pack of cigarettes out of his pocket, lit one, and inhaled deeply. The meeting began with conventional questions asked by him as if in a hurry: where did I study, under whom, etc. It would have been less peculiar had I not repeatedly written about all this in my letters. Had he forgotten - or not read them carefully? Did he ask such questions to start a conversation and not listen to the answers? Certainly my answers made no impression on him. His face was very vivid, but solely due to its nervous twitches and

darting eyes. Only when I showed him the score of my First Piano Sonata did he take notice. I even thought I saw some interest in his face.

We sat down at the piano, Shostakovich taking the seat on the right side of the instrument. He quickly took off his old-fashioned, round-rimmed glasses, put on some others (even more obsolete), and began to browse nervily through my score. While I was playing, he carefully followed the music, turning pages. In this big, almost empty office, in which there were a desk, a small table, office cupboards, and two concert pianos, the reverberation was so huge that the music resounded unbearably and sounds almost blended with one another. Then a strange thought came to my mind that next door, in the secretarial office, people must be saying "What on earth is that racket in Shostakovich's office?", and that someone would appear and stop it. And at that precise moment, my fear came true.

I'd almost finished playing when a young man came into the office without having knocked on the door, heading for the piano at a brisk pace. Shostakovich sprang to his feet, greeted him and said: "Let me introduce you: Polish composer Krzysztof Meyer, composer Andrei Yakovlevich Eshpay. This is a very good composer, you know, a very good composer. In addition," he told me with a stone-like face, "he plays by himself." They quickly exchanged some remarks and Eshpay left the office. "Your sonata is, I would say, interesting, good music and, I would say, I like it. And what else," he suddenly asked warmly, "will you show me? A string quartet?"

He had a look at this and suddenly his kind expression vanished as fast as it had arrived. "Why this different notation?" he asked abruptly. "This is the fashion now, is it?" I tried to explain to him that such music couldn't be registered by means of traditional signs. "Yes, yes, so this is the fashion now." He repeated this sentence as if not listening to what I'd said. He leafed through three pages and instantly, as if he had seen the score, remarked: "Here should be A sharp, not C. Shouldn't it?" I looked at the notes. Absolutely! In a second, he'd detected a mistake, proving that he'd immediately grasped the sense of music alien to him.

As we played through the final movement of the piece four-handed, he repeated his earlier sentence as if I hadn't shown him the quartet at all: "Your sonata is interesting, good music. I liked it, I would say, very much. It is also good that you play it by yourself, because every composer should play the piano." At each of our subsequent meetings, he would repeat this sentence.

He then got up from the piano, went over to the desk, sat down with his back to the window, and again took the pack of cigarettes out of the pocket. Though I've never smoked, for a while I was curious to see whether he would offer me one. Yet he pulled out only one cigarette, lit it and, for a moment, seemed lost in thought. All of a sudden, he came round and again a certain kindness appeared in his face. For the third time he repeated the same sentence about my sonata. Then he sat up: "A concert of your music

should be organized, here, at the Composers' Union. We will make a concert, make a concert. It is necessary to make concerts interchangeably between composers' unions, between Warsaw and Moscow."

He said it in a stifled, hoarse, high treble, swallowing syllables and repeating certain words a few times. Then he added that in the near future he was coming to Poland. When I asked when he was coming and whether it was to do with the "Warsaw Autumn" festival, he replied: "No, not with the 'Warsaw Autumn', no, no. I will write to you when I am coming. I will write a letter."

I never received such a letter. Nor did I ever hear anything more about wanting to organize interchangeable concerts between the Unions. Maybe he forgot about it soon thereafter; or maybe it was only meant as an expression of kindness. Meanwhile I was so much looking forward to this appointment that the conversation completely stopped. I wanted to learn a few things, to ask about various matters linked to his music, but my efforts to rekindle our talk resulted in failure. Shostakovich was on pins and needles, lighting one cigarette after another, almost literally waving away my questions.

For instance, I wanted very much to know why his early incidental music for *Hamlet*, written in 1932 for the Vakhtangov Theatre, was so grotesque and comic and without any correspondence to Shakespeare's drama. "Because such was the director's concept," he rapidly rejoined before I finished the sentence. When I mentioned that on Prague radio I'd heard his *May Day* symphony, at that time unknown and rarely performed, he almost pretended that he hadn't heard me. I became aware that he had not the slightest wish to discuss his music. But when I mentioned that I had just bought the scores of his quartets, his face showed satisfaction. "Oh, quartets." He got excited. "Yes, quartets. Give me the score, I'll sign it." And to my astonishment he grabbed the first volume.

Opening it, he paused for thought, and asked: "And how precisely is your name spelled?" I was totally taken aback. Such a question after three years of relatively regular correspondence! I should have noticed that in none of his letters did he write my surname, first name, and address without a mistake. And that is how it remained till the end of an acquaintance lasting more than ten years which, with the passage of time, turned into a genuinely close friendship. Nor did I then know that the nice words he wrote in the score were merely one of two standard dedications which he almost automatically wrote down for everybody, close and distant acquaintances, autograph collectors and friends: "With fond memories" or "With best wishes".

And so my first meeting with Shostakovich came to an end. His final words were as follows: "That sonata of yours is interesting, good music. I liked it, I would say, a lot. It is good that you play it by yourself, because every composer should play the piano." He led me back to the secretarial office and, while I was putting my coat on, he talked to somebody else. I left the office in Niezdanova Street with the conviction that I would probably never get to know this man better.

We met for the second time in March 1968. From our correspondence it was more and more evident that my approach to contemporary music was very different from his traditional views on the subject, which he underlined clearly several times. Thus I did not anticipate much from our ensuing conversation.

I remember walking to his flat and, having a little time left, standing in front of the house in Niezdanova Street, watching the traffic. Nearby a group of musicologists passionately discussed the forthcoming first post-war official meeting with West German composers. Across the street, three famous Moscow composers, very tipsy, were coming out of the restaurant. Surrounded by his employees, Tikhon Khrennikov was passing some instructions to them. Dmitri Kabalevsky, loaded with skis and a rucksack, got into a large car with his daughter. Everyone there was in the music world. It was noisy and busy. I was struck by the contrast between confusion, so typical of that place, and the tranquillity of the waning day - and also the presence of nature so perceptible in Moscow at that time: the smell of soil and melting snow, a sign of coming spring.

At the agreed hour I rang the bell of his flat. The door was opened by Maria Dmitrievna Kozhunova, Shostakovich's long-serving housemaid, followed by his young wife Irina Antonovna, and my host who literally ran into the corridor. Since the last time we met, he had lived through his first heart attack, broken his leg for the second time, and given up smoking - all of which he communicated to me right away: "Doctors have deprived me of all life's pleasures, all life's pleasures." To my great surprise he gave the impression of a totally different man. He emanated *joie de vivre*, was cheerful, and in no way resembled the low-spirited introvert of three and a half years before. He wore an incredibly ugly though carefully ironed suit of a rust-brown colour and a matching tie. With a warm gesture he invited me to his study.

It was an enormous room which in a strange way revealed a combination of good taste and a lack of any interest in aesthetics. Right at the entrance, on the left, there was an old and fairly shabby sofa, and a book-case with books thrown here and there. Over the sofa there was a familiar portrait of Shostakovich at the age of 13 painted by Kustodiev, and, next to this, another small drawing by the same artist depicting Mitya in profile, playing the piano. On the other side of the room there were two pianos, both out of tune and clearly used only seldom by my host. On this wall were Shostakovich's photographs, one of which, hugely enlarged, depicted him sitting with his back to a piano. There were other photographs of him. (As I noticed after a few visits, these usually appeared very briefly on the wall - passing fancies, presumably.) There were pictures of Shebalin, Mahler, and Mussorgsky as well as caricatures of the Beethoven Quartet members - Tsyganov, the Shirinsky brothers, and Borisovsky - and a sculpture of Beethoven's head.

Elsewhere, the walls were decorated with a poster from a concert devoted to his music and framed diplomas of honorary doctorates. Between two enormous windows there were a desk with a huge lampshade (antique?), two grand silver candlesticks, and a disordered mass of objects: a box of traditional nibs, penholders for fountain pens, an old writing pad, a variety of pens, pencils, markers, and the penknives he used to cut cigarettes which evidently remained from his days as a chain-smoker. Nearby were an agenda book, two big inkstands, a telephone, and many other bits and pieces, and on the

right side of the desk a table with a tape-recorder. A huge antique clock was ticking loudly and every half an hour it struck the time. Opposite the windows there was a huge - and, to be honest, fairly vulgar - portrait of Nana, the heroine of Zola's novel, painted, as I learned later, by a friend of Shostakovich, Peter Williams. There was also a set of primitively installed exercise-bars on which to practice gymnastics.

Shostakovich sat down on a swivel stool at the piano, placing me a fair distance away from him on the sofa by the entrance. Very excited, he started by asking my impressions of my journey from Siberia (I had just returned from Novosibirsk), about the concerts devoted to my compositions, and the people I had met there. Every now and then he interrupted me with comments: "Oh, Slonym, a splendid pianist" or "Kotlarevsky - such a good man, a real believer, you understand, a real believer." He seemed interested in everything down to the smallest detail. Then suddenly he changed the subject and began to tell me what to see in Moscow. Eventually he asked whether I had brought any of my pieces with me and when I told him about the recording of my symphony and the score of my new piano sonata, he exclaimed: "Very well, let me see it, let me see it!"

Irina Antonovna switched on the tape-recorder and Shostakovich sat down at the desk, listening to the music and simultaneously reading the score. His face was no longer cheerful; he was fully concentrated, his head leaning on his left hand. Occasionally he nervously tapped his cheek with fingers. While he was listening, Raisa Glezer, a Moscow musicologist living in the adjoining flat, came in. Having forgotten that he'd invited her, Shostakovich nearly jumped up with agitation: "Lock the door, lock...," he wheezed. Then he went back to listening to my symphony with an inscrutable look. After he'd finished, he began asking meticulous and, in fact, insignificant questions, as if to avoid expressing his opinion about the piece, which perhaps he did not like. The conversation continued in a more and more awkward manner. Suddenly, he turned to me with a low, almost apologetic voice: "And you have promised to play your sonata for me?"

I sat down at the piano and the situation from three years earlier was repeated. Again it was me who played, with him sitting on my right, turning pages. When I'd finished, he remained silent for a moment, and then said: "You play the piano very well." He reflected for a while and added in a low as if surprised voice: "Really marvellously." Then he took a look at the score, browsed through it, and added: "Such a good sonata, a pity that it's over." And unexpectedly he became roused: "Why didn't you write some more, some more?!" Once again he opened the score on the last page. "The sonata should be completed here" - he browsed through some empty pages at the end of the manuscript, moving his finger across them - "Oh, here you should complete it... Or, better, here" - he moved his finger a couple of centimetres upwards - "Or here" - he showed another spot. "A splendid sonata, you play the piano perfectly."

I was in a good mood again. Meanwhile, Irina Antonovna asked us into a generously-set table in the

next room for tea. Shostakovich quickly poured some wine and at one gulp emptied the whole glass. He emanated great joy and soon I found out why, when, as if incidentally, he mentioned that several days before he had finished his Twelfth Quartet. "I was working over it at Repino. Such marvellous countryside there. It's a pity you didn't come there; we should have met there; not in Moscow but at Repino."

I asked him about the opus number of the new quartet. "It's so difficult to say, so difficult. But my sister in Leningrad knows all my opuses, so I have to ask her. Oh, by the way," he interjected, "do you know how to say 'take off the mute' in Italian? - because I have to put it in the score. Not 'play without mute', but 'take off the mute'. Can you tell me this? I wrote this quartet for Tsyganov. I hope he wants to play it, I hope..."

I wanted to find out more about the new piece, but gathered only that it was "much more complex than the Fifth Quartet" before another subject was brought up. Shostakovich spoke faster and faster, and from time to time stopped eating and tapped a rhythm with his fingers on the table or played with a bottle-cork, tossing it from one hand to another and rolling it among plates. Then suddenly he almost burst out: "I can't look at this lamp over us!" (It was a beautiful crystal chandelier). "I'm always scared some part of it will fall on my head. It should be protected!" And more and more nervously he tossed the cork about on the table.

Then he took a sudden interest in Poland and Polish music. He recalled that his father had spoken Polish perfectly and recited a funny nursery rhyme by Jan Brzechwa. Then he added, as if excusing himself: "Maybe it displeases you, but I don't like Chopin too much. Um, for example, the A major prelude..." - and he began to sing in a muffled, high voice imitating playing a piano, tossing his hands in the air with an abandon more appropriate to one of Liszt's *Études d'exécution transcendante* than to Chopin's simple miniature. Then, abruptly, he declared: "I can't sing. I've lost my voice completely."

Then, again, rapidly changing the subject: "Do you know the Polish composer, Grazyna Bacewicz?" As it turned out, he knew Grazyna Bacewicz and liked her music very much, though it differed greatly from his own work. When she died in the following year, he wrote me a beautiful letter full of sorrow, revealing how much he had appreciated and liked this outstanding composer. At the time, however, he was satisfied solely with my affirmative reply, passing quickly on to the opinion that Lutoslawski was a master and that Penderecki's *Passion* contained too much slow music. "Too much slow music," he repeated. "In fact there's also too much slow music in your symphony." His good mood growing, he started to praise Bartok: "He's such a good composer." He fell into a dreamy mood. "You know, his quartets are a wonderful school for composers; every one is better and better." Since Bartok had visited the Soviet Union in 1929, I began to ask him whether he'd had a chance to meet him. "No, no, unfortunately not," he butted in. "Bartok was in Moscow at that time, and I don't know whether you know that I lived in Leningrad then."

He was talking almost nonstop and seemed pleased with his own, often unexpected, expressions. Next, he was telling me joyfully about the new opera of Moisei Vainberg, *The Passenger*. "This is an amazing work." He repeated it many times. "A remarkable opera." When Raisa Glezer eventually stood up, thinking it was time to go, he demurred: "Where are you all hurrying off to? Please stay longer, please. Anyway, we'll see each other tomorrow. Perhaps I'll come to your concert." (The following day I was to have my own concert in Moscow.)

While saying goodbye, two other funny episodes happened. At that time I was thinking of writing a monograph on him, so I asked him about the maiden name of his mother. Confused, he looked at his wife, as if not comprehending the question and Irina Antonovna, with calm tranquillity, helped him out with the answer. Then I presented him with a large and beautiful photograph of him which someone had given me in Novosibirsk. He was pleased: "Do you want my autograph? I'll put it down right away!" Though I wasn't expecting this, he grabbed an old pen and wrote a few words on the picture. Then, while handing it over to me, he withdrew his hand and put down something else. Before we'd even left the flat, he turned and disappeared into his study. All that remained was a memory of an unusually nice, warm, and wonderful meeting.

We met again in autumn 1969 on the occasion of the Moscow première of his Fourteenth Symphony. I arrived in Moscow on the day of the concert, 8th October. I didn't realize how lucky I was since, because of the misty autumn weather, it was the only flight to arrive on time that week. It was impossible to get a ticket to the concert, but my cultivated contacts at the Composers' Union promised to help me. Hours later I was the lucky owner of an invitation; only on the following day did I find out that I had received it from the composer himself, as initially it had been meant for his son, Maxim.

The concert was attended by crowds of people and though it was not a sensation on a par with the world première of the Thirteenth Symphony, the seats in the Great Hall of the Tchaikovsky Conservatoire were full long before the Moscow Chamber Orchestra and its conductor, Rudolph Barshai came on stage. In the first part of the concert, Haydn's *La Passione* was sensationally performed but made scarcely any impression; it was obvious that everybody was waiting for the second part, for Shostakovich's symphony. The new piece was performed even more perfectly. Galina Vishnevskaya, Mark Reshetin, and the twenty-piece orchestra achieved a level of intensity seldom experienced. [See Russian Disc RD CD 11 192. - I.M.] As I learned later, Barshai had taken several dozen rehearsals before the concert.

When the final sounds had died, I expected thunderous applause and a frenzy equivalent to the premières of the Fifth and Seventh symphonies - and certainly the ovations went on for a long time. Compared to regular concerts it was an exceptional success with the composer appearing onstage a dozen times. Yet the audience seemed a bit dismayed by the unusually concentrated, profound music, whose character, atmosphere, and subject matter warranted reflection rather than external expressions of enthusiasm.

Off-stage Shostakovich was surrounded by a crowd of his admirers. Before me was Aram Khachaturian,

who kissed him, crying: "Mitya, many thanks, you're a genius!" Shostakovich made a wry face and thanked him with one word. When I approached him to express my gratitude for this crucial experience, not only did he not say a word but seemed not to recognize me at all. When I added that I'd come straight from Warsaw, he stared at me blankly. To an acquaintance of mine, who also congratulated him, Shostakovich responded with a few warm words. This must have looked strange, since my acquaintance asked me suspiciously: "Have you really met before?" Many years later, Irina Shostakovich told me that the composer had been so highly disturbed that he had been unable to react normally when meeting his friends. And I recalled the story of his meeting with Anna Akhmatova.

They had known each other from before the war. The great poetess appreciated the composer very much, dedicating one of her poems to him. During Zhdanov's slanderous campaigns, their mutual contacts were broken, but they met again one day in the early Sixties at Komarovo, near Leningrad. Smartly dressed and well-groomed, Akhmatova paid Shostakovich a visit. The composer, never particular about his attire, greeted her in casual holiday wear. Afterwards, they sat at the table in complete silence. Irina Antonovna served tea and they stayed silent. The silence went on for almost an hour, despite the attempts by the composer's wife to disrupt it. Finally, Akhmatova stood up. They never met again. A couple of months later Akhmatova died.

Two days after this disconcerting encounter at the Moscow Conservatory, I met Shostakovich at the Bolshoi Theatre. As usual he spent the intermission in his seat. He reacted instantly upon seeing me. "Good evening! How about the last 'Warsaw Autumn'?" We arranged a meeting for the following morning at his place, though he apologized in advance for "not being able to receive me as he ought to".

Knowing his predilection for punctuality, I showed up right on time. The door was opened by Shostakovich, so upset that he was almost trembling: "I've been phoning everywhere for you! I tried all the hotels! Where have you been?" "What happened?", I asked, worried about his anxiety. "What do you mean what happened? Can't you see? The lift isn't working! You have to walk up to the seventh floor! I wanted to change the date of our meeting! But I couldn't find you anywhere! I'm so sorry!" True, the lift wasn't working, but I was unable to convince him that it didn't matter at all. He carried on apologizing and explaining that it had recently been out of order so often...

That day he was in a bad mood and probably felt unwell. He didn't smile once. When I'd taken a closer look at him, I was sorry to see that, since the previous year, he'd aged more than in the previous four. Nervously he fixed and cleaned his new, much stronger glasses again and again. His complexion was unhealthy and the skin of his hands was peeling alarmingly. As usual, he was dressed in a bizarre way - in an old grey suit (judging from its cut, for official occasions) and a creased flannel shirt.

The talk began about Beethoven whose Ninth Symphony he had heard in concert not long before. "I've not heard it for a long time, but at last I can see how marvellously written this work is! With Beethoven we have everything" - he was enthusiastic - "Both classicism and romanticism and the 20th century." He

became lost in thought. "So many astonishing works," he added after a while. "So many wonderful discoveries. Not only in the Ninth Symphony - also in the late sonatas, especially the *Hammerklavier*." He went to the piano and played a fragment of the *Adagio*. "All is already there. And also in the *Grosse Fuge*... I like the *Grosse Fuge* a lot." Suddenly he got excited. "Let's play the *Grosse Fuge*."

He went to the closet, took out the score, and handed it to me. "You'll play the parts of the first violin and viola on one piano and I'll play the parts of the second violin and cello on the other." "And how will we split the notes?" I asked, seeing that there was only one score. Shostakovich waved this objection aside. "Never mind, I'll play by heart!" And though it may seem incredible, Shostakovich, who at that time found it difficult to play the piano, not only played both parts quite efficiently in terms of a technique, but also made not a single mistake, performing the whole of this complex piece from memory!

Later, however, he appeared tired and withdrawn. He didn't even react to the arrival of Moisei Vainberg. He only asked if I'd brought some music of mine as he wanted to see my new pieces. I showed him a violin concerto brought specially for this purpose and, afterwards, a new symphony for choir and orchestra. He wanted to hear both pieces, but declared it impossible. "You know, my wife isn't here." He made a helpless gesture. "I don't know how to use the tape-recorder." He was genuinely stunned when I showed him how easy it was.

As usual he listened with the score in front of him. "Such a marvellous symphony! Splendid, splendid! I like it so much." Then he assumed an apologetic expression: "Please, let me have this recording." I was amazed for a moment. Then Vainberg whispered to me (in Polish): "He really likes it. Please present him with your recording." Shostakovich noticed Vainberg's reaction and became even more uncomfortable: "You think I impose on you? Not at all, indeed! Can you spare me this recording?"

As we were parting, he recommended an incredibly long list of people I should visit in Leningrad, where I was going the following day. "And when you return to Moscow, please call me so we can meet again." Need I add that when I called again after a week, he expressed no interest in meeting me, and - like the year before - he didn't show up at the Moscow concert devoted to my compositions, despite repeatedly assuring me he would come only a day earlier? Once again he paid a few compliments to my Second Symphony and then we said goodbye - this time for a year.

All my meetings with Shostakovich were fascinating, though also nerve-wracking as one could never predict his moods and demeanour. A closer familiarity developed between us in the early Seventies, but even then he used to surprise me with his behaviour and questions. His letters, too, reflected his character - full of contradictions, often sparse but sometimes meticulously describing insignificant details. For me, those letters manifested his anxieties and experiences better than our chaotic, nervous

conversations.

Unfortunately, most of his letters mainly concerned his incessantly declining health. Everybody knew that the developing paralysis of his hands, not to mention his lung cancer, were incurable, but Shostakovich still harboured a belief in recovery, though perhaps, as in many such cases, it was self-deception. "I'll live a hundred years," he said to a journalist of the *Frankfurter Allgemeinen* in 1973. "I have iron health and will live a long time," he assured one of his biographers at a time when climbing a few stairs at the entrance of his house in Moscow caused him much trouble.

The theme of his illness and recovery recurred in his letters: "I feel much better," he wrote to me in January 1968. "I've come back home after a four-month stay in hospital. I broke my leg. It's all right now, though I can hardly climb the stairs, or, especially, go downstairs." In a letter of 2nd May 1970, I read: "I've been at Kurgan for a long time now and I am treated by the eminent doctor G. A. Ilizarov. He's trying to 'bring into order' my hands and legs." Two months later, he continued: "The treatment has had no favourable results. In mid August I'll go to Kurgan again to have Ilizarov complete the treatment, as he says, 'with a consonant chord'."

From his letters I knew that he also suffered from creative problems. In spite of such masterpieces as the Fourteenth Symphony, and the Twelfth and Thirteenth Quartets, he was losing faith in his skills. "Nothing comes out anymore," he told me once. "I'm finished..." In one letter, he complained that he couldn't finish the film music for *King Lear*. In 1971, I received a depressing letter from him: "Dear Krzysztof! Thank you for your Third Quartet. This is a great joy for me and an honour that you've dedicated your new piece to me for my 65th birthday. Thank you. I've been ill recently. I'm ill now, too. I still hope, though, that I'll regain my strength. I'm very weak now. This summer I finished another symphony, the Fifteenth. Probably I shouldn't compose anymore. But I can't live without it. The symphony has four movements. It includes exact quotations from Rossini, Wagner, and Beethoven. This and that written under Mahler's influence. I'd really like to make you acquainted with this symphony." This letter accurately reflects his great modesty. He wrote these words on the eve of his second heart attack.

I visited him after he had left hospital. He was in an unusually cheerful, almost excited mood. When I entered the room, he cried out joyfully: "Wonderful that you're here! Let's start by exchanging souvenirs. Souvenirs first!" All of his life he liked receiving and giving presents, yet never precious ones; as a rule, small gifts, funny or practical, were the most welcome. Acquaintances knew that his favourite objects were candlesticks, so he had plenty delivered on various occasions. He was as pleased as a child when, on his birthday, the room was lit with as many candles as his age in years.

At this meeting he talked a lot - in fact nonstop, not allowing anyone else to speak. He expounded mainly on his illness, or rather on how he had overcome it, as he happily thought. Among the assembled guests, I remember most of all his friend of youth, the film director Leo Arnshtam, who regarded him

with the highest admiration, almost adoration. Shostakovich jumped from one subject to another, enjoying everything, before suddenly exclaiming: "Lovka, you know, Krzysztof Ivanich (for several years he had referred to me thus) tells me that there's flue in Cracow too now. Not only here, not only here. And I don't have flue!"

Such moments were fewer and fewer. When we saw each other for the last time, in April 1974, he was very weak and tired. He confessed: "Now I know for sure that I'll never recover. But I've learned not to think about it."

This last meeting was particularly depressing. He sat on the chair, almost not moving, gesturing only with his fit left hand. He couldn't see well, which his thick glasses indicated. (He admitted that his short-sightedness was more than fifteen diopters.) Irina Antonovna brought a big bottle of Napoleon brandy and he boasted that his doctors had allowed him to drink alcohol again. We sat for several hours, slowly sipping cognac. Shostakovich gradually became more animated. Not much, however, was left of his old spontaneity and vehemence. Only once when the talk was about Mahler did he cry out: "His symphonies!... I like the First one best... and also the Second... and Third... Also the Fourth is wonderful!... and Fifth. Also the Sixth and Seventh... The Eighth is marvellous... and the Ninth!!!... yes, and the Tenth. But if I was told I had only one hour to live, I'd like most to listen to the final part of the *Song of the Earth*."

For years I had been encouraging him to write a clarinet quintet. He pondered on it: "Who knows... I've never thought about it... but this is an interesting idea." During our last meeting he was not so convinced: "I don't like Brahms' Clarinet Quintet. I prefer the Horn Trio. Once I heard Tsyganov playing it often... And perhaps I don't know the Quintet so well... Mozart's Quintet is splendid... but Brahms's?... I guess Brahms is primarily a symphonist..." And suddenly he got excited: "I like the Fourth Symphony most, it's the best one. Then the Second, the First, and the Third least of all, that's for sure."

On that occasion it was him who wanted to show me his pieces: the Songs to Verses by Marina Tsvetayeva and the Fourteenth Quartet. And so the roles were reversed: he sat on the chair which I often used to occupy; I took the seat at the desk and listened to his music, holding in my hands the unpublished scores. If I can put it so immodestly, his new vocal cycle did not convince me at all, so after having listened to the piece, I sat over the score in silence for a long time, just as he had when he didn't like my music. Since, however, he once wrote in one of his letters that "the best relations should always be kept between us and this only requires that we tell each other the truth", I decided to reveal my reservations to him. He replied with sadness: "Yes, it is necessary to be always in search, one can't repeat oneself." Hence, later, I was very pleased to congratulate him on his new quartet, whose first movement was particularly delightful. He stated that he composed quartets easily, but the really complex task was to write a string trio. "At least that's what Edik Denisov told me," he added, smiling inscrutably.

At that last meeting he kept returning to the past; he even played on the piano the subject of the counterpoint exam set by Glazunov. He referred to Shebalin, to his old students. Once again he recollected Kotlarevsky with pleasure. It was clear that he lived mainly on his memories. His desk was loaded with mementoes of the past which I'd not seen before: photographs of him with the Beethoven Quartet, the portrait of Igor Stravinsky, and the diploma of the Academie Charles de Cros for the recording of *Katerina Izmailova*. When saying goodbye, he said that it wouldn't be possible to set a date for another meeting. "Because, you know, I'm a very moody person," he explained, adding: "I believe we'll meet in the very near future."

We saw each other no more. We had many phone conversations, I received a couple of letters, and once a score of the Thirteenth Symphony with a nice dedication arrived. On 10th August 1975 I got a telegram informing me of his death. I went to the funeral, very official and pompous. A few days after I got back to Poland, his last letter came, scribbled with his nearly paralyzed hand during his stay in hospital at the end of July:

"Dear Krzysztof! Thank you for remembrance, thank you for your letter... I'm back in hospital again due to my heart and lung problems. I can hardly write with my right hand. Please don't be upset by this distorted handwriting... With my best regards. D. Shostakovich. P.S. Though it was very hard for me, I've written a sonata for viola and piano. - D. Sh."

If I was to add something else to these incomplete recollections about Shostakovich, I could only refer to one of the letters of Thomas Mann, who wrote that when he had personally met Gustav Mahler, he realized for the first time in his life that he had a truly great man before him. Shostakovich likewise emanated a unique greatness, goodness, and some irresistible magnetic power.

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Shostakovichiana

A collection
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Speaking of Shostakovich...

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D. Shostakovich

**From the inaugural declaration
of the International Shostakovich Association
(1992)**

"The Russian composer Dmitri Shostakovich, whose music is known and played throughout the world, continues to acquire new and ever more fervent admirers. He epitomises the most noble traditions and values of our civilization.

"The personality of Shostakovich proved a powerful moral influence on his contemporaries. During the hard and cruel era of Stalinism, he had the courage to express in his music the misery of his people by means of an extraordinary dramatic feeling, and to denounce the hidden forces which were then eliminating millions of human lives. His music became a moral support for all who were persecuted. Belief in the final victory of justice, instilled through his works, transformed his music into a powerful stimulus to the spirit of resistance and freedom.

"The inner power of his music, always of great vividness, enriches the many thousands of new listeners who discover it with eagerness and pleasure. Thus, even after his death, Dmitri Shostakovich continues to lead the world towards light and reason. His work, of universal value, is recognised by all."

**Association Internationale "Dmitri Chostakovitch"
President: H el ene Ahrweiller
Vice-President: Irina Shostakovich
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"Do Not Judge Me Harshly"

Anti-Communism in Shostakovich's letters to Isaak Glikman

by Ian MacDonald and Dmitry Feofanov

Dear Isaak Davidovich,

I arrived in Odessa on the day of the All-Peoples celebration of the 40th anniversary of Soviet Ukraine. This morning, I went out into the street. You, of course, understand that one cannot stay indoors on such a day. Despite wet and foggy weather, the whole of Odessa was out of doors. Everywhere are portraits of Marx, Engels, Lenin, Stalin, and also of comrades A. I. Belyaev, L. I. Brezhnev, N. A. Bulganin, K. E. Voroshilov, N. G. Ignatov, A. I. Kirilenko, F. R. Kozlov, O. V. Kuussinen, A. I. Mikoyan, N. A. Mukhitdinov, M. A. Suslov, E. A. Furtseva, N. S. Khrushchev, N. M. Shvernik, A. A. Aristov, P. A. Pospelov, Ya. E. Kalnberzin, A. P. Kirichenko, A. N. Kosygin, K. T. Mazyrov, V. P. Mzhevanadze, M. G. Pervukhin, N. T. Kalchenko.

Everywhere are banners, slogans, posters. All around are happy, beaming Russian, Ukrainian, Jewish faces. Here and there one hears eulogies in honour of the great banner of Marx, Engels, Lenin, Stalin, and also in honour of comrades A. I. Belyaev, L. I. Brezhnev, N. A. Bulganin, K. E. Voroshilov, N. G. Ignatov, A. I. Kirichenko, F. R. Kozlov, O. V. Kuussinen, A. I. Mikoyan, N. A. Mukhitdinov, M. A. Suslov, E. A. Furtseva, N. S. Khrushchev, N. M. Shvernik, A. A. Aristov, P. A. Pospelov, Ya. E. Kalnberzin, A. P. Kirilenko, A. N. Kosygin, K. T. Mazyrov, V. P. Mzhevanadze, M. G. Pervukhin, N. T. Kalchenko, D. S. Korotchenko. Everywhere one hears Russian and Ukrainian speech. Sometimes one hears the foreign speech of the representatives of progressive humanity who have come to Odessa to congratulate its residents on the occasion of their glorious holiday. I too wandered around and, unable to restrain my joy, returned to my hotel where I resolved to describe, so far as I can, the All-Peoples celebration in Odessa.

Do not judge me harshly.

All the best,

D. Shostakovich

To many Westerners, deadpan expressions such as those in the foregoing letter, written by the composer to his friend Isaak Glikman on 29th December 1957 in Odessa, represent sincere avowals of communist enthusiasm. Glikman, who records that Shostakovich rarely spoke an unironic word, would not have agreed -- indeed, he says as much in his notes to *Letters To A Friend*, from which this extract is taken: "Shostakovich here parodies the journalism of the period." (Meaning the bathetic repetitions, insipid clichés, and lists of faceless functionaries, each presented in their correct order of precedence within the Soviet mediocracy.) Yet Western "anti-revisionist" sceptics remain obdurate. Deaf to -- or simply refusing to hear -- the nuances of irony in both the composer's music and his other utterances, they cling to the fatally misleading delusion of Shostakovich as a Communist. Some of these sceptics are rank-and-file listeners with a leftwing background which they prefer to assume Shostakovich shared. Others, vaguer in their politics, know too little about Soviet history to countenance the idea that Shostakovich could have conducted his public life in almost complete dissimulation and double-talk, despite the fact that precisely this sort of dissimulation and double-talk is known to have been used by countless other public figures in the Soviet arts.

To academic advocates of anti-revisionism, the idea that Shostakovich held an anti-communist outlook is *a priori* unacceptable -- a false construction based on the composer's memoir *Testimony*, which they believe to be an ideologically mischievous forgery by its editor Solomon Volkov. At a deeper level, these specialists reject the "*Testimony* view" of Shostakovich because it contradicts, and implicitly invalidates, everything they've written about his music. Refusing to identify any pervasive irony in Shostakovich's expression, they persuade themselves to read letters like the composer's deadpan account of the political festival in Odessa as if he sincerely meant every studiously repetitive word of it. (Hence, for example, Robert Matthew-Walker's sleevenote to a recent issue on the Revelation label in which he refers to the cantata *Poem of the Motherland* as "a genuine celebration of the 30th anniversary of the October Revolution" and claims that its composer "remained a convinced communist" in 1954, a mere three years prior to the Odessa letter. In fact, the composer's anti-communism is expressed openly as early as 1942 and there is no evidence, apart from some ambiguous statements in letters to Tanya Glivenko in 1923-4, that he ever held pro-communist views.)

One or two simple propositions need to be borne in mind while considering such extracts. First, Shostakovich was a highly intelligent man, a fact repeatedly confirmed by the many witnesses in the books of Wilson and Ho/Feofanov; he was also, according to these same witnesses, a gifted mimic with a photographic memory (one, for instance, capable of remembering not only the names of many minor Politburo members, but their initials too). Second, the tone of Soviet Communist discourse was lumpen, literal, and repressively prescriptive on the basis of lowest-common-denominator comprehension. This being so, there are only two possible explanations for the simple-minded and crassly repetitious quality

of Shostakovich's utterances on communist issues: (1) his intelligence was a figment of his friends' imaginations and he wrote music of intellectual stature purely by accident; (2) his simple-minded and crassly repetitious utterances on communist issues were in the nature of ironic parody.

That such deadpan irony was widely used by the Soviet non-Party intelligentsia is well-established, indeed the basis of the entire style of writers like Mikhail Zoshchenko and Andrei Platonov. The probability is that Shostakovich, a friend and devotee of Zoshchenko, to some extent partook of his deadpan ironic style (although witnesses attest that irony was characteristic of the composer from his boyhood onward). In any event, the inescapable fact is that to believe Shostakovich to have been sincere in saying most of the things he said about the communist system is to infer that he was an unusually dim, naive, and inarticulate man. There is no way out of this conclusion, apart from the application of a little commonsense and perhaps a small effort at familiarising oneself with the lowbrow locutions of Soviet officialese and the tinny clang of Socialist Realist rhetoric.

For example, on 31st December 1943 in Moscow, Shostakovich wrote to Glikman as follows:

The year 1944 is coming in. This will be a year of happiness, of joy, of victory. This year will bring us great joy. The freedom-loving peoples will at last throw off the yoke of Hitlerism, peace will reign throughout the whole world, and we will resume our peaceful life under the sun of the Stalinist Constitution. I am convinced of this, which is why I am experiencing great joy.

"The sun of the Stalinist Constitution", notes Glikman, was "a holy litany constantly chanted in the national newspapers". It is no accident that a similar mechanical repetition features in this passage, as do other bromidic litany-clichés ("the freedom-loving peoples", "our peaceful life"). The phrase "great joy", for example, ultimately derives from Stalin's notorious announcement at the height of the Terror during the mid-Thirties that life was becoming "more joyful", a litany everyone then had to repeat on pain of arrest, and which Shostakovich adapted into the chant "our business is rejoicing" (allegedly the sub-text to the coda of the finale of the Fifth Symphony). Another illustration of Shostakovich's deadpan parody is the following sentence (from a letter dated 23rd July 1944):

Soon I will live in our wonderful city of Leningrad, city-symbol of the power of the Soviet regime and of the brilliant strategy of Stalin.

As Glikman points out, this strings together no less than three contemporary journalistic clichés. (The point being that reiterating these readymade phrases was not a crime per se, so that it was perfectly safe to do so even in a letter likely to be browsed by the Soviet censors. Nor was anything needed in the way of satirical exegesis. To an intelligent reader, the phrases satirised themselves.)

While Shostakovich did not stoop to reproducing the most ubiquitous formula of this era -- "stormy

applause rising to an ovation" -- he endured the incessant debates and sessions of "inspiring criticism" he had to sit through by pokerfacedly recycling their lesser litanies in letters and conversations, e.g., this note to Glikman written on 21st March 1955:

Just heard on the radio of the appointment of comrade N. A. Mikhailov as Minister of Culture of the USSR. Was delighted about that. All remember how bravely he fought to bring to life the Historic Decree. Our progressive musical circles, which always placed great hopes on comrade Mikhailov, are particularly delighted.

This passage, consisting almost entirely of a patchwork of communist reportage clichés, alludes to the so-called "Historic Decree" made by Zhdanov at the 1948 Composers' Union congress at which Shostakovich was condemned as a formalist. Shostakovich, who always ironically referred to this event as the "Historic Decree", mentions it again in a letter of 19th June 1965 about a film script on his life written by Glikman and two colleagues:

A. I. Khachaturian shared with me his impressions about the script. He liked it a lot. However, he thinks that the script does not give enough attention to the Historic Decree about the opera *The Great Friendship*. He would like to see added to the script the following sequence: the Historic Decree is published, and is in force, while the composer at that time composes the Violin Concerto and the Jewish Songs. This corresponds with historical reality.

To anyone conversant with the discreet "Aesopian" language used by the liberal intelligentsia under Soviet rule, this amounts to a confirmation by the composer that his First Violin Concerto and *From Jewish Folk Poetry* are dissident works. The final phrase in this passage reverses a formula common in communist ideological invective whereby an opponent's factual claim is dismissed by stating that it does not "correspond with historical reality". (The Marxist claim to be uniquely and infallibly acquainted with "reality", a favourite word in the Red lexicon, is linked to the notoriously all-excusing use of the word "objective" in communist dialectic, as in "Since you do not fight our enemy, your interests and those of our enemy are objectively identical".)

Shostakovich refers again to the circumstances of the 1948 congress in a letter of 6th September 1958, describing the newly developed pains in his right hand:

I envy V. Y. Shebalin, who, having lost his right hand, trained himself to use his left instead: he writes fluently with his left hand. Moreover: with his left hand, in response to historic decrees that art should be closer to life, closer to the people, he wrote an opera about our contemporaries, victoriously marching under the leadership of the Party to the radiant heights of our future, towards communism.

Everything from the pointedly reiterated phrase "with his left hand" is a Socialist Realist cliché, the most hackneyed being "the radiant heights" (the title of one of Alexander Zinoviev's satirical studies of the

Soviet system and adapted by Winston Churchill in one of his wartime speeches as "the sunlit uplands").

Inspiring criticism

Shostakovich often refers sarcastically to the "valuable" or "inspiring" criticism he -- and anyone else with real, independent talent in the USSR -- periodically had to suffer in public from mediocre rivals and political appointees. When, for example, Yevtushenko was leant on by the authorities to persuade him to make changes to his poem *Babi Yar* as used in Shostakovich's Thirteenth Symphony, the composer sent the updated version to Glikman on 6th January 1963, adding: "Bracketed lines are those added by the poet in response to inspiring criticism."

Twenty years earlier, on 8th December 1943, he had written from Moscow in a similar vein about his recently premiered, and much attacked, Eighth Symphony:

The Union of Soviet Composers was going to hold a debate on it, but this was delayed due to my illness. This debate will soon take place, and I have no doubt that valuable criticisms will be made which will inspire me to further artistry, and cause me to reevaluate my previous artistry, so that, instead of a step backward, I will take a step forward.

Shostakovich played a similar deadpan game with dead locutions in 1953, following a round of unusually hostile attacks on his Tenth Symphony. Inscrutably mocking the simple-minded analyses advanced by the nonentities ranged against him, he ventured that the first movement was perhaps too long. The second, on the other hand, was possibly too short. "As for the third movement, I think my calculations worked out pretty well, except that it is a bit long. Here and there, though, there are places that are a bit short. It would be very valuable to have the comrades' opinion on this."

Shostakovich had many opportunities to avail himself of such comradely assistance. Writing to Glikman on 31st March 1957, he refers to another such occasion:

Recently I attended the Congress of composers. Listened to orators of various sorts. I particularly liked the speech of comrade Lukin. He reminded the Congress of the inspiring advice of A. A. Zhdanov that music should be melodious and pleasant. "Unfortunately," observed comrade Lukin, "we have failed to comply with this inspiring advice!" There was just as much of value and interest in the other speeches.

Despite the undertow of terror and horror beneath his encounters with the Soviet politico-cultural machine, Shostakovich retained his sense of humour and innate fairness. On 30th April 1960, he writes,

with an almost visible grin, to his friend Glikman of a new work by a mutual friend, performed by a wryly respected, if politically incompatible, mutual acquaintance:

I was greatly impressed by the Violin Concerto by M. S. Vainberg which is wonderfully played by the violinist-communist L. B. Kogan. It's a wonderful work. And I mean it. And the violinist-communist plays it great.

The phrase "And I mean it" is laughingly added to stress the sincerity of "a wonderful work", which in Shostakovich's normal deadpan parlance would have meant the exact opposite (just as the phrase "a splendid fellow" was his code for "he's an informer").

Many more examples of the this kind can be found in the pages of the aforementioned books by Elizabeth Wilson and by Ho and Feofanov. A different, more creative sort of double-talk is on display in some [excerpts](#) from an [article](#) by Shostakovich's Polish biographer Krzysztof Meyer at this site. For a general introduction to this aspect of the Soviet background, consult Mikhail Heller's *Cogs in the Soviet Wheel: The Formation of Soviet Man* (Collins Harvill, 1988).

This article is dedicated to the memory of D. S. Korotchenko.

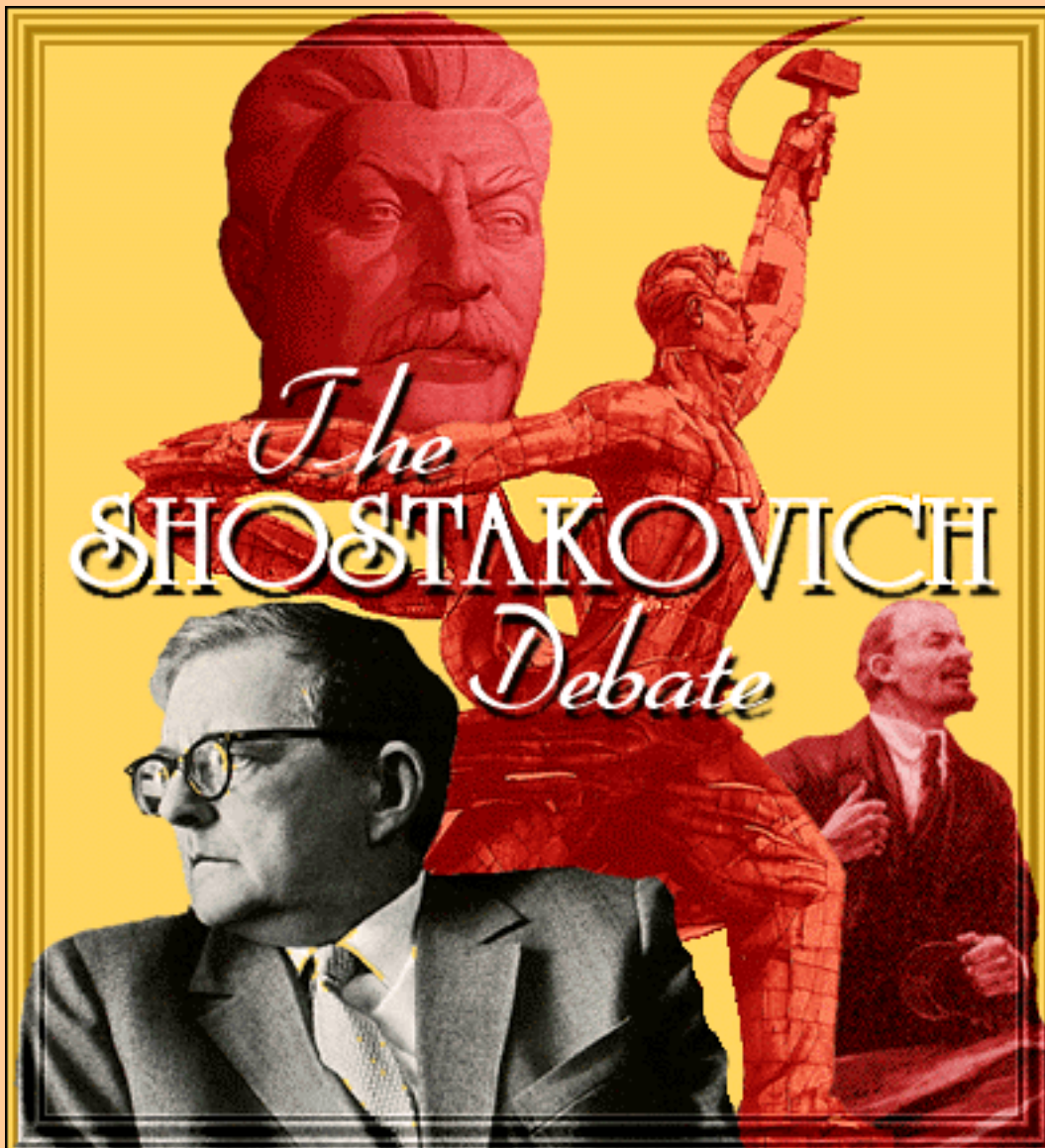
Addendum, 10/01

Until recently, the only Western translation of the Glikman letters was Luba Jurgenson's French version for Albin Michel, *Lettres à un ami: correspondance avec Isaak Glikman (1941-1975)*, published in 1994. In October 2001, Faber & Faber produced an English translation by Anthony Phillips under the title *Story Of A Friendship: The Letters Of Dmitry Shostakovich to Isaak Glikman 1941-1975, with a Commentary by Isaak Glikman*. It is worth noting that the annotations by Glikman as translated by Phillips are quite explicit in expressing Shostakovich's attitude towards Stalin. For example (n. 27, p. 228), when Samuil Samosud suggested that the Seventh Symphony needed some verses glorifying Stalin to be sung by soloists and chorus, Shostakovich "strenuously resisted" the idea. "Such a refusal," comments Glikman, "which meant in effect declining to praise the 'Inspired General and Leader' in an overtly war-related work, called for great courage, a quality with which Shostakovich was abundantly endowed." Glikman likewise observes (n. 29, p. 247) that Shostakovich had "a particular aversion" to the passages in the libretto for *The Song of the Forests* which mentioned Stalin. Vis-à-vis a letter of 6th November 1942 in which Shostakovich ironically regrets that circumstances have forced Glikman and himself to be apart while listening to a radio broadcast by Stalin, Glikman comments (n. 103, p. 233): "Whenever we heard Stalin speak, shared feelings of implacable revulsion instantly passed between us." As for Shostakovich's general antipathy to the Communist hierarchy, it is instructive to read Glikman's notes on the satirical songs which he wrote during the 1930s and which Shostakovich greatly enjoyed (n. 114, pp. 234-5).

Remarking on the letter of 31st December 1943 in which Shostakovich mockingly speaks of living in

peace "under the sun of the Stalinist constitution" (see above), Glikman writes (n. 165, p. 239): "Shostakovich's detestation of Hitler's fanatical tyranny coexisted with equal loathing for the Stalinist terror of the 1930s. In the later stages of the war, when unbridled paeans of praise for the 'Great General', to whom the army and the whole nation naturally owed all victories, began blaring out with renewed force everywhere, Shostakovich reflected with apprehension on what was likely to happen once the long-awaited victory actually came about. He feared a resurgence of the random terror that had been the reality of life 'under the sun of Stalin's constitution', the canonical phrase which in reality existed only on the pages of newspapers. Hence the bitter irony of the reference to the 'unalloyed joy' with which he looked forward to a return to pre-war life and times." This commentary may be justifiably applied to interpretation of Shostakovich's ambiguous Ninth Symphony.

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THE SHOSTAKOVICH DEBATE

A Manual for Beginners

Since the English-language controversy about Shostakovich has recently won notoriety in the national presses of the USA, Canada, and Britain -- a notoriety often badly researched and faultily reported -- it seems timely to offer an introduction to the main lines of the debate.

The Shostakovich debate, which concerns the interpretation of the composer's life and music, is, broadly speaking, conducted between two opposing sides: revisionists and anti-revisionists. Anti-revisionists are sometimes referred to by revisionists as "Taruskinites", an allusion to leading anti-revisionist Richard Taruskin. Similarly, revisionists have been referred to by anti-revisionists as "Volkovists", an allusion to Solomon Volkov, whose book *Testimony* -- presented as Shostakovich's authentic memoirs but disputed as such by anti-revisionists -- constitutes one of the main bones of contention in the debate.

(Revisionists see the question of *Testimony* as a sub-issue within the larger argument.)

There are also shades of opinion between revisionism and anti-revisionism. Some participants argue for a "balanced" point of view between the opposing positions.

Revisionists, though, maintain that such claims, far from balanced, are instead "pseudo-centric".

What do these terms mean and what do they stand for? Answering this requires a brief summary of the issues. A [Chronology](#) of the main events and statements in the evolution of the debate is provided for further clarification.

Shostakovich, as of 1975

Dmitri Shostakovich (1906-75) lived for all but the first eleven years of his life under the communist system of the Soviet Union. As such, he was seen by the outside world as the regime's musical laureate -- a composer who wrote music for Soviet public celebrations and in honour of important events in Soviet history, as well as for films which conveyed a

Soviet point of view (including depictions of Stalin in heroic terms). Lavishly honoured by the Soviet system, Shostakovich held several public offices and, in 1960, joined the Communist Party. Many articles expressing views commensurate with those of the Soviet state appeared over his signature in Soviet publications during his life. He often read official speeches at Soviet cultural occasions and never expressed public disagreement with the Soviet system. On two occasions, however -- in 1936 and in 1948 -- he was publicly, and severely, reprimanded for failing to supply what was demanded of him as a Soviet composer. Through collaboration with the anti-establishment poet Yevgeny Yevtushenko during the early 1960s, Shostakovich expressed a critical attitude towards some aspects of the Soviet system in his Thirteenth Symphony. It was also discovered in 1989 that he had composed a secret satire on the events surrounding his public censure in 1948: *Rayok*, subtitled "A Manual for Beginners". When Shostakovich died in 1975, he was hailed in both the USSR and the free world as a great Soviet composer, his belief in communism being scarcely doubted. His works were understood as written either in explicit solidarity with the Soviet system or as "pure music" (i.e., without symbolic ["extra-musical"] references, beyond the usual emotional and intellectual concerns routinely ascribed to less "political" composers).

The *Testimony* affair: a question of "authenticity"

Although it was possible to maintain a quite different view of Shostakovich even in 1975, a major shift in the Western view of the composer did not begin until four years later when Harper & Row published *Testimony, the memoirs of Dmitri Shostakovich, as related to and edited by Solomon Volkov*. Shostakovich, it seemed, had dictated the contents of this book to Volkov, a young music journalist from Leningrad, during the early 1970s. The book was then smuggled out to the USA, translated into English, and published in 1979. *Testimony* was received with considerable excitement in both the West and the USSR. Depicting Shostakovich as scathing about Stalinism, as cynical about the Soviet system in general, and as claiming that many of his supposedly "pure" compositions contained covert musical symbols of dissent, the book revised his perceived image overnight. Some compared its impact on the musical world with that of Alexander Solzhenitsyn's *The Gulag Archipelago* on the general audience. (*Testimony* has, till the present [2000], not been published in Russian.)

A backlash followed. Within a month of publication (October 1979), *Testimony* was repudiated by the Soviet authorities as "a lie from beginning to end". This opened a sustained [Soviet campaign](#) against the book which included a denunciation of *Testimony* by the composer's son Maxim (then living with his family in the USSR). More damaging was an essay by New York musicologist Laurel Fay, "Shostakovich verses Volkov: Whose Testimony?", which appeared in *The Russian Review* a year later. As well as

making a number of factual criticisms of *Testimony*, Fay identified eight passages in the book which she asserted had been "plagiarised" by Volkov from previously published articles by Shostakovich. These passages all occurred at the beginning of chapters in the book -- the pages on which Shostakovich's standard inscription ("Chital. [Read.] -- D. Shostakovich) appear. These discoveries indicated a hoax. Because Volkov made no response to Fay, it became generally assumed that *Testimony* was, partially or wholly, fraudulent. One American musicologist, Malcolm Hamrick Brown, has since called Volkov "a liar" (*Notes*, 1994); another, Richard Taruskin, wrote "as any proper scholar could plainly see, the book was a fraud" (*The New Republic*, 1989). Consequently, the popular perception among journalists has been that *Testimony* is riddled with errors and almost entirely unreliable (e.g., Vulliamy, *The Observer*, 12/3/2000: "for the most part, spurious and full of plagiarisms"). The book has also been spoken of as a characteristically "propagandist" document of the Cold War.

This situation persisted until 1990 when Ian MacDonald published *The New Shostakovich*, a reassessment of Shostakovich's life and work within the context of Soviet history and culture. The author pointed out that the composer's son Maxim, now living in the West and free of Soviet pressure to maintain otherwise, had, in 1986, endorsed *Testimony*: "It's true. It's accurate... The basis of the book is correct." MacDonald further argued that a contextual approach to Shostakovich (until then largely neglected in Western studies of the composer) emphatically supported the essential authenticity of *Testimony*. He conceded, however, that Laurel Fay's criticisms rendered the book's claim to literal authenticity impossible to sustain: "*Testimony* is a realistic picture of Dmitri Shostakovich. It just isn't a *genuine* one."

No further change occurred until 1998 with the publication of [Shostakovich Reconsidered](#) by American musicologist Allan B. Ho and Russian concert pianist Dmitry Feofanov. Ho and Feofanov's book opened with a 300-page analysis of the case against *Testimony*, repudiating all charges of unreliable information and challenging Laurel Fay's accusation that the signed passages represented "plagiarism" by Volkov with fraudulent intent. Marshalling evidence from six leading experts on "superior memory", each of whom were prepared to attest that Shostakovich could have recycled this material from memory, the authors further pointed out that the book's first page, which contains unrecycled controversial material, was also signed by the composer. Ho and Feofanov went on to charge certain academics with "covering up" evidence and statements which support *Testimony*'s authenticity. Their "case for the defence" in respect of *Testimony* was widely accepted as substantial, even by those previously sceptical about the book (including the British musicologist David Fanning).

In April 2000, Laurel Fay responded to Ho and Feofanov's criticisms of her 1980 essay on *Testimony*. For details, see [Chronology Part 4](#).

The scope of the Shostakovich debate

A common misconception, even among some participants in the discussion, is that its subject is identical with the controversy over the "authenticity" of *Testimony* (e.g., the epithet "Volkovist", recently coined by the Canadian broadcaster Tamara Bernstein). In fact, the wider Shostakovich debate involves a general discussion about the composer's creative intentions and the meaning, if any, of his music. In this connection, wide differences of opinion continue to be voiced concerning Shostakovich's orientation within the politico-cultural context of the Soviet Union -- e.g., was he an earnest communist, a cowardly trimmer, a naive blunderer, or a secret dissident? Attached to these differences of opinion are comparably diverse verdicts on his moral stature in relation to his musical creativity and personal conduct.

In these respects, a more vital source for revisionists than *Testimony* is Elizabeth Wilson's [*Shostakovich: A Life Remembered*](#) (1994), a monumental collection of statements about the composer by his Russian and East European contemporaries: family, friends, and colleagues. No one has so far disputed that *Shostakovich: A Life Remembered* paints a picture of Shostakovich and his context nearly identical to that given in *Testimony* (and also in Rostislav Dubinsky's memoir [*Stormy Applause*](#)). For this reason, as Ian MacDonald has [argued](#), Wilson's book currently forms the evidential backbone of the revisionist case -- yet, unlike *Testimony*, it has never become a subject of debate. (It may be significant that anti-revisionists scarcely mention, let alone address, either Wilson's material or her revisionist linking narrative.)

Within the debate, eye-witness material such as that marshalled by Elizabeth Wilson -- material of a kind which has also appeared in other books, articles, and interviews -- is referred to as "small 't' testimony" in order to distinguish it from Solomon Volkov's *Testimony*.

Revisionism versus anti-revisionism

At its simplest, revisionism consists of the view that Shostakovich was, for much of his life, in conflict with the Soviet regime; and that, as such, his actions, creative and personal, betoken a man of considerable moral stature whose associated thoughts and feelings are tangible in his music, in ways both general and particular. (The particular instances of this orientation consist of a language of musical codes, many of which are already known and others of which are in the process of being discovered.) In this view of Shostakovich, the composer is often said to have been a "secret (or hidden) [dissident](#)" - i.

e., a moral dissenter who differed from the paradigmatic Soviet dissidents of the 1960s in refraining from public verbal expressions of his dissent, confining this to his music. (Exceptions -- more or less explicit expressions of dissent -- can be found in Shostakovich's [letters to Isaak Glikman](#), in several of his reported statements to friends and colleagues, and in the disputed memoir *Testimony*.) Anti-revisionists often accuse revisionists of adopting an "ideological" line on Shostakovich which mirrors that of the Soviet Union. Revisionists argue, on the contrary, that the debate is a question not of ideology but of morality.

At its simplest, anti-revisionism takes the form of several, not necessarily mutually exclusive, views of Shostakovich which stand opposed to the idea of him as a "secret dissident" resistant to the Soviet regime. Anti-revisionists see Shostakovich as a morally flawed man for whom *Testimony* (insofar as any of it can be trusted) represented an attempt to rewrite, and hence justify, an inglorious life. This life was either that of an earnest communist who never seriously questioned the Soviet system; a cowardly trimmer who conformed out of fear and self-seeking cynicism; or a naive blunderer who took on the false appearance of a secret dissident through farcical coincidence or as a result of over-interpretation by his contemporaries or those who came after him. For most anti-revisionists, speculation on the composer's outlook is bogus or irrelevant (although some hardline anti-revisionists remain convinced that he was an orthodox Communist and that "his" public statements are dependable evidence of this). Suggestions that Shostakovich's music contains hidden meanings is, generally, anathema to anti-revisionists, who concede with reluctance and aesthetic distaste any instances of this which cannot be definitely rejected.

How did the terms "revisionism" and "anti-revisionism" come about?

The term "revisionism" in Shostakovich studies was introduced by Ian MacDonald in *The New Shostakovich* in 1990 and confirmed from the opposing point of view by Richard Taruskin in his article "A Martyred Opera Reflects Its Abominable Time" in *The New York Times* (6th November 1994) and by Laurel Fay in her book *Shostakovich: A Life* (1999). The concept, subscribed to by most writers in the debate, is that the views ascribed to revisionism, as defined above, constitute a *revision* of the image of Shostakovich promulgated by the Soviet authorities (an image largely accepted by Western critics prior to the publication of *Testimony* in 1979). Some revisionists object to the term on the grounds that truth needs no revising (the truth, in their opinion, being congruent with the "revisionist" view). There is also an unfortunate derogatory association with Holocaust studies whereby the Nazis' genocidal treatment of European Jews is challenged or even denied by "revisionists". Similarly, revisionism in general Soviet studies often takes the form of attempts to "revise" (by way of minimising) the crimes of Stalinism or the

culpability of Stalin, thereby creating a use of the term almost exactly opposite to its use in the Shostakovich debate. There seems little possibility of replacing the term "revisionism" as it has come to be used in Shostakovich studies over the last ten years; like its corollary "anti-revisionism", it is essentially a convenient label by which to identify a point of view.

The tone of the debate

It has become gospel among journalists covering the debate (and among certain of its participants) that it is uniquely acrimonious -- a slanging match which has "raged for twenty years" and in which spectacular insults are incessantly hurled from one side to the other. The truth is not so garish. Other debates in the musical world have been equally, if not more, heated. Recent instances include the controversies surrounding Wagner's aesthetics and Herbert Von Karajan's political affiliations. (Countless other examples, far exceeding the asperity of these modern cases, may be found in Nicolas Slonimsky's *Lexicon of Musical Invective*.) Compared with contemporary controversies in other fields -- e.g., the argument concerning German culpability for the Holocaust, the battle between Creationists and Evolutionists in biology, the bitter wrangles over the legacies of Freud and Jung -- the Shostakovich debate is relatively temperate and sporadic.

Little in the way of exchange between revisionism and anti-revisionism took place until 1995, when David Fanning published (in *Shostakovich Studies*) an essay by the leading anti-revisionist Richard Taruskin entitled "Public lies and unspeakable truth: interpreting Shostakovich's Fifth Symphony". Arguing that to claim Shostakovich to have been "a dissident" amounts to "a self-gratifying anachronism", Taruskin asserted that Ian MacDonald's commentary on the Symphony in *The New Shostakovich* was "no honourable error" but instead "a vile trivialisation". MacDonald, contended Taruskin, used the critical methods of McCarthyism, wrote like the Soviet state prosecutor Andrei Vyshinsky, and was "the very model of a Stalinist critic". Later in the same year, Taruskin's colleague Laurel Fay referred to *The New Shostakovich* as "a moronic tract".

Although these insults raised the temperature considerably, they remain the high-point of direct personal invective in the debate so far. MacDonald responded to Taruskin, Fay, and other anti-revisionists with corresponding sarcasm, but without name-calling. The same method was adopted by Ho and Feofanov in their book (1998) and anti-revisionists have, in the main, reciprocated. Most of the exchanges in the debate are about averagely acidulous for this sort of controversy, as the correspondence pages of any academic journal will confirm. Contrary to Ed Vulliamy (*Observer*, 12th March 2000) and Tamara Bernstein (*National Post*, 15th March 2000), only Richard Taruskin has used the epithet "Stalinist" against a debating partner (against Ian MacDonald in 1995 and Terry Teachout

in 1999). Most revisionists would suggest that the ratio of invective to argument is higher on the anti-revisionist side, but such judgements depend very largely on where one happens to stand and most anti-revisionists would no doubt strongly deny this, contending that the exact opposite is the case.

Shostakovich, as of 2000

Reduced to its simplest elements, the Shostakovich debate is about the sort of man he was, and the kind of music which that sort of man can be reasonably be assumed to have written. In this regard, direct personal invective has begun to emerge again in recent written and spoken statements. This time, though, the target is the composer himself. As will be seen from the accompanying [Chronology](#), anti-revisionists have been effectively attacking Shostakovich as a man -- and revisionists seeking to defend him -- for the last ten years.

Recently, with the appearance of Laurel Fay's biography *Shostakovich: A Life*, these opposing verdicts on the composer have sharpened up. Writing in *The New York Times* (6th February 2000), the music critic Joseph Horowitz called Shostakovich "a moral beacon" -- an assessment seconded in the [DSCH-L](#) discussion group by, among many others, Ian MacDonald and Martin Anderson, publisher of Ho and Feofanov's *Shostakovich Reconsidered*. In the same newspaper (5th March 2000), Richard Taruskin mocked this concept of Shostakovich, calling him "a fictional hero". Also in *The New York Times* (9th March 2000), the opera critic Bernard Holland accused the composer of cowardice, calling him "a mediocre human being" who "toadied and cringed before his Soviet bosses". Interviewed by Tamara Bernstein (*National Post*, 15th March 2000), Laurel Fay added to this chorus by dubbing Shostakovich "a wuss" (slang: wimp, wet, gutless wonder).

"A cult of thought-control"

Another recent developmen has been Richard Taruskin's assertion (*New York Times*, 5th March 2000) that revisionism constitutes "a clamorous cult of personality" around Shostakovich comparable with that which adhered around Stalin: "Like any such cult, the one around Shostakovich is an instrument of thought control. It fosters orthodoxy, enforces conformism and breeds intolerance of critical thinking." Tamara Bernstein, whose connections with Taruskin are a matter of public record, has joined him (*National Post*, 15th March 2000) in likewise denouncing revisionism as "a cult of fanatics", adding that "If you think this sounds silly and sophomoric, you're right".

This new polarisation opens room for a more substantial centrist position on Shostakovich in which it may be argued that current terms and stances are "too black-and-white" and that the truth is to be sought in a "balanced" position in between. Revisionists, however, regard such a position as a false ("pseudo-centric") compromise based on a refusal to confront the circumstances of Shostakovich's life. He was, they concede, as fearful as the majority of Soviet citizens; however, he was also, unlike many Soviet citizens, courageous in sticking to his moral principles in his work wherever he could. Revisionists insist that only deep contextual understanding can allow us to appreciate Shostakovich's qualities of heroism, which are of a kind not readily understood by people raised in a free society.

The broader perspective

The Shostakovich debate is, of course, not as simple as this brief outline may suggest. Many intricate arguments are entailed, much of this discussion focusing on several key compositions in Shostakovich's output and involving a large quantity of background material. Since the content of the Shostakovich debate requires much time and thought to absorb, it is not surprising that there is disagreement about it -- especially in the English-speaking world which, lacking experience of totalitarian rule, is often unaware of its own inherent uncertainty in coming to terms with the products of a society as foreign to it as the former USSR.

In this perspective, it is worth pointing out that "the Shostakovich debate" is very much an English-language phenomenon. No such controversy, for example, exists in either France or Poland where, for many years, Shostakovich has been seen either as insignificant compared with Western modernists (Stravinsky, the Second Viennese School, and the serialists of the 1950s and 1960s) or as a "communist composer" whose music, through its apparent conformity with Soviet politico-aesthetic canons, is intrinsically shoddy. By challenging the second of these assumptions, the publication of *Testimony* in these countries reawoke interest in Shostakovich during the 1980s and 1990s; however, owing to the continuing national musicological preferences for Western modernism, this new interest failed to ignite a revival comparable to that seen in Britain and America in the same period. Doubts over the literal authenticity of *Testimony* do not, in France or Poland, outweigh the view that the image of Shostakovich conveyed in the book is true to life. In Poland, which shared the system under which Shostakovich lived, this image of the composer is regarded as unsurprising and is consequently not questioned in any fundamental way. Musicologists in France and Poland are more or less oblivious of the *Testimony* controversy as it exists in Britain and America.

In Germany, which has long held Shostakovich's music in respectful esteem, the

contextual approach is well established in musicology, where the preponderance is decisively revisionist. Only one German musicologist (Friedbert Streller) can be described as anti-revisionist; the rest are either neutral specialists in technical and documentary analysis, or contextual scholars with revisionist views of Shostakovich (e.g., Detlef Gojowy, Sigrid Neef, Hilmar Schmalenberg, Frank Schneider, Michael Koball). As in France and Poland, the matter of the literal authenticity of *Testimony* counts for little in Germany, where the view of Shostakovich conveyed in its pages is consonant with the view of the composer held by most musicians and musicologists. Essentially pragmatically investigative, German Shostakovich scholarship eschews the questions at issue in the UK/USA debate, which, in effect, it regards as either already answered or of no serious significance.

No active equivalent of the Shostakovich debate exists in Russia. Aside from surviving close members of the composer's inner circle (and even including some of these), *Testimony* is known in Russia almost entirely through hearsay. Among such close associates, the view of Shostakovich is generally commensurate with that given in *Testimony*, although a distinction is often made between the essential veracity of the picture of Shostakovich given in *Testimony* and the literal authenticity of the book as presented by Solomon Volkov. Aside from Tikhon Khrennikov, the only figure from Shostakovich's former circle to reject "the *Testimony* view" of Shostakovich was Yuri Levitin. Like the composer Boris Tishchenko and archivist Manashir Yakubov, the composer's third wife Irina is highly critical of both Volkov and *Testimony*, but does not on principle reject the book's dissident picture. (The International Shostakovich Association, of which Irina is Vice President, holds a [view](#) of Shostakovich practically indistinguishable from that conveyed in *Testimony* itself.) Sofiya Khentova stays aloof from any controversy, as does [Galina Ustvolskaya](#). In the wider musical establishment, more diverse opinions hold sway, including a strain of denying conservatism which has yet to come to terms with the post-Soviet situation. Owing to the systematic Soviet suppression of independent research, knowledge of Soviet-era cultural history, especially among the young in Russia, tends to be superficial or anecdotal.

The challenge of revisionism

The revisionist view of Shostakovich poses several fundamental conceptual challenges to those who take a different view. Apart from the ongoing controversy surrounding *Testimony*, it is these conceptual challenges, and the various reactions to them, which fuel the debate.

The first such challenge is to classical music's sense of self-sufficiency. A view is often expressed that music should be detachable from history and fully understandable without

contextual exegesis. The editor of a British review magazine recently put this position as follows: "Several of Shostakovich's works are brimming with musical codes and enigmas. But should we care? Shostakovich's genius is such that he communicates at all levels. Is our appreciation of Mozart or Shakespeare diminished by the fact that we know so little about their lives?" Many anti-revisionists would agree with this view; indeed, for some, it may be said to define the extent of their anti-revisionism.

Revisionists argue that such thinking is empty. What, they ask, does it mean to claim that Shostakovich communicates "at all levels" or (as BBC Radio 3 Controller Nicholas Kenyon puts it) "suggests an infinite number of possibilities at once"? Is any "statement" by Mozart and Shakespeare interpretable in an infinite number of different ways -- or is the possible range of meaning in such statements constrained by conventions of style and content? Revisionists argue that invocations of infinite levels of interpretation are mere intellectual evasions. As for whether our understanding of Mozart or Shakespeare is diminished by our lack of biographical data about them, we could only answer this question if we possessed the information we presently lack. Without this information, we cannot know what we are missing and thus cannot say whether its absence diminishes our understanding (of Mozart, Shakespeare, or anyone else). Only contextualism -- of the kind which, for the last thirty years, has been standard in all academic fields (except modern musicology) -- can offer appropriate answers.

The suggestion that we may fully appreciate Shostakovich without knowledge of his context carries two implications: (1) that artistic appreciation, contrary to the invocation of infinite "possibilities" or endless "levels", may be finite; (2) that context is a detachable adjunct to the work of art, which should be considered purely subjectively, as if beyond time and place. Revisionism argues that, since we grow and change (and since what we know about a work of art inescapably modifies our view of it), artistic appreciation can never be finite; instead, we are always in a developing relationship with any work of art, as we are with life. Since art is part of life, context cannot be detached from the art born within it (this being the theoretical basis of all contextual historical investigation into the intentions supposedly expressed by artists in their works, and the ways in which these intentions have been interpreted by their audiences ["reception theory"].)

The challenge posed to the individual's subjective response by contextualised art is especially sharp in Shostakovich's case, since, owing to the peculiarities of his context, his music is uniquely confrontational. Listeners preferring the subjective purview of infinite interpretive possibilities have an additional reason to ward off claims that Shostakovich's work contains messages of uncomfortable specificity: such messages, being upsetting, are disruptive to subjective pleasure. As Solomon Volkov has suggested, Shostakovich's music makes one think, not of oneself, but of other people -- and many resent this. Paul Epstein's revisionist booklet for the Emerson Quartet's Shostakovich cycle crystallises this

challenge and it will be interesting to see how critics and listeners react to so explicitly "unsubjective" an interpretation.

Beyond these tough challenges to our listening habits, Shostakovich's music poses an equally stark challenge to modern musicology, which, since around 1950, has been more or less exclusively score-centred and structurally analytical. Much of the disquiet caused among Western musicologists by the Shostakovich debate appears to stem from resentment of resurgent contextual issues which mid-20th century musical developments sought to transcend. Few academic specialists in modern music find it easy to accept the possibility that questions of history, politics, biography, and ethics may have to be reintroduced into the study of music because of what we are discovering about Shostakovich.

Given the increasing polarisation of the debate (and the new developments in the rhetorical overtones of anti-revisionism noted above), there seems little prospect of any cessation in the English-language "war" over the interpretation of Shostakovich and his music. To the extent that this debate can be said to obscure understanding of his music, its continuation is regrettable; yet there are real issues at stake in this discussion, and the debate has shed far more light on the composer's life and work than heat or smoke. In order to get a clearer idea of these issues, newcomers are advised to consult the accompanying [Chronology of the Debate](#), which contains much potted comment from statements made during the last twenty or so years, as well as links to over a dozen texts available at this site (and other websites as well).

Further Reading

MUSIC

- [Testimony](#): *the memoirs of Dmitri Shostakovich. as related to and edited by Solomon Volkov* [tr. Antonina W. Bouis]. Harper & Row, 1979.
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CHRONOLOGY OF THE DEBATE

Part One: 1971 - 1989

SR = *Shostakovich Reconsidered*

TNS = *The New Shostakovich*

1971

Solomon Volkov's book *Young Composers of Leningrad* is published in Leningrad, with a preface by Shostakovich. All references to the past are cut from this preface by the Soviet censor. Shostakovich resolves to dictate his memoirs to Volkov (SR, p. 79). Volkov: "We had first met when I was sixteen years old. He had read -- later I learned that he carefully read every article about his music -- my review, one of my very first ones, of his Eighth Quartet." (SR, p. 316.)

February. Soviet Jews demonstrate outside the Supreme Soviet, thereby winning the right to emigrate to Israel. In practice, this right is often withheld, endlessly postponed, implemented only after the bribery of Soviet officials, etc. Those whose requests to emigrate are turned down become known as *refuseniks*.

September 17th. Shostakovich suffers his second heart attack.

**1971-
4**

Solomon Volkov allegedly interviews Shostakovich in "dozens of meetings" in Moscow (at the composer's apartment in Nezhdanova Street, upstairs from the offices of *Sovetskaya muzyka* where Volkov worked) and at the retreat of Repino near Leningrad. That such meetings took place is confirmed by **Galina Drubachevskaya** and **Yury Korev** of *Sovetskaya muzyka* (SR, pp. 136-8), **Flora Litvinova** (SR, pp. 251-2), **Karen Khachaturian** (SR, p. 66, n. 71), and **Maxim Shostakovich** (SR, p. 114).

1972

January. KGB crackdown on dissident intellectuals in Moscow and the Ukraine, aimed at stopping circulation of *A Chronicle of Current Events* (unofficial human rights journal founded in 1968) and its sister publication the *Ukrainian Herald* (founded in 1970).

April. Soviet authorities refuse visa for Swedish official to present Nobel Prize to Solzhenitsyn.

May. Anti-Soviet riots in Lithuania break out after the self-immolation of protesting young worker Romas Kalenta in Kaunas.

August 24th. Solzhenitsyn's Nobel Prize acceptance speech published in the West.

November 20th. Andrei Sakharov and **Mstislav Rostropovich** form a committee to protest against the Soviet crackdown on dissidents and to appeal for an end to the death penalty and the release of political prisoners in the USSR.

1973

March 26th. KGB questions Sakharov.

August. Trial of leading dissidents Petr Yakir and Viktor Krasin. Under KGB pressure, they plead guilty and publicly "repent".

September. Solzhenitsyn's "Letter to the Soviet Leadership".

September. Nadezhda Mandelstam, *Hope Abandoned* [tr. Max Hayward].

October 6th. Shostakovich's elder sister Mariya dies.

December 28th. Solzhenitsyn's *The Gulag Archipelago* is published in Paris (in Russian).

1974

February 14th. Solzhenitsyn is expelled from the USSR following the publication in Paris of *The Gulag Archipelago*.

April 14th. Sakharov calls on the Soviet government to renounce Marxism.

July 26th. Mstislav Rostropovich and Galina Vishnevskaya leave the USSR.

August. First volume of *The Gulag Archipelago* in English [tr. Thomas P. Whitney].

October 24th. Death of David Oistrakh.

December 10th. Solzhenitsyn collects his 1970 Nobel Prize.

1975

Andrei Olkhovsky's *Music under the Soviets: the agony of an art* (1955) is reprinted.

August 1st. Signing of the Helsinki Accords on human rights.

August 9th. Death of Shostakovich. He is buried five days later in Moscow's Novodevichy Cemetery. Obituaries in both the Soviet Union and the West refer to him as a loyal Soviet composer and a believing Communist.

August. Second volume of *The Gulag Archipelago* in English [tr. Thomas P. Whitney].

October. Andrei Sakharov is awarded the Nobel Peace Prize.

1976

Helsinki Watch Groups (to monitor the implementation of the Helsinki Accords) are formed in Moscow, the Ukraine, Georgia, Lithuania, and Armenia.

February. *A Chronicle of Current Events* reports that the KGB have interviewed **Irina Shostakovich** "concerning D. D. Shostakovich's memoirs, which he had dictated during the last four years of his life (when he was already gravely ill) to the musicologist S. Volkov. She was told that information concerning the memoirs had appeared in the West... On the advice of the KGB, [she] asked Volkov to let her read the memoirs before publication. Volkov replied that he had no copies, but would gladly comply with her request abroad."

February. Members of the Helsinki Group, led by Yuri Orlov, are arrested.

March. **Solomon Volkov** is allowed to emigrate.

July 16th. **Richard Taruskin** writes a letter of recommendation on Solomon Volkov's behalf to Columbia University: "I can confidently state that he is unquestionably the most impressive and accomplished among the Soviet emigré musicians and musicologists whom I have had occasion to meet in the last few years."

December. **Kyrill Kondrashin**, on a visit to Paris, is interviewed by Pierre Vidal about Shostakovich. [Tr. Tatjana Marovic and Ian MacDonald, as "The most extraordinary person I ever met", in Ho and Feofanov, *Shostakovich Reconsidered* (1998).] Kondrashin: "[Shostakovich] was a unique personality -- the moral conscience of music in Russia."

1977 **Alexander Werth's *Musical Uproar in Moscow*** (1949) -- containing transcripts of Zhdanov's conference on music of January 1948 -- is reprinted.

August-September. World Psychiatric Congress in Honolulu condemns the Soviet abuse of psychiatry against dissidents.

1978 Spring. Third volume of *The Gulag Archipelago* in English [tr. H. T. Willetts].

May. Trial of members of the Moscow Helsinki Watch Group. Yuri Orlov jailed for seven years.

July. Trial of Anatoly Shcharansky for "treason". (As a member of the Moscow Helsinki Watch Group, he coordinated the activities of *refuseniks*.) He is sentenced to ten years in the Gulag plus three years in prison. Fellow human rights campaigner Alexander Ginzburg is given seven years hard labour. Robert Toth of the *Los Angeles Times* is expelled from the USSR for having links with Soviet dissidents.

November 22. **Irina Shostakovich** makes a statement to the Soviet copyright agency VAAP: "Everyone whom this [*Testimony*] concerned knew about it. The journal *Sovetskaya muzyka* knew about it as well."

December 14th. Soviet attempts to dissuade Harper & Row from publishing *Testimony* having failed, a memorandum of the Department of Culture suggests that "the 'memoirs' of D. D. Shostakovich" should be attacked "through Soviet and foreign organs of mass media... as an anti-Soviet forgery, discrediting the name of the great composer".

1979 April. Brezhnev receives the Lenin Prize for literature.

October. Publication of [Testimony](#) in English (tr. Antonina Bouis). "An extremely powerful, grim, gripping book and one that will set the record straight." -- **Harold C. Schonberg**, *New York Times Review of Books*. "No single account portrays so nakedly, so brutally, the crushing hand of Stalin on Russia's cultural and creative life." -- **Harrison Salisbury**. "These memoirs have afforded me an insight into Shostakovich's thoughts which would otherwise have been quite impossible." -- **André Previn**. "Book of the Year." -- *The Times*.

November. [The Soviet anti-Testimony campaign](#), coordinated by KGB colonel **Vassily Sitnikov** (see SR, pp. 50-51), begins. At the Sixth Congress of Soviet Composers, **Tikhon Khrennikov** denounces *Testimony* as "a vile falsification". Deputy Minister of Culture **Vasily Kukharsky** calls *Testimony* "a vile attempt to rouse distrust in cultural relations [between the USSR and the West]". *Literaturnaya gazeta* attacks Volkov as a "bed-bug" and publishes a "letter" -- signed by **Veniamin Basner, Kara Karayev, Yury Levitin, Karen Khachaturian, Boris Tishchenko, and Moisey Weinberg** -- which condemns *Testimony* as a "pitiful forgery". **Boris Chaikovsky, Rodion Shchedrin, Georgiy Sviridov, and Galina Ustvol'skaya** refuse to sign. (For Tishchenko's role in the *Testimony* affair, see SR, pp. 67-72.) **Maxim Shostakovich** criticises the content of *Testimony* in a radio broadcast.

December 15th. "There is nothing which makes me doubt at all the authenticity of [*Testimony*]." -- **Mark Lubotsky** (*Vrij Nederland*).

1980

January. Protesting against the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan, Andrei Sakharov and his wife, Yelena Bonner, are internally exiled to Gorky.

March. **Peter Schaeffer** (*Books & Arts*) attacks Solomon Volkov: "Who is this Volkov? Is one to take at face value the vilification not only of some of the leading lights of Soviet culture, but also the malice and bitterness with which Shostakovich purportedly speaks of Stanislavsky, Rolland, Shaw, and Feuchtwanger? Is all his life and work, the Symphony on the Siege of Leningrad, on the Year 1906 [sic], on the Year 1917, to be taken as an existential lie?"

John Warrack (*Opera*) reviews *Testimony*: "I wish [the memoirs] were not true; but I am afraid they are.' Thus a very distinguished Soviet musician, privately; and other Soviet musicians and acquaintances have confided more or less the same thing."

September 9th. "[The Interior Shostakovich](#)", a statement by **Kyrill Kondrashin**, is read during a symposium at Bucknell University, New York. [Tr. Antonina Bouis in Ho and Feofanov, *Shostakovich Reconsidered* (1998).] Kondrashin reveals his "programmatic" interpretations of Shostakovich's symphonies. Also: "The Interior Shostakovich", a statement by **Rostislav Dubinsky**, likewise read at the same symposium: "When I read *Testimony*, I saw Shostakovich himself. I saw him behind every sentence, heard the characteristic manner of his nervous, jagged conversation, always carrying a subtext." (For the complete text, see *DSCH Journal* 8 [1997].)

September 21st. **Harold C. Schonberg** (*The New York Times*) reviews Dmitri and Ludmilla Sollertinsky's *Pages from the Life of Dmitri Shostakovich*: "A contemptible book... a reflection of current Soviet hagiography... a portrait of Shostakovich as a Soviet Boy Scout [that] is in complete disagreement with everything we know about the man."

October. **Laurel Fay's** essay "Shostakovich versus Volkov: Whose Testimony?" (*The Russian Review*). Fay challenges the authenticity of *Testimony* on many factual grounds and accuses Solomon Volkov of plagiarizing passages from articles "by" Shostakovich published in Soviet periodicals and books during the composer's life. These passages, signed by Shostakovich, occur at the beginnings of chapters in *Testimony*, suggesting premeditated fraudulent intent on Volkov's part. (He does not respond to Fay's charges.)

1981

April. **Maxim Shostakovich** defects to the West. Reflecting on his criticisms of *Testimony* whilst in the USSR, he explains: "We were afraid that the book might have serious consequences for our family." **Solomon Volkov**: "They faced a moral dilemma, because they could not imitate Shostakovich: go along with the authorities outwardly, but be a hidden dissident. *Testimony* denied them a moral fig leaf." (*SR*, p. 60, fn. 51.)

June. **Maxim Shostakovich** is interviewed by Boris Schwarz: "If [*Testimony*] accomplished one good thing, it is that it revealed for the first time the tragedy of the mask of loyalty that my father had to wear all his life."

August 23rd. **Maxim Shostakovich** (*The New York Times*): "The attitude of Shostakovich toward the regime [depicted in *Testimony*] is correct... My father hated the [Soviet] tyranny. If this book changed in any way the attitude of the public toward Shostakovich as a court musician of the Soviet government, it's very good. If it proved that Shostakovich wasn't a servant of the Communist party, then thank God."

September. Eugenia Ginzburg, *Within the Whirlwind* [tr. Ian Boland]. -- The sequel to Ginzburg's autobiography *Into the Whirlwind*, which, in 1967, could only be published by finishing with a false statement of the author's communist orthodoxy and faith in "Leninist truth". Concluding Ginzburg's account of her life in the Gulag, *Within the Whirlwind* makes explicit her complete alienation from the Soviet system.

December. The "re-Stalinization" of Poland. General Jaruzelski decrees martial law. Solidarity is repressed. Mass arrests follow.

1982

June. The English expert on Russian and Soviet music **Gerald Abraham** (*The Times Literary Supplement*) pronounces *Testimony* "genuine" based on Kyrill Kondrashin's endorsement and information from a "reliable source" in the Soviet Union.

Christopher Norris (ed.), *Shostakovich: The Man and His Music* is published in London by the leftwing imprint Lawrence & Wishart. Norris calls *Testimony* "too good to be true from an anti-Soviet viewpoint".

September. The last of the Helsinki Watch Groups is disbanded.

November 10th. Brezhnev dies. Andropov succeeds him as General Secretary of the Soviet Communist Party.

1983

Boris Schwarz (*Music and Musical Life in Soviet Russia, 1917-1981*): "The overall impression [made by *Testimony*] is very persuasive."

Claude Samuel interviews **Rostropovich** and **Vishnevskaya** in Paris. (Tr. Thomas Glasow, as *Mstislav Rostropovich and Galina Vishnevskaya: Russia, Music, and Liberty*, 1995.) Vishnevskaya: "When you live in Russia, what can you do? How can Soviet artists be accused of not supporting Poland? [The Solidarity movement.] If they make one move, they'll be arrested, just like that... Over there you were always afraid 'friends' would betray you sooner or later. In a system where the government pushes people to act underhandedly, to build a career on dirty tricks, and to obtain personal benefits by being an informant, how can you help fearing that a friend might betray you for material gain?" Rostropovich: "Imagine yourself in the company of someone whom you consider your friend. And, in the friendliest of manners, he says to you, 'You know, life is atrocious in this country! What corruption!' And you start thinking, 'He might be an undercover agent --' In Russia, this has become a sickness. So, whenever you speak sincerely to a friend, even a very close friend, you instantly feel you are being shut out. For example, let's take Shostakovich or Prokofiev. Obviously they could not be accused or even suspected of being agents. Yet, sometimes, if someone else had said the same sorts of things to me as Shostakovich or Prokofiev said, well, I would have been afraid and stopped the conversation. Because that type of provocation is rampant at home. They send us people who are violently critical of the regime to make us respond in the same way... When Solzhenitsyn first came to stay with us, there was no thought of our becoming political. It was simply a humanitarian act. When they wanted to force us to drive him out, that's when the bomb exploded." Vishnevskaya: "We entered into open opposition against the regime, against the lie. You know how that turned out! We found ourselves back here, which is to say we were chased out!"

1984

January 29th-30th. "**Rudolf Barshai** remembers Shostakovich", BBC Radio 3. Barshai describes *Testimony* as "true -- the authentic voice of Shostakovich, but not the whole story".

February 9th. Andropov dies. Chernenko succeeds him.

Boris Schwarz, "Shostakovich, Soviet Citizen and Anti-Stalinist" (in *Music and Civilization: essays in honor of Paul Henry Lang*).

Malcolm H. Brown (ed.), *Russian and Soviet Music: essays for Boris Schwarz*. Includes **Joachim Braun**, "Shostakovich's Song Cycle *From Jewish Folk Poetry*: aspects of style and meaning". Braun calls *FJFP* "a masterpiece of the composer's 'secret language' of dissent".

Galina Vishnevskaya's Galina: A Russian Story: "How the authorities hastened to cover up the traces of the gradual murder of that great man! But they deluded themselves if they thought that by presenting Shostakovich in their package, by palming a Party card off on him, they had made him the very image of a loyal communist... If music can be called anti-communist, I think Shostakovich's music should be called by that name."

1985

March 10th. Chernenko dies. Gorbachev succeeds him.

Solomon Volkov's Balanchine's Tchaikovsky published in New York.

Joachim Braun, "The Double Meaning of Jewish Elements in Dimitri Shostakovich's Music" (*Musical Quarterly*). "The use of Jewish elements in Shostakovich's music reaches far beyond their specific Jewishness. The intrinsic meaning of these elements is of a socio-symbolic nature and may be interpreted as concealed dissidence. It is in fact a hidden language of resistance."

- 1985-6** **Sofiya Khentova**, *Shostakovich: zhizhn' i tvorchestvo* [*Shostakovich: life and works*], published in Moscow (2 vols).
- 1986** Summer. Gorbachev institutes policies of *glasnost* and *perestroika*. The literary censor, Glavlit, is ordered to relax its rules.
- September. **Maxim Shostakovich**, interviewed by Michael Berkeley on BBC-2, endorses *Testimony*: "It's true. It's accurate... The basis of the book is correct."
- December 16th. Gorbachev releases Sakharov from internal exile in Gorky.
- 1987** Tengiz Abuladze's anti-Stalinist film satire *Repentance* (1984) is allowed to be screened. It causes a national sensation.
- Mikhail Chulaki**, "Today I will tell you about Shostakovich", *Zvezda* [tr. excerpts in Elizabeth Wilson, *Shostakovich: A Life Remembered* (1994)]. Chulaki relates the grotesque circumstances of the early Soviet performances of the Fifth Symphony -- an account which conflicts with the chronological sequence given by Richard Taruskin's in his essay on the Fifth Symphony in David Fanning's *Shostakovich Studies* (1995). (Taruskin does not cite Chulaki.)
- August. Formation of the All-Union Federation of Socialist Clubs (FSOK) in opposition to Stalinist-Brezhnevite "socialism".

November 7th. Peter Maniura's documentary "The Public and Private Voice of Dmitri Shostakovich" is broadcast as the first programme in BBC-2's season *Shostakovich: A Career*. A largely revisionist account, the film includes contributions by Irina Shostakovich, Maxim Shostakovich, Galina Shostakovich, Yevgeny Yevtushenko, Leonid Trauberg, Galina Vishnevskaya, Yevgeny Nesterenko, Gennadi Rozhdestvensky, Rudolf Barshai, Solomon Volkov, Yuri Lyubimov, Karen Khachaturian, and Tikhon Khrennikov.

November 15th. Tony Palmer's film of *Testimony*, with Ben Kingsley as Shostakovich and Terence Rigby as Stalin, is premiered at the London Film Festival. (The soundtrack music is performed by the London Philharmonic Orchestra conducted by Rudolf Barshai.)

1988

January. **Maxim Shostakovich** interviewed by Volkov ("On 'Late' Shostakovich"): "It was one of the tricks of Soviet critics of the time to write that Shostakovich was getting sick and therefore began writing tragic music. Father wasn't conveying his personal health but the health of an era, of the times."

May. Foundation of the Democratic Union (the first opposition party in the USSR since the liquidation of the SRs in 1918).

June. Foundation of Sajudis, the Lithuanian nationalist movement.

August. Riot police break up a demonstration by the Democratic Union (organised to commemorate the Soviet repression of the Prague Spring in Czechoslovakia in 1968).

November. The Estonian Supreme Soviet declares juridical independence.

John Amis's BBC Radio 3 documentary "Shostakovich: Music in the Shadow of Stalin". Contributors include: Solomon Volkov, Maxim Shostakovich, Galina Vishnevskaya, Mstislav Rostropovich, Lyuba Edlina, Rostislav Dubinsky, Peter Pears, and Edward Downes.

1989

David Fanning, *The Breath of the Symphonist: Shostakovich's Tenth*.

January 12th-17th. Five performances of Shostakovich's anti-Stalinist satire *Rayok* under Rostropovich at the Kennedy Centre, Washington, and at Carnegie Hall. *Rayok*, alluded to in *Testimony*, did not hitherto officially exist. Its authenticity is confirmed by **Irina Shostakovich**, **Maxim Shostakovich**, **Mstislav Rostropovich**, and **Boris Tishchenko** (who later orchestrates the work).

January 20th. Discussing *Rayok* with Irina Shostakovich in *Sovetskaya kultura*, **Andrei Alexandrov** writes: "Considering the musico-political satire that is nowadays being discovered in Shostakovich and the incredible courage, intelligence, and will-power of the man and the artist, one is ashamed of the scribblers who try to defame his integrity, accusing him of cowardice and opportunism. May this composition serve as a lesson to them."

March 2nd. **Richard Taruskin**, "The Opera and the Dictator: the peculiar martyrdom of Dmitri Shostakovich" (*New Republic*). Taruskin recalls Solomon Volkov's arrival in the USA in 1976 and the letter of recommendation he wrote on Volkov's behalf. "Thus I became an early accomplice in what was, I later realized, a shameful exploitation." He describes media and academic reaction to *Testimony's* depiction of Shostakovich as a "hidden dissident" (Solomon Volkov, 1981 [April]): "Everyone wanted to believe it. Therefore, according to ecstatic reviewers, it was all true. The reception of *Testimony* was the greatest critical scandal I have

ever witnessed. For, as any proper scholar could plainly see, the book was a fraud." Summarising Laurel Fay's essay "Shostakovich versus Volkov: whose Testimony?", Taruskin attacks Tony Palmer's film *Testimony* as "appalling... maudlin sanctimony", contrasting what he regards as Palmer's platitudinous idealisation of Shostakovich with his (Taruskin's) interpretation of *Lady Macbeth of Mtsensk* as a political attempt to conform with Stalin's demonisation of the peasants during collectivization. Taruskin sees the opera as the product of "a hideous moral inversion", charging Shostakovich with "dehumanization": "The opera remains a profoundly inhumane work of art. Its chilling treatment of the victims amounts to a justification of genocide." Describing the work's fall from grace in January 1936, Taruskin writes: "Thus was Dmitri Shostakovich, perhaps Soviet Russia's most loyal musical son, and certainly her most talented one, made a sacrificial lamb, precisely for his pre-eminence among Soviet artists of his generation... The fate of *Lady Macbeth of Mtsensk* opened Shostakovich's eyes to the nature of the regime under which he was condemned to live. It could be argued that the work's martyrdom humanized its creator... A great deal of evidence suggests that in his later years Shostakovich became desperately obsessed with his historical image, and with the theme of self-justification. For he did have a history of collaboration to live down."

Summer. Formation of the Congress of People's Deputies and inauguration of the reformed Supreme Soviet. To oppose the conservative/communist rump, Congress radicals (led by Yeltsin, Sakharov, Yuri Afanasiev, and Gavril Popov) launch the reformist Inter-Regional group.

August. A million people join hands in a human chain across Estonia, Latvia, and Lithuania in commemorative protest against the Nazi-Soviet Pact of 1939. The Polish communists are defeated in free elections and replaced by the anti-communist government of Tadeusz Mazowiecki.

September. Foundation of Rukh, the Ukrainian nationalist movement. Hungary opens its border with Austria.

September 25th. A more "complete" version of *Rayok* is premiered in Moscow. The additional section consists of an epilogue ("an ode to tireless vigilance") composed by Shostakovich in the late 1960s.

Second edition of Seppo Heikinheimo's Finnish translation of *Testimony* includes a statement by **Maxim Shostakovich**: "Everything that the book says about the persecution of my father and politics in general is certainly true."

October 1st-2nd. **Stephen Johnson** ("The Roots of *Testimony*", BBC Radio 3), investigates doubts about the authenticity of *Testimony*: "Until we find out for certain, we will have to take *Testimony* with a good deal more than a pinch of salt."

October. **Rostislav Dubinsky**, [*Stormy Applause: making music in a worker's state*](#). The tone of Dubinsky's caustic account of the Soviet music scene and his dissident portrayal of Shostakovich closely correspond with *Testimony*.

October. **Rostropovich**'s recording of *Rayok* is released on Erato. Its libretto's excremental imagery reflects arguably the most vituperative satire since Swift. **André Lischké**: "For Shostakovich to have reached this point of repulsion in his irony, Zhdanov and his allies, and his successors, must really have inflicted some incurable wounds." **Michael Oliver** (*Gramophone*) reviews the disc: "*Rayok* is the most explicit testimony we have to Shostakovich's contempt for the Soviet powers-that-be."

October-December. Erich Honecker overthrown in the GDR. The Baltic states declare independence. The Czechoslovakian communist regime is peacefully replaced by Václav Havel's democratic government. The communist regimes in Bulgaria and Romania collapse.

December. **Vladimir Ashkenazy** (*Gramophone*): "Shostakovich honours everywhere he can the Soviet individuals who stand up against the omnipresent powers. That, basically, is the theme and the context of his work. In the end it really doesn't matter what society and what injustices we are talking about -- music like his communicates a message so powerful, so important and so direct that people everywhere understand it."

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CHRONOLOGY OF THE DEBATE

Part Two: 1990 - 1997

SR = *Shostakovich Reconsidered*

TNS = *The New Shostakovich*

1990

January. Fourth Estate (London) and Northeastern University Press (Boston) publish [*The New Shostakovich*](#) by **Ian MacDonald**. "I highly recommend Ian MacDonald's book *The New Shostakovich*. It is one of the best biographies of Dmitri Shostakovich I have read." -- **Maxim Shostakovich**. "The best biography of the composer available." -- **Andrei Navrozov**. "Remarkable... gets under the skin of Shostakovich and understands the perversity of the Soviet system and what it has inflicted on humanity." -- **Semyon Bychkov**. "Thank you for your wonderful book on DDS." -- **Vladimir Ashkenazy**. "Wonderful... serious, deep, well researched, well written." -- **Maya Pritsker**. "Brilliant." -- **Marina Ledin**. "I have spent most of Christmas reading your excellent book, which my dear friend Maxim Shostakovich reminded me about by saying 'It is the best book written about my father'." -- **Seppo Heikinheimo**. "Anti-Stalinist readings, of astounding blatancy and jejune specificity, for all of Shostakovich's works. As music criticism, altogether worthless." -- **Richard Taruskin** (2000). "Trite." -- **Tamara Bernstein** (2000). "A moronic tract." -- **Laurel Fay** (1995).

February. Abandoning faith in Lenin, Gorbachev vows to bring about "the spiritual and political liberation of Soviet society".

"On some musical citations in Shostakovich's music", by the composer's long-standing colleague **Lev Lebedinsky**, is published in *Novy Mir*. [Tr. Tatjana Marovic and Ian MacDonald, as "Code, quotation and collage: some musical allusions in the works of Dmitri Shostakovich", in Ho and Feofanov, *Shostakovich Reconsidered* (1998).] Lebedinsky confirms Shostakovich's allusion, in his Eleventh Symphony, to the Hungarian Uprising (cf. *TNS*, pp. 215-16); reveals the quotation of "Suliko", Stalin's favourite song, in the First Cello Concerto; asserts that the march in the first movement of the Seventh Symphony was conceived by Shostakovich as "the 'Stalin' theme" and that the Twelfth Symphony originated as "a criticism of Lenin" (cf. *TNS*, pp. 225-7); and confirms the autobiographical, anti-communist subtext of the Eighth Quartet (cf. *TNS*, pp. 222-4): "The quartet was composed immediately after he had joined the Communist Party -- and this, to Shostakovich, was equivalent to death itself."

June. The Leninist old guard is defeated at 28th Party Congress. The Soviet system is on the point of economic collapse.

June. Soviet issue of *Tempo*. Includes **Malcolm MacDonald's** "The Anti-Formalist *Rayok* -- Learners Start Here!": "*Rayok* represents, in an extreme vitriolic form, an aspect of Shostakovich's musical humour that could only express itself publicly through a protective mask of irony. The vitriol is here undiluted, because *Rayok* was written with no thought of publication."

"Shostakovich: the official and the authentic", by a long-time colleague of Shostakovich, the musicologist **Daniel Zhitomirsky**, is published in *Daugava*. [Tr. Tatjana Marovic, Katia Vinogradova, Ian MacDonald: "[Shostakovich: the public and the private.](#)"] Zhitomirsky confirms Shostakovich's alienation from the Soviet regime, and endorses *Testimony* at length: "I'm convinced that no serious scholar of Shostakovich's work -- and, in particular of his life and times -- should disregard this source."

November 11th. "A False Note", by Shostakovich's former pupil **Yuri Levitin**, is published in *Pravda*. Levitin contests Lebedinsky's claim that the march in the first movement of the Seventh Symphony was conceived as "the 'Stalin' theme", calling Lebedinsky a "zealous scribe" and accusing him of "primitive vulgarisation".

November 24th. **Harlow Robinson** (*The New York Times*) recalls that, in Moscow in 1979, when copies of *Testimony* were circulating clandestinely, "Soviet musicologists and musicians (including those who knew him well) expressed reservations about Mr. Volkov's motives and methods, [but] they agreed almost unanimously that this was the Shostakovich they knew".

December 29th. "The Gulag and Shostakovich's Memorial", by the eminent Russian writer **Andrei Bitov** (*Nezavisimaya gazeta*). (Tr. Susan Brownsberger in Ho and Feofanov, *Shostakovich Reconsidered* (1998).] Bitov writes: "Shostakovich was not a lost sheep. He knew. He knew what he was doing and what to expect for it. Shostakovich survived nothing less than execution. For him, the execution lasted at least two decades."

1991

January 13th. Soviet special forces in Lithuania storm the Vilnius television tower in an attempt to deter separatism. Fifteen people are killed.

March 19th. **Lev Lebedinsky's** letter "The master's honour" published in *Pravda*: "Writing in the Stalinist years, [Shostakovich] had to respond to everything the era brought with it. Moreover it was a condition of that time that he could rarely reveal his specific thoughts. Thus in order to express his convictions, while at the same time concealing their form and content, he, like many of the most honest and greatest artists, was often forced to resort to the use of 'Aesopian language'. Many have not understood this fact and, even now, refuse to understand it."

May. **Maxim Shostakovich** (*Gramophone*) rejects Sofiya Khentova's biography of his father (1985-6): "I hate her book and I told her so, because all the explanations come from the wrong political angle. The facts are okay, but she makes him look like a genuine son of the ****ing Communist Party."

May. **Maxim Shostakovich** (interview, *DSCH*) comments on Ian MacDonald's *The New Shostakovich*: "A very good book. I like this book."

May. **Ian MacDonald**, "[Shostakovich and Bulgakov: a significant affinity](#)" (*DSCH Newsletter XVIII*).

June. **Yuri Temirkanov** (*CD Review*): "I am always nervous when I conduct Shostakovich in the West because people know only superficially what happened; they don't know the real horror of the facts, and to understand Shostakovich fully you have to understand the extent of those horrors."

June 12th. Yeltsin elected President of the RSFSR.

July 20th. Yeltsin bans the CPSU from holding office in Russia.

July. **Semyon Bychkov**, interviewed about Shostakovich on BBC-2, calls the Seventh Symphony a universal protest against "Hitler... Stalin... Lenin..."

"On the debate about Shostakovich", by the musicologist **Lev Mazel'**, is published in *Sovetskaya muzika*. [Tr. Tatjana Marovic and Ian MacDonald, as "An Inner Rebellion: thoughts on the current debate about Shostakovich", in Ho and Feofanov, *Shostakovich Reconsidered* (1998).] Mazel': "[Shostakovich] gave all the outward appearances of obeying orders while staging an inner rebellion. We should be eternally grateful that throughout those desperate times he managed to preserve his genius and create works of immense power." Mazel' criticises Yuri Levitin's attack on Lebedinsky (1990). Levitin makes no response.

August 18th-21st. The Communist/KGB old guard, attempting a coup against Gorbachev, is defeated by army rebels and parliamentary resistance led by Boris Yeltsin and his deputy Alexander Rutskoi.

August 26th. **Semyon Bychkov** is interviewed five days after the abortive coup (*DSCH Newsletter XIX*). What does Bychkov think Shostakovich would have made of it all? "He would have got very drunk! I wish he and Sakharov had lived to see this day. Sakharov at least saw the beginnings. Shostakovich probably would have written another requiem. Then again, who's better off? Shostakovich, who's been dead since long before even glasnost', or someone who's still alive but conscious of a life destroyed by the old Soviet regime?" And what of *Testimony*? "Whether it happened exactly as Volkov said word for word is a secondary and not very interesting question. Essentially, what I read in that book is what I hear in his music. The *spirit* is true."

Derek Hulme, *Dmitri Shostakovich: Catalogue, Bibliography and Discography* (second edition).

December 1st. Ukraine votes for independence.

December 25th. Gorbachev resigns.

December 31st. The USSR is abolished at midnight.

Winter. **Christopher Norris**, "Shostakovich and Cold War Cultural Politics" (*Southern Humanities Review*) -- a hostile review of Ian MacDonald's *The New Shostakovich*: "The book proceeds by systematically inverting the value-judgements and the standards of musico-political accountability that were applied to Shostakovich with such brutal consistency throughout the greater part of his composing career."

1992

Inauguration of the [International Shostakovich Association](#) (Vice-President **Irina Shostakovich**). The body's [founding statement](#) is unequivocally revisionist.

January 25th. **Maxim Shostakovich** appears with Solomon Volkov at a Shostakovich symposium at Russell Sage College, New York. Maxim: "[*Testimony*] is a very important book which revealed a whole aspect of the composer and his life in his homeland that was really unknown before."

Spring. **Ian MacDonald**, "Commonsense about Shostakovich: breaking the hermeneutic circle" (*Southern Humanities Review*). A response to Norris's review in the same magazine in Winter 1991. [Revised as "[Universal Because Specific](#)" in Ho and Feofanov, *Shostakovich Reconsidered* (1980.)]

Spring. **Vladimir Ashkenazy** ([interview](#), *DSCH Newsletter XX*) observes that passages from *Testimony* have appeared in *Sovetskaya muzika* recently. *DSCH*: "What do you think the response will be? Will people be surprised?" Ashkenazy: "Not at all. A confirmation of what they already knew. As far as the character and image of Shostakovich is concerned, I'm sure [*Testimony*] is true to life. I was always sure Shostakovich hated the Soviet system because we all hated it."

Summer. **Richard Taruskin** (*The Slavic Review*) dismisses Ian MacDonald's *The New Shostakovich*: "A counter-caricature of Shostakovich, asserted in the teeth of the old official view (itself a transparent political fabrication and long recognised as such) that cast the composer as an unwavering apostle of Soviet patriotism and established ideology. Instead, we are now bade to believe, he was an unremitting subversive who used his music as a means of Aesopian truth-telling in a society built on falsehood. MacDonald's thesis is well insulated and as tightly argued as any conspiracy theory and the author writes with flair. But the new view is as simpleminded and unrealistically one-dimensional as the old. The very ease with which the author proves his case undoes it; for if any fool can see 'the new Shostakovich' for what he was, then any informer or commissar might as easily have caught him out in the evil days of yore."

June. **Mstislav Rostropovich**, interviewed by Rob Ainsley for *Classic CD*, tells the story of how he once found Shostakovich practising his signature upside down. "It's for 'my' articles in the newspapers," Shostakovich explained (articles ghosted for him along approved lines and brought to him for his mandatory signature). "It's so that I can sign them when they push them across the table to me without having to turn them round to read them."

November 23rd. **Maxim Shostakovich** is interviewed with Solomon Volkov on Radio Liberty: "I would like to take this opportunity and thank you for your book about my father -- for your description of the political atmosphere of suffering of this giant artist."

Solomon Volkov (*Muzykal'naya akademiya*): "I have a perfectly clean conscience about any debt to Dmitry Dmitriyevich Shostakovich. I have accomplished everything we agreed to."

1993

"Shostakovich" by **Daniel Zhitomirsky** is published in *Muzikal'naya akademiya*. [Tr. Véronique Zaytzeff and Frederick Morrison in Ho and Feofanov, *Shostakovich Reconsidered* (1998).] The essay develops material first deployed in *Daugava* in 1990.

March. **Malcolm H. Brown** (*Notes*) attacks Ian MacDonald's *The New Shostakovich*. Brown refers to Maxim Shostakovich's "long-standing and outspoken scepticism about Volkov" and asserts that "Maxim has allowed his family name to be co-opted for commerce on behalf of MacDonald's book". He adds: "As more of Shostakovich's contemporaries speak out and as reliable documentary information becomes available, the 'real' Shostakovich is likely to emerge as both a sometime closet dissident and a sometime collaborator." (Brown's attack is reproduced in the Summer issue of *melos*.) **Ian MacDonald** responds in the same issue of *melos* and in the March 1994 issue of *Notes*: "I am far from alone in holding these views -- almost all recent Russian commentators share, in varying degrees, my vision of Shostakovich." MacDonald points out that Maxim Shostakovich "has, on numerous occasions since 1986, authenticated *Testimony*, reserving judgement only on what he calls 'rumours', none of which, he stresses, affect his judgement of the main thrust of the book". MacDonald charges Brown with seeking to maintain "the old, worn-out image of Shostakovich as a confused, corrupt, and

impenetrable introvert... The key to hearing Shostakovich is to recognise his intelligence."

Malcolm H. Brown replies (*Notes*, March 1994):

"Ian MacDonald just doesn't get the point that it makes ordinary commonsense *not* to trust someone you know to be a liar, and that's what we know Solomon Volkov to be. It doesn't really matter how many ex-Soviets believe that *Testimony* is 'essentially accurate'."

May. "Shostakovich's Idioms", by the emigré musicologist **Vladimir Zak**, is published in *Yevreysky mir*. [Tr. Véronique Zaytzeff and Frederick Morrison in Ho and Feofanov, *Shostakovich Reconsidered* (1998).] "The abstract language of music allowed [Shostakovich] to be outspoken, right to the very end. His great symphonic anthology of the totalitarian regime unreservedly reveals the sufferings of a man condemned 'to play a double game' or, rather, lead a double life." Zak discusses Shostakovich's public tactics of Aesopian protest and endorses *Testimony*.

Summer. All-Shostakovich issue of *melos*. German Shostakovich expert **Detlef Gojowy**: "The legend that circulated earlier, insinuating that [*Testimony*] was a falsification, was completely disposed of, [yet] is... still disturbing some Western minds."

Irina Nikolska [interviews](#) various Russian musicians. **Vera Volkova**, musicologist, calls Shostakovich "a musical dissident": "My perception of Shostakovich's music is quite consonant with the image created in the composer's memoirs by Solomon Volkov." **Lev Lebedinsky**: "I regard [*Testimony*] as one of the most important publications devoted to the composer, and its authenticity doesn't raise any questions or doubts in me. This is the truth about Shostakovich."

Lebedinsky describes the Twelfth Symphony as "a denunciation of Leninism": "It contains a characteristic soliloquy where Lenin's speech is presented in the form of a parody." Asked about Volkov, **Boris Tishchenko** replies: "I think it non-

ethical to mention this name in a conversation about Shostakovich." **Israel Nestyev**: "In Shostakovich's works, tragedy is often neighbour to fierce sarcasm directed against narrow-mindedness, banality, inhumanity." Nestyev sees the slow movement of the Fifth Symphony as "a requiem for the millions of innocent victims of Stalin's regime", adding: "Not a single other artist -- no painter, dramatist, or film-maker -- could think of using their art as a means of expressing protest against Stalin's Terror. Only instrumental music was able to express the terrible truth of that time." Nestyev on *Testimony*: "This book is known to be a reflection of Shostakovich's views -- and, indeed, the genuine talks of this musicologist [Solomon Volkov] with the composer are included in the book. At the same time parts of it would never have been approved by Dmitri Dmitriyevich and he would never have agreed to publish them in his lifetime." **Marina Sabinina** claims to have been personally unimpressed by Solomon Volkov and suggests that parts of *Testimony* were obtained from other "pupils" of Shostakovich. She otherwise confirms the composer's alienation from the Soviet regime, but stresses the mocking irony by which he preserved his inner resilience: "He was able to disengage himself from the events of Soviet reality, to soar above it." She dismisses his "falsely patriotic" choral works as having "very little in common with his real style" and describes Shostakovich's scores for such "repulsive, hypocritical movies as *The Unforgettable Year 1919*, *The Fall of Berlin*, and *The Meeting on the Elbe*" as "compromises which repelled him as an artist and were bitter and humiliating for him". (She adds that he had to write these things, even though doing so "violated" him, because he had no other source of income at that time.) Observing that foreigners hear Shostakovich's music as "pure" music out of social context and thus miss its "dramatic" character, Sabinina claims that the third movement of the Eleventh Symphony "could be associated with the mass executions of the Soviet time and Stalin's reprisals, while the first part with

its melodies of pre-revolutionary songs of hard labour and banishment recall the victims of the Gulag -- the millions who perished in concentration camps and prisons". She confesses having had to throw out "whole passages" of her 1976 book on Shostakovich's symphonies in order to get it published: "I would have liked to show truthfully the tragedy of this genius who suffered persecutions from rude, uncouth nonentities who tried to crush and trample him; who had to buy the right to be himself with certain concessions. But it was impossible to speak it outright, so by force of necessity I resorted to hints, allusions, and innuendos." **Manashir Yakubov** purports to discredit the picture of Shostakovich as "an internal dissident" painted by Lev Lebedinsky and Daniel Zhitomirsky by referring to pre-war writings by these authors when they considered the composer to be an orthodox Soviet artist. Yakubov more or less shares Sabinina's view of the genesis of *Testimony*, nominating Lev Lebedinsky and Lev Arnshtam as key informants. Yakubov's view of Shostakovich is paradoxical and often self-contradictory (e.g., "He was an internal emigré, like many other members of the intelligentsia -- but at the same time he was a patriot sharing the belief in some ideas of revolution").

September 21st. Yeltsin's opponents in the Russian parliament barricade themselves in the White House.

September 26th. Mstislav Rostropovich and the National Symphony Orchestra give a free concert in Red Square to rapturous crowds.

Isaak Glikman's *Pisma k drugu (Letters to a Friend: Dmitri Shostakovich to Isaak Glikman)* is published in Russia. Several letters contain mocking references to Soviet conventions. In general, Glikman's view of Shostakovich does not differ from the vast majority of the composer's other Soviet colleagues. **Richard Taruskin** (*The Atlantic Monthly* [1995, February]) acknowledges the anti-communist satire in Shostakovich's letters to Glikman, but describes Glikman's explanatory comments as an illegitimate attempt to "take possession" of their meaning, as if other valid interpretations of a quite different kind might exist. Taruskin does not indicate what these alternative interpretations might be.

October 3rd-4th. The "October Events". General Makashov's pro-parliamentary troops attempt to take control of Moscow's Ostankino TV station, but are repulsed in heavy street fighting. Yeltsin orders the bombardment of the White House. The rebels surrender.

1994

January. "Shostakovich: the man and his age" -- conference held at Michigan University. **Inna Barsova** argues that Shostakovich became creatively alienated from the Soviet regime during the late 1920s. **Richard Taruskin** dismisses Ian MacDonald's *The New Shostakovich* as "a travesty". Conceding the presence of subversive irony in Shostakovich's letters to Isaak Glikman, Taruskin warns against searching for hidden meanings in the composer's music. **Nelly Kravetz** reveals the "Elmira" code in the Tenth Symphony.

Summer. **Valentin Berlinsky** (*DSCH Journal 1*): "When Shostakovich died, it was said that it was not only the death of a great composer, but the death of a musical conscience."

[Krzysztof Meyer's](#) biography *Dimitri Shostakovich* published in Paris. **Igor Shafarevich**, "Shostakovich and the Russian Resistance to Communism" (in *Shafarevich: sochineniya 2*, Moscow).

September. **Elizabeth Wilson's** *Shostakovich: A Life Remembered* is published in London. **Ian MacDonald** [reviews](#) it in *DSCH Journal 2*: "The picture of Shostakovich which emerges from it is overwhelmingly consistent and coherent. I was amazed to find myself still shockable by the full truth about Shostakovich. For, as revealed by Elizabeth Wilson's witnesses, it is far worse than even *Testimony* suggests, and certainly exceeds the most pessimistic deductions made by me in *The New Shostakovich*. Critics who have spent years claiming that the accounts given by Solomon Volkov and myself are Cold War caricatures will need all the evasiveness and dishonesty they can muster to wriggle out of this one." **Richard Taruskin** (*The New York Times*): "The one indispensable book about the composer."

November 6th. **Richard Taruskin**, "A Martyred Opera Reflects Its Abominable Time" (*The New York Times*). Taruskin effectively reiterates his 1989 [March] interpretation of *Lady Macbeth of Mtsensk*, slightly changing a key sentence: "Dmitri Shostakovich, *till then* perhaps Soviet Russia's most loyal musical son and certainly her most talented one, had been made a sacrificial lamb." Taruskin states that Shostakovich has come to be seen in a falsely heroic light -- "a light made garish by sensationalistic publications like *Testimony*, Solomon Volkov's spurious book of Shostakovich "memoirs", or *The New Shostakovich*, Ian MacDonald's worthless ventriloquist's act on the music". He adds: "So ineluctably has the opera come to symbolize pertinacity in the face of inhumanity that it is virtually impossible now to see it as an embodiment of that very inhumanity... Shostakovich was writing his opera in defense of the lawless extermination of the kulaks, peasants who were

resisting forced collectivization in the brutal period of the first Five Year Plan... His opera is a faithful reflection of an abominable time, and a memento of it."

December. Yeltsin orders action against insurgent Chechnya. During the next two years, the ensuing war costs 25,000 Russian lives.

1995

February. **Terry Teachout**, "The Problem of Shostakovich" (*Commentary*). Teachout summarises the debate up to the appearance of Elizabeth Wilson's *Shostakovich: A Life Remembered*. "The concept of 'secret dissidence' did not suddenly enter the annals of 20th-century music with the publication of Volkov's *Testimony*. It was the stock-in-trade of innumerable European musicians accused of collaboration with the Nazis. The wartime records of such otherwise distinguished artists as Richard Strauss, Wilhelm Furtwängler, Willem Mengelberg, and Alfred Cortot continue to raise hackles in musical circles, with defenders of these men typically claiming that they privately opposed Hitler and did what they could to help Jewish friends and colleagues escape the Holocaust. Unlike the musicians of the Third Reich, Shostakovich was never in a position to flee his captors... *Testimony* or no *Testimony*, it is no longer possible to regard Shostakovich as a faithful servant of the Communist party. *Shostakovich: A Life Remembered* leaves no doubt whatsoever that he hated Stalin, hated Communism, hated the *apparatchiki* and the *nomenklatura*, and that much of his music was in some meaningful sense intended to convey this hatred."

February. **Richard Taruskin**, "Who Was Shostakovich?" (*The Atlantic Monthly*). Taruskin argues that Isaak Glikman's comments on Shostakovich's letters to him [1993] constitute "an attempt to contain meaning and foreclose interpretation". Any attempt to suggest that the letters contain anti-communist satire reduces "not only meaning but interest and value". Shostakovich's work is not to be confined by such interpretation: "The fact is that no one owns the meaning of this music, which has always supported (nay, invited -- nay, compelled) multiple opportunistic and contradictory readings." Taruskin analyses rival interpretations of the Seventh Symphony and the issues raised during the 1948 conferences. He admits a sense of subtextual ambiguity in the Fourth Symphony and concedes that the Eighth Quartet contains a "message in a bottle" (which, he argues, reduces its value as a work of art). He attacks Ian MacDonald's "monological" approach to interpretation: "Having ears only for the paraphrase, he is unable to distinguish his own hectoring, monotonous voice from Shostakovich's." He rejects the idea that Shostakovich was a secret dissident: "The mature Shostakovich was not a dissident. The mature Shostakovich was an *intelligent*. He was heir to a noble tradition of artist and social thought -- one that abhorred injustice and political repression, but also one that valued social commitment, participation in one's community, and solidarity with people. Shostakovich's mature idea of art, in contrast to the egoistic traditions of Western modernism, was based not on alienation but on service. He found a way of maintaining public service and personal integrity under unimaginably hard conditions. In this way he remained, in the time-honored Russian, if not exactly the Soviet sense of the word, a 'civic' artist."

March. **David Fanning** (ed.), *Shostakovich Studies*.

This volume includes **Richard Taruskin's** essay "Public lies and unspeakable truth: interpreting Shostakovich's Fifth Symphony". Taruskin denies that Shostakovich could have harboured dissident thoughts ("There were no dissidents in Stalin's Russia") and repudiates the legitimacy of suggesting otherwise: "That characterisation, popular as it has become, and attractive as it always will be to many, has got to be rejected as a self-gratifying anachronism." Taruskin argues that Shostakovich's rehabilitation following the Fifth Symphony was the denouement of a prepared Stalinist script: "His forgiveness was surely just as foreordained as his fall." He describes Ian MacDonald as "the very model of a Stalinist critic", accusing him of "vile trivialisation" and "McCarthyism".

Solomon Volkov's *St Petersburg: A Cultural History* is published in New York. Its rich account of Shostakovich's cultural milieu makes it an indispensable addition to any library of Shostakovichiana.

October. **Galina Shostakovich** endorses *Testimony* (SR, p. 83): "I am an admirer of Volkov."

**1996-
8**

Ivan Sollertinsky's letters to Shostakovich are published, edited by Lyudmila Mikheyeva, in *Zhurnal lyubiteley iskusstva*.

1996

4th German Shostakovich Symposium [Academy Rheinsburg, Brandenburg], chaired by **Hilmar Schmalenberg**, chairman of the German Shostakovich Society and leader of the Schmalenberg Quartet, which premiered most of the composer's quartets in the former GDR. (Report in *DSCH Journal* 5 [Summer 1996].) Schmalenberg "started [by] stating the significance of Shostakovich's personal history and its close links with state terror as experienced in the USSR. The symphonic dimensions of some works, the use of the

grotesque in times of war and the Jewish 'intonations' as a reflection of the [prevailing] anti-Jewish propaganda turned the string quartets [into] something of a personal diary, whose central theme was the inner debate on the 'state and artist' theme..." Musicologist **Detlef Gojowy** "stirred the audience's imagination by referring to the string quartets as a kind of scene-sequence, as a *dramma per musica*, which might have been inspired by the theatre of the absurd or the Meyerhold/Tairov production in St Petersburg of the 1930s... Working in Meyerhold's theatre in his early years, [the composer] might well have [been impressed by] the point of view that the four instruments of the quartet [represent] 'masks' that act out a sometimes trivial, sometimes enigmatic play for the listener. Even the quotations of his and other composers' music can be seen as such masks. These masks culminate in the last quartet, being on the whole dissimilar to earlier works and requiring much more formulation in the listeners' minds."

April 14th. **Laurel Fay**, "The Composer was Courageous but not as much as in Myth" (*The New York Times*). Fay argues that *From Jewish Folk Poetry* was not a work of protest against the persecution of Soviet Jews, but an attempt to "kowtow" to the *apparatus* with a work in the folk-national idiom: "He did what was required of him. It was his rotten luck that of all the available nationalities, he just happened to pick the wrong 'folk' as his inspiration."

June. **Ian MacDonald** replies (*DSCH Journal* 5) to Richard Taruskin's essay in Fanning's 1995 book. MacDonald concedes the value of Taruskin's remarks on the Cultural Revolution and his "sensitive discourse" on the slow movement of the Fifth Symphony, but argues that his rejection of Shostakovich's secret dissidence is both tautological and ahistorical. MacDonald further criticises Taruskin for his belligerence and attacks his account of the Soviet reception of the Fifth Symphony as a polemical distortion of the documentary record. Taruskin does not respond, instead reprinting his essay ("Public lies and unspeakable truths") in his collection *Defining Russia Musically* (1997). (MacDonald's review is later adapted as the first half of "Naive Anti-revisionism" in Ho and Feofanov's *Shostakovich Reconsidered* [1998].)

Sofiya Khentova, *Shostakovich: zhizhn' i tvorchestvo* [*Shostakovich: life and works*], second edition.

December. **Flora Litvinova** ("Remembering Shostakovich", *Znamya*): "At a meeting [in the last years of his life], Dmitry Dmitriyevich said: 'You know, Flora, I met a wonderful young man -- a Leningrad musicologist (he did not tell me his name -- F. L.). This young man knows my music better than I do. Somewhere, he dug everything up, even my juvenilia.' I saw that this thorough study of his music pleased Shostakovich immensely. 'We now meet constantly, and I tell him everything I remember about my works and myself. He writes it down, and at a subsequent meeting I look it over.'" (This passage was omitted from excerpts from Litvinova's text as reproduced in Elizabeth Wilson's *Shostakovich: A Life Remembered* in 1994.)

Winter. **Irina Shostakovich** (*DSCH Journal* 6) accuses Yuri Korev, former editor of *Sovetskaya muzika*, of dishonesty in supporting Solomon Volkov's claims of having interviewed Shostakovich many times. (See *SR*, p. 137.)

Winter. **Kurt Sanderling**, assistant to Mravinsky during 1941-1960, is [interviewed](#) by *DSCH*: "I think that for us contemporaries who knew and worked with Shostakovich, it has never been difficult to interpret his works along with their double meanings. For us, it was all very clear... The Fifth Symphony was the first contemporary work with which I was confronted (in the USSR) and I got the impression: yes -- that's exactly it -- that's our life here... The so-called 'triumph' at the end -- we understood what he was saying. And it was not the 'triumph' of the mighty, those in power." And *Testimony*? "I have no doubt that it's true."

Winter. **Ian MacDonald**, "Fay versus Shostakovich: whose stupidity?" (*East European Jewish Affairs*). MacDonald criticises Fay's "historically illiterate" *New York Times* article on *From Jewish Folk Poetry*: "Fay's interpretation depends on an estimate of Shostakovich's intelligence which is frankly insulting." (This article is adapted as the second half of "Naive Anti-Revisionism" in Ho and Feofanov, *Shostakovich Reconsidered* [1998].)

1997

Larry Weinstein's documentary [The War Symphonies: Shostakovich Against Stalin](#). Strongly revisionist, this film includes contributions by Veniamin Basner, Valery Gergiev, Isaac Glikman, Abraam Gozenpud, Karen Khachaturian, Tikhon Khrennikov, Mariya Konniskaya, Flora Litvinova, Ilya Musin, Natan Perelman, Vladimir Rubin, Maria Sabinina, Alisa Shebalina, Galina Shostakovich, and Dmitri Tolstoy. **Royal S. Brown** (*Cineaste*, 24 [1999], 2-3) attacks Weinstein's film as "propaganda": "The various witnesses go through great contortions to make their view of history fit the

Volkov thesis."

Maxim Shostakovich vouches for the authenticity of excerpts from *Testimony* reprinted in *Composers on Music* edited by Josiah Fisk.

April 19. **Maxim Shostakovich** tells Ho and Feofanov: "[*Testimony* is] a great book, showing the life of the artist under the totalitarian regime... I am a supporter both of *Testimony* and of Volkov."

September. **David Fanning** (*Gramophone*) interviews the composer **Rodion Shchedrin**, referring to the latter's "image-consciousness" and "selective memory", and suggesting that he is anxious to justify his record in the former Soviet Union: "Shchedrin goes straight into an explanation of the nature of necessary compromise for a Soviet composer. 'You know Shostakovich helped [with acceptance for performance] tremendously with [my Second Symphony], as he did with my *Carmen Suite*. Yet he himself had to make all sorts of compromises. His music was much more courageous... If you want to hear it all in the open, listen to his Fourth Symphony.' He rehearses Russia's tragedy yet again: 'Stalin killed 60 million people. Not one family was untouched. I lost two uncles, and both my father-in-law and mother-in-law were in prison. After his death the windows opened each month a little more.'... For all his affability, there is an unmistakable element of self-justification in his conversation. It's difficult to avoid the suspicion that Shchedrin tends to rely on his audience not knowing too much about Russian music... Yet it's difficult to blame Shchedrin for his eagerness to defend his position. 'You in the West sometimes have a very naive view. You think in black and white. Relations with the authorities were always complex, for Shostakovich and Prokofiev as well as others. I remember playing in a performance of Prokofiev's *Zdravitsa* [aka *Hail to Stalin*], for instance. But wouldn't you compromise if you had to save your family?'"

October 4th. Regional meeting of the American Musicological Society in Chicago, Illinois. **Allan B. Ho** and **Dmitry Feofanov** present, for the first time, some of the new evidence assembled in their forthcoming book *Shostakovich Reconsidered*. Summarised in *DSCH Journal* 8, their presentation was as follows: "We called attention to a number of previously overlooked, or unknown, pieces of evidence bearing on the authenticity of *Testimony* and on the reception these memoirs have received in academic circles. For the first time at an AMS meeting, we presented evidence on the following topics: (1) Shostakovich's anti-communist views, expressed privately in letters to his friends, as they related to, and confirmed, *Testimony*; (2) Shostakovich's repeated thoughts of emigration, which can be traced back to as early as 1928; (3) Flora Litvinova's corroboration of the genesis of *Testimony* based on what Shostakovich himself told her in the last years of his life; (4) Galina Shostakovich's recent unequivocal endorsement of both *Testimony* and Volkov; and (5) two specific examples of academic cover-up in Shostakovich research involving, first, the aforementioned statement by Litvinova, and, second, the significance of Shostakovich's signature at the beginning of Chapter 1 of *Testimony*, which includes one of the most embittered statements in the book. We also distributed two handouts: "A Primer for Musicologists," outlining rule-of-thumb methods for deciphering Shostakovich's Aesopian language, and materials pertaining to standard book contacts. The latter were provided in anticipation of Malcolm Hamrick Brown's oft-repeated charge that Volkov refuses to publish *Testimony* in Russian. It demonstrated the standard practice in the publishing industry of vesting copyright in the name of the author, but granting publication rights (and, consequently, decisions) to the publisher."

November. **Rodion Shchedrin** writes to *Gramophone* to complain about the tone and content of David Fanning's interview with him in the September issue: "In a totalitarian system, relations between the artist and the regime are always extremely complex and contradictory. If the artist sets himself against the system, he is put behind bars or simply killed. But if he does not express his disagreement with its dogmas *verbally* ('When you enter the city of the one-eyed, shut one eye,' ancient wisdom tells us), he is not physically bothered, he is left alone. He is even rewarded from time to time. For example, Prokofiev received six Stalin Prizes (1943, 1946, 1946, 1946, 1947 and 1951) and Shostakovich five Stalin Prizes (1941, 1942, 1948, 1950 and 1952) and two State Prizes (1968 and 1974). I have always believed that *real* music has the power to overcome the regime and all its ideological taboos. Who allowed Shostakovich's Symphonies Nos. 8, 10 and 13, for instance? Who gave them licences? They gave themselves permission to exist by the strength of their musical truth and musical power. The 'younger generation' of [Russian] composers, to whom Fanning refers, are showing a clear tendency to reproach Shostakovich for the compromises he made in his life. But Shostakovich did not wish to rot in prison or in a cemetery; he wanted to tell people, through the power of his art, his pain and his hatred of totalitarianism. He wrote all his scores in a Soviet country. He was recognized and given awards there. But in his music he was always honest and uncompromising. In his article, Fanning diligently and consistently attempts to persuade the uninformed musical reader that I have some guilt somewhere. For what? For not having been in prison? For succeeding Shostakovich as Chairman of the Composers' Union of Russia, an organization he founded? For being its Honorary Chairman to this day? For not joining the Communist Party? For refusing to sign a letter from the intelligentsia in 1968 supporting the invasion of Czechoslovakia by troops of the Warsaw Pact? For being a member

along with Academician Andrei Sakharov and Boris Yeltsin in the democratic opposition in Parliament, the Inter-Regional Group of People's Deputies [see 1989 (Summer)], when red flags still flew over the Kremlin? Yes, in my life I have made compromises (and who has not?). But I have never made a single compromise in any of my compositions."

November 18th. **Rodion Shchedrin** to Martin Anderson at La Maison de la Radio France, Paris: "It makes me so angry. These people..." Anderson: "You mean people like Fanning, the Western academics?" Shchedrin: "Yes. They know nothing about it, they never lived through it, and they write things that are so deep [holds thumb and forefinger close together] -- one millimetre!" Anderson: "Ian MacDonald says the same of Laurel Fay." Shchedrin: "Yes, exactly; she knows nothing either."

Winter. **Ian MacDonald** and **Dmitry Feofanov**, "[Do Not Judge Me Harshly!](#): anti-communism in Shostakovich's letters to Isaak Glikman" (*DSCH Journal* 8).

Winter. **Allan Ho** and **Dmitry Feofanov**, "Shostakovich and the Testimony Affair" (*DSCH Journal* 8). The authors describe their presentation at the American Musicological Society [see above, October]: "Malcolm Hamrick Brown, who was present at the AMS meeting, described the abstract for our paper as "fraudulent" (while admitting that he had not read it) and wished for "appropriate actions". Subsequently submissions followed up on Brown's wish by proposing that we be sentenced to the academic equivalent of Siberia -- a 3 to 5 year ban on presenting papers at the AMS meetings... As we were preparing to take questions from the audience, Malcolm Hamrick Brown made his way to the microphone, responding to us with a nine-page handout, a verbal rebuttal, and a public insult of Solomon Volkov, whom he called a liar. Due to time constraints, we were not allowed to demonstrate how Brown's points are invalid and, in fact, are

additional examples of selective scholarship." Ho and Feofanov set out these new claims against Brown in the form of 12 points of disputed fact. They conclude: "In his AMS handout and elsewhere, Brown suggests that, if you cannot trust Solomon Volkov on one point (the provenance of the passages recycled from earlier articles), 'it makes ordinary commonsense not to trust' him on other points. We submit that if you cannot trust Malcolm Hamrick Brown on at least twelve points, it makes even less sense to trust him on one point: that Solomon Volkov is a liar and plagiarist. *Testimony* is exactly what it purports to be: the memoirs of Dmitri Dmitriyevich Shostakovich."

Winter. Russian musicologist **Mark Aranovsky** writes (in "[The Dissident](#)", *Muzikal'naya akademiya*): "Shostakovich's art remained practically the only artistic event which actively resisted the [Soviet] totalitarian regime. Without exaggeration, we can say that dissidence was the unifying, integral feature of the entire artistic output of this great musician."

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CHRONOLOGY OF THE DEBATE

Part Three: 1998 - 1999

SR = *Shostakovich Reconsidered*

TNS = *The New Shostakovich*

1998 February 15th. **Christopher Norris** claims (BBC Radio 3) that no one of consequence endorses *Testimony*, adding that it is immoral [sic] to suggest that Shostakovich was not a faithful communist and that it is merely "fashionable" to maintain such an opinion.

February 22nd. "Was Shostakovich reluctant to smile because of his unattractive teeth?" enquires an article in *The Sunday Telegraph*.

June. [*Shostakovich Reconsidered*](#), by **Allan B. Ho** and **Dmitry Feofanov**, is published by Toccata Press with an "Overture" by **Vladimir Ashkenazy**: "Students and teachers of the [Moscow] Conservatory and the musical community in general... knew without a shadow of a doubt that Shostakovich deeply detested the system in which he lived... When I read *Testimony*, there was no question in my mind that the real Shostakovich was here in this book... I personally was happy that the rest of the world would now be able to know the truth. Needless to say, the reaction of official Soviet musicology was predictable; what else would one expect from this totalitarian state, this huge Potemkin village, and what, consequently, would one expect from the Soviet stooges in the West? To this day the pointless controversy continues. It is about time that the world ceased to be a victim of totalitarian ideological disinformation. But what I find even more amazing and distressing is that some of the so-called

'experts' on Shostakovich in the West still persist in distorting the facts to suit their arguments, while others show an unacceptable lack of knowledge of the Soviet reality -- and I need hardly emphasise at this stage that without profound (and, I repeat, *profound*) knowledge of what Shostakovich had to live through, it is virtually impossible to be a serious and credible analyst of his output. It is hard to believe that one such 'expert' writes that Shostakovich was ever 'perhaps the Soviet Union's most loyal musical son' -- and that in 1994! Is it still possible that this musicologist still cannot shed the skin of an agent of influence of the USSR (and there were thousands of them in the West) or that he simply does not possess enough intelligence for this matter?... This book settles the issue once and for all. I am sure that no one in his sane mind, having read the evidence presented by the authors, will ever ask the question of whether *Testimony* is authentic Shostakovich or not. The answer is that it most definitely is." Taking up this theme in "Shostakovich's *Testimony*: reply to an unjust criticism", Ho and Feofanov criticise Fay's 1980 essay on *Testimony* for "subjective and selective editing of the facts": "Fay is guilty of the same inept scholarship of which she accuses Solomon Volkov and of the very same Western naiveté she attributes to supporters of *Testimony*." They further accuse Richard Taruskin of "insinuations in the style of the tabloid press" and Malcolm H. Brown of "sloppy, selective scholarship", charging Fay, Taruskin, and Brown collectively with "functioning as 'spin doctors' rather than scholars in search of the truth". *Shostakovich Reconsidered* is nominated "Book of the Year" in *The Times Literary Supplement* by **Robert Conquest**. "So thoroughly done it surely puts the onus on *Testimony*'s detractors to return to the stand." -- **David Fanning**, *BBC Music Magazine*. "Exposes levels of academic self-delusion that might be condonable under North Korean water torture but seem a tad contorted in the cathedra of Ivy League colleges and the columns of the *New Grove Dictionary*. -- **Norman Lebrecht**, *The Daily Telegraph*. "Sells a message that most of us have already bought, although the sell is certainly

persuasive for any who haven't." -- **Michael White**, *The Independent*. "Is there still someone in Finland suspecting that Solomon Volkov distorted the words of [Shostakovich]? Suspicions can now be discarded." -- **Vesa Sirén**, *Helsingin Sanomat*. "A heinous attack on the integrity of their critics." -- **Richard Taruskin**, *The New York Times*. "Ludicrously polemic [sic]." -- **Tamara Bernstein**, *National Post*. "A pedantic, fanatical mess." -- **Alex Ross**, *The New Yorker*.

June 10th. **Norman Lebrecht**, "Western scholars who miss the point" (*The Daily Telegraph*). Lebrecht attacks "Fay and her fellow revisionists" [sic] for contextual naivety: "A dinner-table chat with an undergraduate Sovietologist would have taught these professors a thing or two about life under communism, but their entire training militates against recognising anything that is not written around a five-lined stave. Thus 'official' dedications and inscriptions by Shostakovich are taken to represent his true intention, when they were made under fear of death. The gulf between ivory-tower musicology and the real world has never been wider."

June 12th. Professor **Anthony Briggs** (BBC Radio 3) on *Shostakovich Reconsidered*: "A wonderful read, a marvellous book. It's a book about suffering, of course. Shostakovich is about suffering. Well, now Shostakovich's suffering is over, and Volkov's suffering is over, but I suspect that Professor Taruskin's suffering is just beginning."

June. **Malcolm H. Brown** writes to *DSCH Journal* 9 in response to Ho and Feofanov's presentation at the American Musicological Society in 1997 [October]. Brown adduces parallel comparisons of the "plagiarized" passages in *Testimony* and the original texts upon which they are ostensibly based. "The issue," Brown contends, "is not whether Shostakovich had 'a phenomenal, some say photographic memory'. The issue is whether or not Solomon Volkov has a photographic memory!" Brown argues that Volkov's description of his methodology in recording,

transcribing, and organising his material is incompatible with the detailed precision of the textual allusion in these passages, let alone the fact that they all occur at the beginning of chapters. "I am prepared to believe that *Testimony* includes words and ideas communicated by Shostakovich in face-to-face conversations with Volkov. But I doubt Volkov's bald-faced claim that *everything* in the book came to him 'in dictation' from the mouth of Shostakovich... I continue to consider *Testimony* to be flawed as a 'primary source'." **Allan Ho** and **Dmitry Feofanov** respond: "For decades, Malcolm Hamrick Brown and others have attacked *Testimony* and its editor, Solomon Volkov, without reporting all the facts: either they have never researched this topic or they have deliberately withheld information that corroborates *Testimony*. In our article [in *DSCH Journal* 8, based on their AMS presentation of October 1997], we call attention to 12 major misrepresentations of fact made by Malcolm Hamrick Brown at just one meeting of the American Musicological Society (and in the internet discussion that followed)... Readers will notice that Malcolm Hamrick Brown has failed to respond to 11 of the 12 points we raised... These, however, are just the tip of a massive iceberg: in our book, we reveal numerous other specific instances of opponents of *Testimony* distorting facts, taking things out of proper context, and, above all, remaining silent on the wealth of evidence that corroborates *Testimony*... Brown's new assertion (that Volkov himself would have needed a photographic memory to reproduce the recycled texts verbatim) makes no sense." Ho and Feofanov argue that Volkov was more than capable of recording Shostakovich verbatim in shorthand and that *Shostakovich Reconsidered* supplies "a coherent explanation" for why the recycled material occurs at the beginning of chapters in *Testimony*. **Malcolm H. Brown** responds on several points of detail, defending his statements that Maxim Shostakovich's repudiations of *Testimony* have been "remarkably consistent" over the years, expressing guarded interest that Galina Shostakovich has recently endorsed *Testimony*, and describing as "lame and self-serving" Elizabeth

Wilson's explanation for not including Flora Litvinova's allusion to Shostakovich's confirmation of Solomon Volkov's claims to have interviewed him frequently. Brown denies that this or any other of the omissions and misrepresentations alleged by Ho and Feofanov constitute a "cover-up": "Here go Prof. Ho and Mr Feofanov, yet again painting the picture in sharp black and white and insisting that that is the way it's always been. I can tell you, this is classic Soviet-style denunciation: read the articles in *Pravda* from the period of the Cold War! It makes me tired just to think about it."

June. **Ian MacDonald**, "[The Turning Point](#)" (*DSCJ Journal* 9). MacDonald welcomes Ho and Feofanov's book; defends Elizabeth Wilson against Malcolm H. Brown; criticises leading anti-revisionists for being "less concerned with truth than with the health of their reputations based on statements they have made in the past"; takes the same writers to task for "intellectual intimidation" and suppressing facts and statements inconvenient to them; predicts an exodus of anti-revisionist opinion to a bogus "central" position in the debate; and severely criticises Richard Taruskin's 1995 essay "Who Was Shostakovich?" (later revised and included in his 1997 collection *Defining Russia Musically*): "As for [Taruskin's] disgusting assertion that Shostakovich did not suffer a dissident's trials and merely wished to exculpate himself at the end of his life by pretending that he had, this can only be said to represent the last refuge of a scoundrel. If he really does intend to use this slander as a secondary line of defence, he will lose the last rags of scholastic honour still adhering to what remains of his reputation."

August. **Hilmar Schmalenberg** (ed.), *Schostakowitsch in Deutschland*. Schmalenberg is a leading German revisionist.

September. **David Fanning** (*BBC Music Magazine*) reviews Ho and Feofanov's *Shostakovich Reconsidered*: "Even though the meaning of Shostakovich's music is crystal-clear for those "with ears to listen", as the composer was wont to say, many, especially among those who should know better -- musicologists -- continue to misinterpret Shostakovich's art.' That sentence says it all. Indignation, presumption, schoolmasterly condescension, all supported by a conviction that 'the meaning of Shostakovich's music' is not only 'crystal-clear' but equivalent to ideological content... How did commentary about one of the greatest composers of our century sink to such a level? Well, you could say it never had far to fall... Middle-of-the-road views were overwhelmed in 1979 by Solomon Volkov's *Testimony*, billed as the composer's memoirs... Since the appearance of Ian MacDonald's *The New Shostakovich* in 1990, the mud-slinging has begun to look more like mud-wrestling. Scholars who have devoted careers to countering Soviet propaganda but who have dared to deviate from the pure *Testimony* line are now accused of presenting Shostakovich as 'a craven lackey... a devout and unwavering communist' (Norman Lebrecht in *The Daily Telegraph*). Anyone (like me) who views the ideological question as just one of many interesting areas which make up the untranslatable and unconfined 'meaning' of Shostakovich's music, is declared a believer in Pure Music (asserts MacDonald in *Shostakovich Reconsidered*) whose 'entire training and method militates against recognizing anything that is not written around a five-lined staff' (Lebrecht). If anyone can tell me where this arcane sect resides, I'll gladly keep my distance from it. Leaving aside such paranoia, the *Testimony* affair is a fascinating one, and well worth the 300 pages Ho and Feofanov devote to it... Their defence of *Testimony* proceeds in courtroom terms, cross-examining and painstakingly discrediting objections one by one. This is so thoroughly done it surely puts the onus on *Testimony*'s detractors to return to the stand, as no doubt they will..." Fanning goes on to criticise Ho, Feofanov, and MacDonald for

allegedly taking out of context Richard Taruskin's "loyal son" phrase, for exaggerating the extent to which Maxim and Galina Shostakovich endorse *Testimony*, and for ungentlemanly conduct in insulting opponents. Fanning dismisses MacDonald's essay "Naive Anti-Revisionism" as "an 81-page diatribe". He concludes: "Be prepared for a few more revelations, and probably a lot more bad-mouthing on all sides, before you retire to consider your verdict. And don't expect to discover too much about the meaning of Shostakovich's music in the process."

September 28th. Manhattan School of Music Seminar on Shostakovich. **Boris Gasparov** analyses the Fourth Symphony as vivid depiction of the horrors of its time. **Elizabeth Wilson** speaks of Shostakovich's artistic role as the musical conscience of his people. She believes that *Testimony* contains the spirit of Shostakovich, but she is in doubt as to which of its statements are the composer's own. Wilson thinks it unfair to accuse Laurel Fay of "selective scholarship" and dislikes Ho and Feofanov's style of presentation. Concerning selective scholarship in her own book (1996, December), she replies: "Anyone writing a book about Shostakovich is bound to have to be selective given the interest of the subject. Mine was 500 pages long and could have been a lot longer." Wilson speaks also on the true story behind the Eighth Quartet and discusses Shostakovich's phenomenal memory. **Yuri Temirkanov** describes Soviet attempts to "discourage" him from performing Shostakovich's Thirteenth Symphony. (Report of the seminar by Louis Blois, *DSCH Journal* 10.)

October 17th. **Edward Rothstein** (*The New York Times*): "A generation after the death of this complex figure, [Shostakovich's] music continues to recall his awful times; now it is spurring scholarship into passions that echo, in their distress and anger, the moral urgency of the music."

November 1st. The American Musicological Society annual meeting in Boston gives the floor to the Shostakovich debate. **Allan Ho** speaks against Laurel Fay's 1980 essay "Shostakovich versus Volkov: whose Testimony?", summarising arguments in *Shostakovich Reconsidered*. **David Fanning** (see *DSCH Journal 11*) challenges Solomon Volkov to produce the notes of his conversations with Shostakovich in 1971-4. (Volkov elsewhere states that his notes were left in the USSR when he emigrated and may since have been destroyed by the KGB.) Fanning further defends **Richard Taruskin** against the use, allegedly out of context, of his 1989 phrase "Thus was Shostakovich, perhaps Soviet Russia's most loyal musical son and certainly its most talented one, made a sacrificial lamb". Taruskin argues that neither he nor Fay ever argued that *Testimony* was entirely false, but maintains that Volkov perpetrated a fraud. **Bernard Holland** reports: "'To call Shostakovich a Communist is the ultimate insult,' said **Dmitry Feofanov**, a pianist and a lawyer. Richard Taruskin, a joyously contentious music historian, rose from the audience to defend his belief that the composer was 'perhaps Soviet Russia's most loyal musical son'." (In fact, Taruskin stated that his "loyal son" phrase was meant ironically.)

November 2nd. **Tamara Bernstein** (*National Post*) reviews Ho and Feofanov's *Shostakovich Reconsidered*: "A scurrilous volume... A book that claims to prove Soviet composer Dmitri Shostakovich was a dissident. Yet its authors can only argue their case by appropriating the tried and true [sic] techniques of Stalinism to silence those who dare to see things differently... Anyone who fails to see Shostakovich as a rabid dissenter is labelled a KGB agent or sympathiser, a 'spin doctor' -- or just plain stupid... The 787-page book is essentially a sophomoric attack on three of the most eloquent and informed Shostakovich scholars in the West: Laurel Fay, Berkeley musicologist Richard Taruskin, and Malcolm Brown, another musicologist who dared to question the Volkov line... The Taruskin and Fay who appear in *Shostakovich Reconsidered* are

unrecognizable -- figments, one feels, of the authors' overwrought and paranoid imaginations... The reader who can wade through contributor Ian MacDonald's hysterical tirades against Taruskin should know that MacDonald -- author of a ham-fisted biography of Shostakovich in which he finds anti-Stalinist messages in every note the composer wrote -- has a long-standing vendetta against the U.S. musicologist... Clearly these are not people from whom one would rush to purchase a used car. By distorting the work of fine scholars, what amounts to an intellectual reign of terror, Volkov's rabid apologists have proven that the spirit of the Soviet Union is alive and well -- and living, tragically, in some of the very people who fled it."

November 21st. **Paul Bailey** (*The Daily Telegraph*): "There are those who believe [*Testimony*] to be a fake, and that the composer was a Soviet stooge. It is clear from his chamber music alone that he was nothing of the sort."

November/December. **Paul Moor** (*American Record Guide*) reviews *Shostakovich Reconsidered*: "When *Testimony* appeared in 1979, Moscow's Communist establishment immediately savaged Volkov's book as total fraud. So, curiously, did certain Western musicologists, especially in the USA, led by Malcolm Brown, Laurel Fay, and Richard Taruskin. Together, they soon erected a massive anti-Volkov fortress, and kept pots of boiling oil ever at the ready to dump on anyone challenging their depiction of Shostakovich as a good Communist or at the very least a thoroughly willing fellow traveller. [Now] Allan Ho, also a musicologist, and Dmitry Feofanov, a music-loving bilingual attorney, energetically set out to do to Brown, Fay, and Taruskin what a sledge-hammer customarily does to a tent-stake. They conclude by issuing not only Shostakovich but also Solomon Volkov -- who has for years suffered in dignified silence -- an unconditionally clean bill of political, ethical, and moral health... *The New York Times*, incidentally, frequently provides Taruskin a platform,

and has ignored requests from his adversaries -- with scholarly credentials at least as imposing as his own -- for equal space to rebut him."

Winter. **Ian MacDonald**, "[Witnesses for the Defence](#): testimonies concerning Shostakovich's attitudes to the Soviet regime" (*DSCJ Journal 10*). A sketch of the main stages of the Shostakovich debate, followed by an analysis of the testimony of witnesses assembled by Elizabeth Wilson in *Shostakovich: A Life Remembered*.

Winter. **Ian MacDonald**, "Shostakovich's Moral Anti-Communism" (*DSCJ Journal 10*): "Laurel Fay has shown herself, at candid length, to be calamitously ignorant of Soviet history... Unlike Fay's, some of Taruskin's history is both factually and interpretatively sound, yet these successes exist in the shadow of a range of mind-boggling blunders and distortions which discredit what little there is of value among his few writings about the composer. By his callous castigation of the ethics of averagely imperfect folk who lived under circumstances of political terror beyond the capacity of a choleric American music professor to conceive, he betrays a gross insensitivity to nuance and a distressing lack of simple human sympathy. This indelicacy, combined with his rudimentary acquaintance with the facts and tone of cultural life under Stalinism, is crippling... It's long past time for the anti-revisionists to supply evidence of their intellectual competence. Put up, ladies and gentlemen, or shut up."

Winter. **Yevgeny Svetlanov**, interviewed by [DSCH](#), demurs with the idea that Shostakovich's work contains "double meanings": "In my view, all that he wrote -- it was entirely from the heart. Of course, I often hear the theories -- that he composed secretive, double-intentioned works. And many critics can, and have made their careers from this kind of thing. Indeed the debate could well last eternally -- but I don't want to be a part of it. I am absolutely persuaded that Shostakovich was first and foremost an honest man, in his life he was a man of crystal purity -- and all that he wrote is of this same crystal purity, be it the Fourth Symphony or the operetta *Moscow Cheryomushki*, the Thirteenth Symphony or *The Songs of the Forest* [sic]. They are all marvellous works." (*DSCH* does not ask after Svetlanov's thoughts on *Rayok*.)

Winter. *DSCH Journal 10* includes a comprehensive digest of reaction to Ho and Feofanov's *Shostakovich Reconsidered*.

1999 January. **Julian Haylock** (*Classic FM*): "It is largely due to Volkov and the work of music writer Ian MacDonald that our perception of what Shostakovich's music is all about has fundamentally altered."

February 15th. [Shostakovich Conference at Mannes School of Music](#), New York. Solomon Volkov, Vladimir Ashkenazy, Dmitry Feofanov, Allan Ho, and Martin Anderson (Toccata Press) answer questions from the audience. **Solomon Volkov**: "I don't regret that for these twenty years I maintained silence on my own. I could only add that there were very few, if any, direct appeals to me from somebody that I would think about as an objective scholar, to reply to. I must admit that I never read this famous -- or infamous, as you wish -- Fay's article, to the end. Because I stopped reading it when I saw that she's misrepresenting the facts, she's distorting the facts. I saw that this is not an objective investigation. And the same was true for any subsequent attempts to discredit the book. I never believed that the people who stood behind it were

disinterested scholars. I couldn't, as a former Soviet citizen, discern to what extent the [KGB](#) and its Misinformation Department were involved. I only learned the many details of it subsequently, here, in New York. And this involvement was very, very substantial. About the interpolations -- I was not aware of them before Fay's article. I have a number of theories about how it happened. One thing about *Testimony* that I'm sure about and that's that while the book probably has many flaws, it's an absolutely honest book. But, at the time I was doing this book with Shostakovich, I was relatively young, and inexperienced in constructing a big book. Now probably I would edit it more carefully, I would construct it better, and so on. Second, that it wasn't written in the comfort of New York. It was done in the Soviet Union of the early '70s, in a very nervous atmosphere, in a hurry. And that's how, probably, you know, these... If I would have done more research then, in the Soviet Union, on this subject, probably I would have uncovered this. And then I would have decided, then I would have made my editing decisions more wisely... Somehow people assume that I, a young journalist and writer, could fool this all-time genius into signing something which he wasn't aware of how it would be used. You should imagine the real situation. I was awed by this man. I never asked him to sign anything. It was his initiative to do so. I always considered myself to be a vessel which the thoughts and ideas of Shostakovich went through. Nothing less, but nothing more as well." **Terry Teachout** (*Time and Commentary*): "I'm one of the people who questioned, in print, the documentary accuracy of *Testimony*. Having read *Shostakovich Reconsidered* carefully, I believe that [*Testimony*] is both accurate and authentic. Mr. Volkov, I would like to apologize to you for what I said in print." **Vladimir Ashkenazy**: "I lived in the Soviet Union. I met Shostakovich. I had inside knowledge of how we reacted to Shostakovich's presence in the Soviet Union, Shostakovich's image. I wanted to convey our understanding of what we knew about his attitude to the Soviet system, his tremendous contempt for the system in which he lived. When I

read *Testimony*, I thought "Oh, at last, the world knows what Shostakovich was like. That's about time the people know about it." There was not a shred of doubt in my mind or in the minds of my colleagues, musicians from the Soviet Union. It was an absolutely genuine presentation of Shostakovich's mind, what he meant in his music, etc. So, as far as I'm concerned, it's 100%." **Dmitry Feofanov**: "I don't think Shostakovich felt the need to make ideological statements. But I have to explain to people here that, during our lives in what was then the Soviet Union, we were, by necessity, very politically sensitive. Because our survival depended on that. Ideology played probably a very important role in Shostakovich's life -- not because he wanted it to, but because that's the way it was." **Allan Ho**: "Richard Taruskin, Malcolm Brown, and Laurel Fay have not reported 99% of the information that's included in our book. I raise the question: is it a cover-up to protect personal egos and professional reputations? Is it complacency, because they thought the case was solved in 1989? Is it incompetence? They are the only ones who can answer these questions."

May 27th-June 12th. Chicago Shostakovich Festival. St Petersburg musicologist **Margarite Mazo**: "Those of us who were 'in the know' were always searching for the second layer of meaning in his music."

Summer. **Irina Shostakovich** interviewed by Alexandre Brussilovsky (*DSCH Journal 11*). To what extent did Shostakovich share with her his creative ideas? "He didn't share his ideas, not with me nor with any other person for that matter... One day, he was thinking of writing a suite on the verses of Alexander Blok, and he asked me to tell him which verses I preferred. I agreed good-heartedly to this request, underlining the best-known Blok verses, but to my great disillusionment, Shostakovich didn't even glance at my choice." What does she think of *Testimony*? "To be frank, not much... It has played its part in the description of the general atmosphere in which the life of Shostakovich's generation unfolded. But it is not

possible to place one's confidence in it completely... If a Russian version existed, it would be easy to determine the article from which [Volkov] drew for such-and-such an episode. I think that Volkov is quite simply afraid to publish this book in Russian. In reality, he visited D. Shostakovich three times, their conversation was not taken down in shorthand, he didn't have a tape recorder, he contented himself with making some notes in his notebook. He was thinking of publishing this in the magazine *Russian Music* [sic] for which he worked. He showed his notes to Shostakovich; they took up a small packet. Shostakovich didn't read them. I know this because at that moment I returned to his office. During this episode, with Volkov irritating him continually, Shostakovich signed each page without sitting down and without reading it. When Volkov left, I asked him why he had signed all these pages. To which he replied that there was a rule that demanded that each page be signed in Shostakovich's hand, otherwise they wouldn't have accepted Volkov's texts." [Cf. **Galina Shostakovich**: "Shostakovich did sign some stupid articles about inconsequential subjects without reading them, but he would not have signed something this big and important without reading it." *SR*, p. 83.]

Summer. **Ian MacDonald**, "[Centre and pseudo-centre](#)" (*DSCH Journal 11*). MacDonald argues that claims -- by, among others, Louis Blois and David Fanning -- that the truth about Shostakovich lies at a point of "balance" between "extreme" positions are, in fact, emollient evasions: "The essence of pseudo-centrism is vagueness -- vagueness about the background and vagueness of assertion. It is a position which depends on general claims that Soviet reality is insusceptible to rational interrogation and that all testimony and evidence emanating from it is equally suspect. The ultimate motive of pseudo-centrism is to reduce the role of context in Shostakovich criticism by making context itself appear unstable. A phenomenon which has been predictable for the last two or three years, pseudo-centrism will doubtless be the future sanctuary for pundits migrating from the extremity of

anti-revisionism; as such, pseudo-centrist commentary will always, whether or not it admits this, implicitly favour anti-revisionist interpretations over revisionist ones." MacDonald further criticises a recent anti-revisionist article by Barbara Amiel and Tamara Bernstein's 1994 CBC radio documentary series on Shostakovich; summarises the argument over Richard Taruskin's "loyal son" phrase; and analyses some of David Fanning's assumptions about Shostakovich, including his "ideological" beliefs, concluding: "The evidence at present indicates that Shostakovich was, in varying degrees, a non-Party apolitical moralist from his youth to his later years (when just such a description of him is supplied by observers like Boris Tishchenko, Edison Denisov, Nikolai Karetnikov, and Grigori Kozintsev)."

Summer. **Allan Ho** and **Dmitry Feofanov** respond (*DSCH Journal 11*) to David Fanning's review of *Shostakovich Reconsidered* (1998 [September]): "In fairness to us, as well as to the readers of *BBC Music Magazine*, it would have been proper for David Fanning to acknowledge, up front, his very real conflicts of interest in reviewing our book. For example, he does not make clear that five of the principal contributors (himself, Laurel Fay, Richard Taruskin, Manashir Yakubov, and Eric Roseberry) to his own book, *Shostakovich Studies*, are the very ones whose scholarship is challenged in *Shostakovich Reconsidered*, nor does he mention that Ian MacDonald's article 'Naive Anti-Revisionism', which Fanning criticizes, is, in large part, a negative review of his own book." Ho and Feofanov go on to deny taking Taruskin's "loyal son" phrase out of context, to deride Taruskin's suggestion that this phrase was meant ironically, and to repudiate Fanning's charge that they exaggerate the extent to which Maxim and Galina Shostakovich endorse *Testimony*.

September. St Petersburg Shostakovich Conferences.

October. **Terry Teachout**, "The Composer and the Commissar" (*Commentary*). Based on Ho and Feofanov's *Shostakovich Reconsidered* (1998) and the Mannes Conference [above, February], Teachout withdraws his previous reservations about *Testimony*. **Richard Taruskin** writes against Teachout's article in the following issue of *Commentary*, accusing Teachout of "Stalinist tactics". Taruskin dismisses *Shostakovich Reconsidered* as "a massive attempt to prove *Testimony*'s veracity through hearsay corroboration of its contents". Taruskin further asserts that Fay's criticisms have not been met by Ho and Feofanov and that no one can know which parts of *Testimony* are "authentic and true" until Solomon Volkov "comes clean" about the details of his role in compiling the book: "In all likelihood *Testimony* is an amalgam of the authentic and the inauthentic, the veridical and the inveridical... Many of the stories in *Testimony* circulated in oral tradition long before Volkov published them. I heard many of them myself as an exchange student in Moscow in 1971-72. I believed many of them at the time, and I still do."

Terry Teachout replies: "It is a novel experience for me to stand accused of engaging in 'Stalinist tactics'. On the other hand, I cannot imagine being surprised by anything Richard Taruskin might possibly say about me, however preposterous. Readers of *Commentary* may not recognize Mr. Taruskin's stock rhetorical strategies -- the sky-high dudgeon, the sneering, arrogant bluster, the disingenuous distortions of inconvenient fact -- but writers on musical subjects will find his letter characteristic... Those who dare to take issue with his sometimes highly idiosyncratic opinions are likely to find themselves on the receiving end of the sort of ad-hominem abuse he habitually decries (and not infrequently imagines) in others. It is a pity that the peculiarities of his temperament have apparently rendered him incapable of participating in civilized and intellectually honest debate... I know a planted axiom when I see one, and Mr. Taruskin's letter rests on one: he contends that the problem of the authenticity of *Testimony* cannot be settled until Volkov 'comes clean', presumably meaning that any

evidence short of a confession by Volkov of plagiarism is 'hearsay', and thus irrelevant. (It should come as no surprise that Mr. Taruskin declined to attend the New York press conference held last February at which Volkov, for the first time ever, publicly answered questions about *Testimony* from the press and other interested parties.) In fact -- as Mr. Taruskin knows perfectly well, and as my article makes perfectly clear -- the only way to establish the authenticity of *Testimony* is through the use of hearsay evidence... Anyone who understands the nature of the Soviet regime should recognize that the 'process of scholarly testing' to which Mr. Taruskin pays ritual homage in his letter is simply not applicable to a book written in secret, under conditions of totalitarian repression and surveillance. In cases such as these, one must perforce deal in probabilities, and judging by the evidence amassed by Ho and Feofanov and (very briefly) summarized in my article, it seems to me highly probable that *Testimony* is authentic -- that, in other words, Shostakovich and Volkov did indeed have numerous conversations that formed the basis for a first-person memoir ghost-written by Volkov and subsequently approved by the composer... Surely it is to the point that *Testimony* is believed to be both authentic and true by a great many people who, unlike Richard Taruskin or Laurel Fay, knew Shostakovich intimately, including his son and daughter. As it happens, *Shostakovich Reconsidered* is only partly about Fay's article. The bulk of the book is devoted to an equally detailed refutation of what Ho and Feofanov believe to be gross misrepresentations by Western commentators of key aspects of Shostakovich's life and work. Mr. Taruskin himself comes in for frequent and severe criticism, not least for his oft-quoted remark that the composer was 'perhaps Soviet Russia's most loyal son'; in his introduction, for example, Vladimir Ashkenazy responds to this fantastic claim by suggesting that 'this musicologist... simply does not possess enough intelligence' to know better. One can hardly blame Mr. Taruskin for passing over such criticisms in silence, but they suggest that what he has to say about

Shostakovich Reconsidered -- not to mention my own article -- should be viewed with due skepticism."

November. **Laurel Fay's** *Shostakovich: A Life* is published in New York. Fay reflects in her Introduction: "Writing about Shostakovich remains laced with political and moral subtexts. At its most extreme, it simply replaces one orthodoxy with another, reversing the polarities of the old, shopworn Soviet clichés: the true-believing Communist citizen-composer is inverted into an equally unconvincing caricature of a lifelong closet dissident. The challenges Shostakovich confronted as a creative artist, a Soviet citizen, a family man, and an individual were a great deal more complicated, likewise his strategies for dealing with them. There is a pressing need to sort fact from fiction, substance from speculation, the man from the myths... Memoirs and interviews have loomed large among the fresh evidence gathered. Glasnost untied the tongues of millions who had been intimidated, or censored, into silence during the Soviet era. Since Shostakovich symbolized something very important in their lives, and since his presumption to 'greatness' seems unassailable, it is not surprising that many have hastened to set down their personal reminiscences of the man. As fascinating and useful as these can be, memoirs furnish a treacherous resource to the historian. Reminiscences can be self-serving, vengeful, and distorted by faulty memory, selective amnesia, wishful thinking, and exaggeration. They can be rife with gossip and rumor. The temptation to recast the past to suit the present -- especially now, when the victims and survivors of the Soviet 'experiment' are grappling with discomfiting issues of complicity and culpability with a shameful past -- can be hard to resist. In any case, factual accuracy is not generally one of their most salient features. Memoirs need to be treated with extreme care, evaluated critically, and corroborated by reference to established facts... I have not excluded the evidence of memoirs -- Soviet, ex-Soviet and post-Soviet -- but I have treated it with the utmost caution, filtering out false or improbable allegations and screening for bias and hidden

agendas... Instead of relying on the accuracy of secondary sources for documentation, I have gone back to period newspapers, concert programs and reviews, personnel files, transcripts, letters, and diaries to reconstruct as precise a chronology of Shostakovich's life and works as the available evidence will permit... Unfortunately there is not a single even remotely reliable resource in Russian, English, or any other language for the basic facts about Shostakovich's life and work...[Sofiya] Khentova's study seems an absolute gold mine of dates, names, and detail unavailable anywhere else. In fact, it is a minefield of misinformation, incorrect dates and facts, errors of every stripe... Whether *Testimony* faithfully reproduces Shostakovich's confidences, and his alone, in a form and context he would have recognized and approved for publication, remains doubtful. Yet even were its claim to authenticity not in doubt, *Testimony* would still furnish a poor resource for the serious biographer. The embittered, "death-bed" disclosures of someone ravaged by illness, with festering psychological wounds and scores to settle, are not to be relied on for accuracy, fairness, or balance when recreating the impact of the events of a lifetime as they actually occurred. Such reflections may even willfully mislead. They cannot be taken at face value and must be scrupulously verified. Since *Testimony* is highly anecdotal anyhow, offering little specificity about the composer's activities or music, I have found it of little use... Shostakovich himself was obliged to reinvent his past on occasion... To allow [my] book to function as a resource, I have endeavoured to lay out the circumstances of Shostakovich's life in as balanced and objective a manner as possible." Dust-jacket comment: "An immensely important book." -- **Michael Steinberg**. "Clear-eyed, straightforward, copiously researched, sympathetic, objective, and uncluttered by cold-war or post cold-war myths." -- **Malcolm H. Brown**. "Laurel Fay has erected the platform upon which truly informed interpretation and debate concerning Shostakovich's works and legacy can now take place." -- **Richard Taruskin**.

November 28th. **Sudip Bose** (*The Washington Post*) reviews Fay's *Shostakovich: A Life*: "At times an unreliable book that portrays Shostakovich as a nervous Soviet patriot, 'a "true son" of the Communist Party' who 'ceded unconditionally his signature, his voice, his time, and his physical presence to all manner of propaganda legitimizing the party'. This caricature of the composer betrays a bewildering naiveté about the climate of terror and intimidation in which Shostakovich was forced to work... On the subject of Shostakovich's music, Fay is startlingly silent. Why, in a book with fewer than 300 pages of text, does Fay give such scant attention to the analysis of Shostakovich's scores? It's almost as if she's afraid to approach them for fear of what they'll reveal... Anyone who wants to explore the connection between the composer's conscience and the world that shaped it need only listen to his music with open mind and open ears."

Winter. **Ian MacDonald** [reviews](#) Fay's *Shostakovich: A Life* at length at this website, pointing out many significant omissions and misrepresentations. Fay's basic biographically methodology is challenged as "incoherent" and "deceitful": "It seems that she ignores whatever does not suit her. This 'blind eye' methodology has the further advantage, so far as Fay is concerned, of allowing her to imply that nothing of significance has appeared in the last twenty years with regard to the issue of who Shostakovich was. Whether this is the stance of a respectable scholar is doubtful, although another supposedly respectable scholar, Richard Taruskin, displays no qualms in applauding her procedural vagaries: 'Laurel Fay has erected a platform upon which truly informed interpretation and debate concerning Shostakovich's works and legacy can now take place.' As a commentator who deems *Lady Macbeth of Mtsensk* to be an apologia for Stalin's genocide in the Ukraine, whose account of the Soviet reception of the Fifth Symphony is (as Fay's narrative confirms) not so much misleading as fraudulent, and who claims he was being 'ironic' by describing Shostakovich as 'perhaps Soviet Russia's most loyal

musical son', Taruskin is a less than dependable authority. In reality, Fay's reliance on intrinsically corrupt Soviet sources has merely ensured that the majority of planks in her 'platform' are rotten... Fay's methodology -- rely on Soviet sources, distrust those who knew Shostakovich -- is blatantly indefensible and, if attempted in any other field of Soviet study, would result in such basic attacks from fellow academics as to prejudice her continuance as a scholar. The approval expressed on her book's dust-jacket by Richard Taruskin and Malcolm Hamrick Brown reveals a major academic scandal: endorsement of a false methodology from the leading figures at America's two main centres for the study of Russian and Soviet music. As is shown by her misleadingly selective quotations from Rostropovich on Shostakovich's signing of the Sakharov letter and from Joachim Braun on the "'secret language" of dissent' in *From Jewish Folk Poetry*, we cannot even be sure that the sources which Fay arbitrarily admits as legitimate are dependably used by her -- and nor is her way with facts more reliable. Contrary to assurances of balance and objectivity, her account of *From Jewish Folk Poetry* is tendentious and flies in the face of any sensible deduction. Much the same goes for her conclusions regarding the Eleventh Symphony's relationship with the Hungarian Uprising, a verdict which ignores testimony already published in English in Elizabeth Wilson's book. In her coverage of the post-Stalin period, Fay persists in presenting Shostakovich as authentically making statements in *Pravda*, *Izvestiya*, and other Soviet publications and arenas (statements which around a dozen of those who knew him insist were ghostwritten on his behalf and merely attributed to him); in doing so, she falsely describes him as "allowing" this, as if he had any say in the matter. Attempting to prove his political orthodoxy, she falsely claims that, after the Tenth Symphony, Shostakovich devoted "a disproportionately large portion of his music to the greater glory of Socialist Realism". As with her account of *From Jewish Folk Poetry*, Fay's account of the circumstances surrounding Shostakovich's joining of the Communist

Party in 1960 is blatantly unbalanced, downplaying the testimony of those closest to him at the time. Similarly, her descriptions of three "Lenin" pieces -- the "Lenin Symphony" of the period 1938-41, the Twelfth Symphony of the period 1959-61, and the song-cycle *Loyalty* of the period 1968-70 -- fail to come to the obvious conclusion that he had no enthusiasm for writing music about Lenin. Malcolm Hamrick Brown describes *Shostakovich: A Life* as "copiously researched" -- yet, apart from a few corrected dates, there seem to be no cases of original research in this book at all. Certainly there is no fresh interview material. Instances abound of cases where such original research is clearly demanded but not fulfilled... Richard Taruskin -- in any other circumstance willing to push the case for irreducible subjectivity to absurdity -- is, it transpires, willing to describe *Shostakovich: A Life* as "a reliable book to consult for the facts of [the composer's] life". Were a revisionist to make the claims for objectivity advanced by Fay, Taruskin would respond with his familiar "no one can be sure of anything whatever about Shostakovich" disquisition. Indeed, those who prefer to believe that Shostakovich and the Soviet background are innately impenetrable -- such, invariably, being people who know little about these issues and do not intend to remedy this -- will probably enjoy being confused by Fay. The fact remains that those who give a good review to this dismal, devious, and at times dishonest book are merely signing a certificate of their incompetence as judges."

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CHRONOLOGY OF THE DEBATE

Part Four: 2000 -

SR = *Shostakovich Reconsidered*

TNS = *The New Shostakovich*

2000 January 2nd. **Harlow Robinson** (*The New York Times*) reviews Fay's *Shostakovich: A Life*: "Mostly lifeless. Cautious, dutiful and choked with details, her book reads more like an extended encyclopedia entry than a biography... Like many scholars who attempt to write biographies, she seems to have fallen so deeply in love with her research that she became incapable of distinguishing between the trivial and the essential... Her exhaustive examination of all the available documents has failed to uncover any startling revelations... Reading [this book] is a bit like hearing only the second violin part of an epic symphony. Something is definitely missing... No one can accuse Laurel E. Fay of having an imagination, fertile or otherwise."

January 7th. **Laurel Fay** interviewed in *The Guardian*: "I don't have a view of Volkov as a person. I am a scholar and I am interested in posterity. I know Volkov had conversations with Shostakovich. I think there are parts of the book that reflect those conversations. But a lot of it is the musical gossip that was current at the time. *Testimony* does reflect the kinds of stories and anecdotes that were floating around the musical community in Russia. In the end, though, people must check what was correct and what was incorrect... [Revisionists] want to read [Shostakovich's] music as encoded dissidence. I don't. They start from the position of knowing the answers. I start from the position of asking the questions. I don't

automatically assume that his 'Soviet' music is ironic. I allow that he might have been serious." Why has she never met her opponents in debate? "I don't have any reason not to, but not while they're defaming me, not while they're throwing mud at me. I'm not going to be told I'm a liar and unethical just because I think they are wrong. These people aren't interested in Shostakovich at all."

January. **Krzysztof Meyer** (*DSCH Journal 12*):

"[Shostakovich] was never like the Communists. But of course I must remind you that his family came from generations with strong socialist backgrounds -- of course, Communism and Socialism are quite different phenomena. Soviet Communism was synonymous with tyranny."

January. **Vladislav Uspensky** interviewed by Pierre Vidal (*DSCH Journal 12*). Vidal: "We have always had the impression of a form of complicity between Shostakovich and the public which expected some message or other to be contained within each of his new works." Uspensky: "That was certainly the case. The Eighth, Tenth and Thirteenth symphonies, *Stenka Razin*... It was always in opposition to the [Soviet] regime... The Jewish songs and *Babi Yar* reflect a certain ideology. Or at least the contesting of the official ideology. Shostakovich entered into a dialogue with the people, opposing Party ideology." Vidal: "But why did he join the Party?" Uspensky: "Under Khrushchev and Brezhnev, the pressure the Party exerted remained very great. Shostakovich had to become a member of the Party in order to become President [sic] of the [RSFSR] Composers' Union. I was also a member of the Party. Being so meant absolutely nothing."

January 19th. **Norman Lebrecht** (*The Daily Telegraph*): "There is a striking symmetry between the Holocaust 'denial' issues that are being heard in the High Court and the publication of a purportedly authoritative biography of Dmitri Shostakovich which argues that he was essentially an obedient Soviet citizen. The historian David Irving, who has acknowledged that millions of Jews were killed by the Nazis, maintains that this cannot properly be attributed to Adolf Hitler's instigation since no one has ever seen a signed Führer order for the prosecution of genocide. The American musicologist Laurel Fay follows similar thinking in maintaining that Shostakovich came to terms with communism because nothing in his own hand suggests otherwise. She dismisses the composer's dissident memoirs and she discounts the oral evidence of musicians who worked closely with Shostakovich. No musician of consequence, apart from the Stalinist *apparatchik* Tikhon Khrennikov, ever regarded Shostakovich as a Soviet puppet. Yet Fay and her fellow revisionists generally accept only signed statements. Many of these will have been made under mortal pressure. Eye-witness accounts are all too often ruled out of court. Memoirs, sniffs Fay, 'furnish a treacherous resource to the historian'... Fay and her ilk give the impression of having appeared to have studied [Shostakovich's music] under sterile laboratory conditions. The greatness of Shostakovich, however, was that he did not shrink from infection. His music was a mirror of Soviet reality and a testimony to human endurance. It is profoundly a moral issue, an issue of truth versus contrivance."

February 6th. **Joseph Horowitz**, "Shostakovich: A Moral Beacon Amid the Darkness of a Tragic Era" (*The New York Times*): "The Soviet pressure cooker shattered Shostakovich's nerves and, doubtless, shortened his life. But Stalinism may be said to have more inflamed than suppressed his creative gift. With its mournful austerity, its vicious ferocity, its programmatic clues, his music conveyed his own denunciations: of state tyranny, of the persecution of Jews, of the suppression of the human spirit. He suffered and testified... Shostakovich was a moral bulwark or scourge. If this function was old-fashioned, so was his aesthetic. For decades, he was disparaged in the West as a sellout whose failure to challenge traditional means and forms signified a capitulation to retrograde party canons. Only belatedly did he emerge as the century's great political subversive among composers, a voice of conscience."

March. Composer **Paul Epstein**'s booklet for the Emerson Quartet's set of Shostakovich's complete string quartets (Deutsche Grammophon 463284-2): "It is the tragic irony of Shostakovich's life that he lived in a country whose leaders took art seriously as a social force -- as a tool in a murderous program of suppression and brutal social engineering. Because his immense reputation allowed him to reach millions of minds, he was a tacit threat to the established power and was drawn into a terrifying dance with the State, with Stalin personally, and with the insane and sinister cast of characters that flourished during (and after) that awful era. His life literally hung on the notes he wrote. He chose to survive -- for his family and his music -- rather than actively oppose the regime, as the poet Osip Mandelshtam had done, inevitably to be destroyed by it. Shostakovich worked with the Party and tried to fight from inside. At the same time, he never abandoned his commitment to the Russian people, to express their common despair, anger, courage and desire for freedom. Out of these conflicting allegiances he developed a complex, multilevelled language, full of coded cultural and personal references -- a vehicle for expressing

potentially subversive ideas in a style that, on the surface, was acceptable (often just barely) to the Party... To be understood fully, the drama of these quartets must be heard as not only musical, but also social, cultural and interpersonal. The music ceases to be just a vehicle for stimulation or relaxation, and becomes a kind of social contract between creator and listener, and listener and listener."

March 5th. **Richard Taruskin**, "Casting A Great Composer As A Fictional Hero" (*The New York Times*): "Many have disputed [the] authenticity [of *Testimony*]. In the interests of full disclosure, I had better acknowledge that I am one such, and that I have received in consequence much abuse from those whose views I am about to critique. But no matter how one feels about Mr. Volkov's methods, one must feel a certain gratitude for the role his book has played in the elevation of Shostakovich's stock. It portrayed the composer as embittered by the mistreatment he had suffered and vengeful toward the Soviet state, and toward the memory of Stalin in particular. Both in Mr. Volkov's annotations and in the text itself there were hints that Shostakovich's works contained veiled (or not so veiled) ironies, even outright messages of protest... The *Testimony*-inspired enthusiasm... has been magnified of late by the emergence of a clamorous cult around the person of the composer. Like the one around Stalin, like any such cult, the one around Shostakovich is an instrument of thought control. It fosters orthodoxy, enforces conformism and breeds intolerance of critical thinking... It is important to quash the fantasy image of Shostakovich as a dissident, no matter how much it feeds his popularity, because it dishonors actual dissidents like Mr. Solzhenitsyn or Andrei Sakharov, who took risks and suffered reprisals. Shostakovich did not take risks... The poet Osip Mandelstam, who by actually doing what Shostakovich is now fancied to have done, managed only to commit state-assisted suicide... In 1960, by which time his international fame offered him a shield, Shostakovich gave in to pressure and joined the Communist Party. The autobiographical

Eighth Quartet was an act of atonement for this display of weakness. When, in 1973, Shostakovich was approached with the demand that he sign a circular letter denouncing Sakharov, he again gave in, with disastrous consequences for his reputation among his peers in the Soviet intelligentsia, including Mr. Solzhenitsyn, who despised him for it. Shostakovich's likely motive in dictating whatever portion of *Testimony* proves to be truly his was exculpation for these and similar failures of nerve... Officially dedicated to the memory of the suppressed Russian Revolution of 1905, [the Eleventh Symphony] was privately interpreted as a protest against the crushing by the Soviets of the recent Hungarian revolt. Whenever asked, Shostakovich denied it; but that made no difference. His audience never asked... Were the silly claims or rabid denunciations confined to cyberspace, there would be little need to cry them down, but they have had some alarming public repercussions in the wake of Ms. Fay's biography. Harlow Robinson, a contributor to *Shostakovich Reconsidered*, writing in *The New York Times Book Review*, derided it [Fay's biography] for its failure to support the myths inspired by *Testimony*, as did the reviewer for *The Washington Post*. The sentimental Mr. Horowitz faults the author [Fay] for being "inordinately dry-eyed." The nadir -- it has to be the nadir -- was reached in a column by the English music journalist Norman Lebrecht, which compared Ms. Fay's honorable scholarly skepticism with David Irving's notorious attempts at Holocaust denial. The atmosphere of hostility and organized slander that Ms. Fay has had to endure is more than a little reminiscent of the atmosphere in which Soviet dissidents -- and even Shostakovich, at times -- had to carry on. If we want Shostakovich's presence in the concert hall and on records to outlast it, let's begin by returning our attention from our cold-war bedtime stories to his music and recognizing that our interpretations, and the purposes they serve, are ours, not his. Encasing Shostakovich in a bubble of dramatic fiction is a fool's game. Bubbles burst." (Cf. **Irina Shostakovich**, interviewed by Margarite Mazo in *DSCH Journal 12*:

"The Eleventh Symphony was written in 1957 when these events [the aftermath of the Hungarian Uprising of 1956] occurred. What happened was viewed with great gravity by everyone. There are no direct references to the 1956 events in the symphony, but Shostakovich had them in mind.")

March 9th. **Bernard Holland**, "Great Music Isn't Necessarily Made By Great People" (*The New York Times*): "You can like the music; you don't have to like the man. Listeners have a hard time believing this. How, people ask, could the composer who toadied and cringed before his Soviet bosses have written such bravely beautiful music? In all those quartets and symphonies, weren't those secret messages he was sending? Do we read between the conformist lines and find rebellion? They weren't. We don't... Shostakovich was a mediocre human being possessed of staggering musical ability. After Stalin scared him almost to death in the mid-1930's, the composer did his duty: writing patriotic pieces, signing petitions on request (some of them damaging to his colleagues), rebuking what he was asked to rebuke, dispensing the government line as directed. He may not have liked some of it, but there is little evidence that he showed much hesitation when his own skin was in question. In other words, Shostakovich behaved just as most of us would have behaved in similar circumstances. Martyrs are few. Self-preservation is strong. Cowardice is a human concept. Animals run away without apology when they feel themselves threatened... It is hard to call Shostakovich's life tragic, at least any more tragic than your own. Terrifying and stressful a lot of it was, but tragedy requires an imposing person brought down by fate and bad decisions. Shostakovich was more a victim; I don't think he rises to the needed stature."

March 10th. **Ian MacDonald** ([DSCH-L](#) discussion group) [responds](#) to Bernard Holland: "...I'll refrain from insulting Bernard Holland in the manner in which he has so gratuitously insulted Shostakovich -- other than to say that people like him prospered very nicely under Soviet rule despite barely aspiring to the mediocrity which he falsely ascribes to Shostakovich. Mr Holland's comments are disgusting and *The New York Times* stands self-condemned by the conscienceless act of publishing them."

March 12th. **Ed Vulliamy** interviews Laurel Fay (*The Observer*): "'They're already calling me a Soviet stooge,' she sighs."

March 15th. **Tamara Bernstein**, "Shostakovich in shades of grey: have revisionists kidnapped the memory of the Russian composer?" (*National Post*): "You wouldn't think that the publication of the first meticulously researched, trustworthy biography of the Soviet composer -- and the first Western biography of him that draws on Russian language sources -- would inspire hysterical controversy. [Laurel Fay's] long-awaited *Shostakovich: A Life* has triggered drearily predictable howls of protest from a cult of fanatics who insist that Shostakovich was a lifelong dissident; that every note of his music expresses this in easily understood codes; and that anyone who denies this is an idiot, a Stalinist, or both. If you think this sounds silly and sophomoric, you're right... The Shostakovich-as-dissident cult began in 1979, when a Russian emigre named Solomon Volkov published *Testimony*, claiming it was Shostakovich's dictated memoirs... *Testimony* begat *The New Shostakovich* -- a trite, 1990 biography by British journalist Ian MacDonald, who conscripts all data into the service of his own anti-Stalinist agenda. Since then, MacDonald and other Volkov disciples have invested a staggering amount of energy -- not to mention ego -- in their cause. But as U. S. musicologist Richard Taruskin has argued, they're essentially using Shostakovich as a blank screen on which they can project their own fantasies of political and moral heroism. The 'Volkovists' declare

intellectual war on anyone who disagrees with them -- I once had the honour of being lumped with Taruskin and Fay in an Internet [diatribe](#) by MacDonald that rivalled *War and Peace* in length (but not, alas, literary quality). But they have a particular phobia of Fay, principally because she has found serious cracks in Volkov's claims for the authenticity of *Testimony*, and because she didn't include the book as a reliable source in her new biography. Taruskin has earned the Volkovists' hatred because, among other things, he's pointed out that even if *Testimony* were authentic, memoirs are never infallible sources -- every human being to some extent rewrites his or her life in old age -- and anyone who survived a totalitarian regime will have plenty of reasons to do so. These are fascinating, complex questions; in a healthy intellectual environment they could be bandied about constructively. But the Volkovists will allow only for black and white; right and wrong; good guys and bad guys... 'The atmosphere of hostility and organized slander that Ms. Fay has had to endure,' Taruskin noted recently in *The New York Times*, 'is more than a little reminiscent of the atmosphere in which Soviet dissidents -- and even Shostakovich at times -- had to carry on.' Even more disturbingly, a number of influential journalists have jumped on the MacDonald-Volkov bandwagon. In a particularly odious column in *The Daily Telegraph* a few months ago, Norman Lebrecht compared Fay's refusal to accept Shostakovich's alleged dissidence to David Irving's Holocaust denial... Fay's sense of Shostakovich the man is 'a little hard to put into words. He was a brilliant, brilliant man -- talented beyond anything that most of us can imagine. And... he was a very conflicted person. On the one hand, he resisted and resented some of the things that happened to him [under the communist regime]. On the other hand, he was a wuss...'"

March 20th. **Alex Ross**, "Ruined Choirs: how did Shostakovich's music survive Stalin's Russia?" (*The New Yorker*). Ross offers an alleged "compromise" between revisionism and anti-revisionism, arguing that Shostakovich was not a dissident but a trimmer who wished chiefly for a quiet life: "The strong feeling in his music has led people to imagine a man who was engaged in a great battle with the system. But the hard facts reveal a smaller, weaker figure -- a man who strived at all costs to create conditions in which he could work in peace." On the subject of *Testimony*, Ross concurs with Richard Taruskin's view that the book represents at best a last-ditch attempt at self-justification: "The composer may have wished to improve his image in the eyes of the younger generation, of whom Volkov was a representative. So he went back over his published work and argued that what had seemed doctrinaire was in fact subversive." Quoting the passage in *Testimony* in which Shostakovich derides the idea that the ending of his Fifth Symphony is exultant, Ross comments: "It is strange for an artist to hector his audience in this fashion. Shostakovich was usually as vague as possible when he spoke about his music, and his belated, belligerent specificity about the meaning of the Fifth seems to protest too much. Nothing in the score supports such a reading... Shostakovich's revisionist account of the Fifth has caught on because the circumstances of its creation make us uncomfortable. It's hard to accept that a composer wrote his best-loved work under the gun of a totalitarian regime." Ross argues that the coda of the Fifth resembles that of Mahler's Third and that, like Mahler's ending, Shostakovich's represents "celebration". Ross continues: "After the war, [Shostakovich] failed to produce the Beethovenian 'Victory' symphony that Stalin had been expecting, issuing instead a largely frivolous Ninth Symphony with a vaudeville finale... At the 1948 proceedings against formalism, during which most of the accused composers avoided personal appearances, he read aloud a speech that was stultifying in its banality and disconcerting in its masochism." Ross describes

Shostakovich's joining of the Communist Party in 1960 as "an unnecessary action, for which he gave conflicting explanations (one being that he was drunk)" and calls his later, openly dissident works "more the projection of a dissident career than the enactment of one". He concludes: "Shostakovich wrote agonized music from the beginning to the end of his career, no matter who was running the country."

Ian MacDonald comments: "Although Alex Ross announces his conception of Shostakovich as a 'compromise' between revisionism and anti-revisionism, his account is, in fact, indiluted anti-revisionism. Whether he deliberately meant to mislead his readers by purporting to do otherwise is hard to discern. Judging by his article, he is insufficiently experienced in the Shostakovich debate to understand where he actually stands in this discussion. In reality, he expresses an obsolete view of Shostakovich of c.1980 vintage. At most, he appears to have read *Testimony*, some of *Shostakovich Reconsidered*, and Laurel Fay's *Shostakovich: A Life*. Quoting from Shostakovich's letters to Isaak Glikman (as rendered by Fay) he concludes that these letters feature passages of 'artful mockery' of 'Soviet doublespeak' without any deeper significance. Ross does not seem to have come across Elizabeth Wilson's *Shostakovich: A Life Remembered* and appears sturdily unaware of the overwhelming consensus among those who knew Shostakovich that he hated the Soviet system and had done for most of his adult life. A lack of contextual reading in this subject is apparent throughout Ross's article, which seems to have been put together somewhat languidly. Several of his assumptions about Shostakovich's motives and attitudes appear to be improvised without reference to fact (e.g., his suggestion that, with respect to *Lady Macbeth*, Shostakovich 'had been expecting the same reception that Stalin gave to Dzerzhinsky' and his assertion that 'Shostakovich lived the next two years of his life in a state of abject fear', neither of which claims are justifiable from evidence). Ross's uncritical acceptance of the 1937 [interrogation story](#) likewise indicates less

than complete acquaintance with the material of the debate, as does his condemnatory adduction of Iosif Brodsky's attack on 'the effort to locate "nuances of virtue" in the gray expanses of Shostakovich's later life'. (Brodsky has also conceded that Shostakovich did much in an effort to assist him during his confrontation with the Soviet authorities in 1964, while Akhmatova's circle, of which Brodsky was a member, regarded Shostakovich's long-standing secret dissidence as self-evident.) Ross's musical judgements appear no more deeply informed than his attempts at moral and political ones. He does not, for example, appear to have persevered far enough into *Shostakovich Reconsidered* to stumble on Gerard McBurney's analysis of the 'Rebirth' code in the Fifth Symphony's finale. Similarly, Ross's claim that Shostakovich wrote 'ostensibly socialist realist symphonies' and that the Fifth Symphony 'passed muster with socialist-realist aesthetics' indicate that he has little idea what Socialist Realism was and how it manifested itself in musical form. (The closest Shostakovich approached to the recognised canons of Socialist Realism was in the choral works and cinema scores he was forced to specialise in during the late 1940s and early 1950s.) As for Ross's claim that Shostakovich was 'a man who strived at all costs to create conditions in which he could work in peace', it is hard to see how this can be reconciled with the composer's heroism in works like *From Jewish Folk Poetry* and the Thirteenth Symphony, let alone with the furious revulsion of *Rayok*. If -- as in a caption to the main illustration for Ross's article -- the question is to be 'Was Shostakovich a craven *apparatchik* or a secret dissident?', the answer on the basis of these three works alone is clear enough. Alex Ross's piece appears to be a predictable consequence of swallowing Laurel Fay's biography without chewing it. Certainly one might have expected him, in his quest for a 'compromise', to have made some mention of *From Jewish Folk Poetry* during his trip through Shostakovich's career of the late 1940s. Had he read my [review](#) of Fay's book, he would have been alerted to the controversy which surrounds her contested

account of this work, as of much else, notably including her similarly controversial documentary methodology. Sadly, Alex Ross does not seem to have been troubled by the possibility that his conclusions might be hasty, superficial, and underinformed."

April 4th. **Laurel Fay** lectures at NYU on the *Testimony* controversy (paraphrased by Louis Blois for DSCH-L). Fay welcomes Ho and Feofanov's investigations (1998 [June]), but observes that they have not presented all available information fairly and fully. She asserts that Solomon Volkov claimed ignorance of previously published material attributed to Shostakovich; referring to the composer's article on Meyerhold in *Sovetskaya muzika* (1974, No. 3, p. 54), she suggests that the close proximity of an article by Volkov proves that he must have known of the Meyerhold article (third of the eight "plagiarised" passages). Fay compares the first of the recycled passages with the way it appeared in *Sovetskii kompozitor* in 1973, observing that every detail is identical. Fay goes on to question the significance of Shostakovich's signatures on the first pages of sections in *Testimony*, to point out that each interpolation of recycled material in the book is equal to the length of one typewritten page, and to question the extent of Shostakovich's alleged "superior memory". She further queries Ho and Feofanov's representation of Galina Vishnevskaya's and Mstislav Rostropovich's views on *Testimony*, doubts the extent of Vladimir Ashkenazy's personal knowledge of Shostakovich, and asks for proof that "dozens of meetings" took place between Volkov and Shostakovich. Other witnesses (Boris Tishchenko, Kara Karayev, Veniamin Basner's daughter) are adduced against *Testimony*. Fay concludes by giving notice of an "explosive" book on Shostakovich soon to be published in St Petersburg.

April 8th. **Brian Hunt** (*National Post*) reviews Fay's biography: "So intemperate was [Ho and Feofanov's] foaming at the mouth [in *Shostakovich Reconsidered*] that many readers may be favourably disposed to Fay's biography before reading a word of it." Hunt, however, deplores her "refusal to take a strong line on what the composer's ideology may have been", adding "Fay ducks every issue[...], gives scant idea of changes in the prevailing political climate in the Soviet Union, [and] seriously misleads the reader by giving the impression that oppression by the state died with Stalin." On Fay's account of *From Jewish Folk Poetry*, Hunt notes that because the work was "completed in October, 1948, and Joseph Stalin's campaign against Jewish institutions was not (in her phrase) 'gathering momentum' until December, she downgrades the work's status as protest against anti-Semitism. But anti-Semitism was not a fresh concept dreamed up by the Kremlin overnight."

April 11th. *The NewsHour* (PBS): "Showcasing Shostakovich". Senior producer **Jeffrey Brown** interviews the Emerson Quartet about their Shostakovich cycle [see March]. Brown: "Known more for his symphonies, Shostakovich also wrote fifteen quartets during his troubled life as both a hero and, as he's widely seen today, a victim of the Soviet totalitarian state." Concerning the Eighth Quartet, **Eugene Drucker** (violin) comments: "It is dedicated to the victims of fascism and war, and that gave him an opportunity to express great grief, violence, and sardonic humor in this work. But we feel that it is also about the situation in the Soviet Union itself, and he could always use the atrocities perpetrated by the Nazis as a metaphor for something much more controversial that he was trying to express about his own country." Brown: "In 1936, the state-run press denounced Shostakovich's work as 'crude, muddled, vulgar', and warned that things 'could end very badly.' It was a time when millions were being imprisoned or executed. Do you get the sense that his life was literally hanging on the notes that he wrote?" **Philip Setzer**: "I think it definitely, I mean, literally, did. Art

in this kind of totalitarian system takes on a tremendous importance, and it's fascinating to look at the fact that they were so obsessed -- that the powers that be were so obsessed with what Shostakovich was writing... But he took that and he made that into an art form." Brown: "The fourth movement of the [Eighth] quartet -- three loud knocks suggest the terror of the police state." Setzer: "At one point he knew he was in a lot of trouble, and he knew that one of his neighbors was in a lot of trouble, and in one of the letters he talked about hearing them come in the middle of the night, and not knowing which one they were coming for, and then hearing them go to the neighbor's door..."

April 13th. Swedish musicologist and Soviet music expert **Per Skans** writes in [DSCH-L](#) concerning the present Chronology: "*Ich finde es lächerlich, über solche Dinge zu streiten*. This line came to my mind when reading the new, extensive description of the Shostakovich debate at the website Music Under Soviet Rule. The line is sung by one of the two soldiers just about a minute from the beginning of Richard Strauss's *Salome*. 'I think it is ridiculous to dispute about such things' is the English equivalent, and the translation from the French original was done by Lord Alfred Douglas who, I have been given to understand, had an adequate experience of Oscar Wilde's ways of thinking. It is true that in *Salome* this line applies to the Jews' row over religious things, whilst the Shostakovich debate is anything but religious. But I nevertheless detect an almost religious fanaticism in some of the statements quoted from the debate. I am new to DSCH-L and so far never had any idea that grown-up persons are here more or less anathematising each other, that some apparently have not yet discovered that the Brezhnev commandments are hopelessly out of date except with some Old Believers at the former KGB, and that some Westerners incredibly behave as if an absolutely complete list of all former Soviet dissenters is available somewhere in Russia, not only in the old secret police archives. How bitterly would all my friends around the Soviet Empire -- from Tallinn to

Khabarovsk, from Murmansk to Yerevan, from Odessa to Novosibirsk -- laugh, if only they knew! But above all I am deeply shocked by the lack of Western comprehension that Shostakovich was living in a society where one had to turn on the shower before even daring to discuss certain things. Compared to this, the USA of McCarthy was, in spite of its injustices, a Disneyland. I need only refer to the Soviet citizens who were tried and sentenced to death solely because of having met and been friendly with a certain Eric Blair during the Spanish civil war -- Blair later writing *Nineteen Eighty-Four* under the pseudonym George Orwell. Whilst respecting the intellect of my American friends very much, I frequently have the impression that they have difficulties in understanding societies very unlike their own. There is no shame in this: I have occasionally found the same phenomenon with Soviet citizens! Yet, under Soviet rule foreign students who spent years there were under careful surveillance and subject to cunning personal propaganda -- so that, short of making a superhuman effort, even people like this received an incorrect impression of the real life in the USSR. (A brilliant contrary example, showing that a really ambitious foreign student could discern a rather truthful picture of the Soviet Union, is Elizabeth Wilson.) Some Westerners apparently do not realise that it did not matter a damn what a person did, said or wrote, as long as he/she did not contact foreigners or stand up in Red Square shouting 'down with communism'. The only thing that mattered was whether the authorities had made up their minds to arrest and punish somebody. If they had, then they concocted accusations and proofs. In Shostakovich's case they knew very well that he was a dissenter (everybody did, except some benighted minds in the West), but they also knew that he was good propaganda, well worth preserving. Lavish information on KGB methods is to be found in numerous books by Arkady Vaksberg, the author of *Stalin Against The Jews*. In his book on the Soviet public prosecutor Vyshinsky, he chillingly illustrates the paranoiac Soviet ethos from his own personal experience. In Vaksberg's youth, a student

'friend' -- in fact, a provocateur of the kind mentioned by Vishnevskaya and Rostropovich in [Ian] MacDonald's chronology [1983] -- once asked him whether he did not agree that the new buildings along Gorky Street were dull and sterile. Arkady agreed, but when he told this to his mother, she understood what was happening and immediately pulled all possible strings to get into contact with the highest person she knew: Vyshinsky. She realised from experience that the provocateur would turn Arkady's words against him: 'Vaksberg claims that the Gorky Street architecture, outlined and approved by the Great Leader, the beloved Teacher of the Soviet people, is mediocre!' In other words, 'biting your tongue' in the USSR was crucial to survival. Incidentally, Vaksberg has told me (in writing) that he knows Solomon Volkov very well and is certain that the conversations with Shostakovich related in *Testimony* are authentic. I quote: 'He is a very honest man, and no falsified publication would be possible for him'! Quite apart from my numerous personal experiences from the Soviet era, this utterance makes any debate about *Testimony's* authenticity superfluous for me."

April 23rd-28th. The **Borodin Quartet** plays the complete Shostakovich quartets at Bantry House in West Cork, Ireland. From the Festival announcement: "The quartets... tell the searing story of one man's fight against tyranny, the voice of an artist, who stayed behind and spoke for his people. The first one, written in 1938 after his terrifying interview by the dreaded NKVD, is no youthful experiment. And the extraordinary 15th Quartet with its six Adagios was written in 1974 just over a year before he died. In those thirty six years he wrote a sequence of quartets full of inner strength, music not just of suffering but of the ability to come to terms with that suffering, music of purification, the distillation of one man's life and of the terrible century as a whole." **Stuart Masterton** of [DSCH-L](#) reports on an interview/Q&A conducted by **Elizabeth Wilson** with **Valentin Berlinsky**, the Borodins' oldest surviving member: "It did generally repeat most of the stuff from the interview with

Berlinsky in *A Life Remembered*, with a couple of intriguing additions... When Shostakovich, Miaskovsky, and Shebalin were sacked from the Conservatoire in 1948, the students clubbed together to provide a support fund for them. During that period, much of their new music was played regularly (and apparently quite extensively) in private circles and student halls. This struck me as being the exact musical equivalent of underground publication. Perhaps works like the Fourth Quartet and *From Jewish Folk Poetry* would be better described as 'samizdat' works, rather than 'for the drawer'. [Berlinsky] spoke of Gavriil Popov as a 'very good friend' of Shostakovich, and having initially disparaged the number of people nowadays going round calling themselves 'close friends' of the composer, he must have meant it. Elizabeth Wilson [said], in answer to one question, that she felt no doubt Shostakovich despised the rulers of his country for most of his life, and that whilst he may have sympathised with the basic ideals behind Communism, he'd seen the results of implementation. She also seemed to agree with Ian MacDonald's assertion that the late 20's 'Cultural Revolution' was a crucial point in the composer's life, and spoke of the early music as being a musical parallel to the [satirical] literature of the likes of Zoshchenko, Zamyatin, and Bulgakov."

May. **Richard Whitehouse** (*Gramophone*) reviews Laurel Fay's biography: "The tone is, *pace* the dissenters, objectively neutral... Shostakovich comes across as a fallible but deeply sympathetic figure; from the beginning, playing out an internal creative conflict under the light of intense public and official scrutiny... The *Lady Macbeth* debacle and subsequent climbdown over the Fourth Symphony are calmly, effectively negotiated; though, not for the last time, Fay appears unsure of the degree to which compositional changes in emphasis are politically motivated... The tone of [Fay's] thinking, guardedly rather than radically neutral, is her greatest limitation. The primary reason for this lies in her unwavering intention to base her assertions only on verifiable evidence. In point of

practice this is not wrong: too many opinions in this ongoing debate have taken as gospel the recollections, often contradictory, of those who 'knew' Shostakovich and claim a certain privileged insight into his character. Yet in focusing almost solely on extant documentation official or otherwise, Fay leaves the composer stranded in an intellectual and political vacuum, tangible neither as a covert dissident or as a figure who latterly used his official standing to promote incremental change, within a framework where even token liberalism was a threat to an ossifying and self-defeating power structure."

May/June. **Paul Mitchinson**, "The Shostakovich Variations: Was he a dissident? Were his memoirs genuine?" (*Lingua franca*). Mitchinson interviews Solomon Volkov by phone. Volkov insists that he had never seen the recycled material in *Testimony* before it was pointed out by Laurel Fay in 1980: "No, no, if I did I wouldn't have included it, of course." Mitchinson continues: "Asked about Shostakovich's article about Meyerhold [in *Sovetskaya muzika*, March 1974], for which Volkov apparently wrote the introduction, Volkov responds: 'I can assure you that there wasn't a single staffer who read the current issue of the magazine in its entirety. Material dealing with Shostakovich was appearing in almost every issue'... After Maxim Shostakovich, the composer's son defected in 1981, he was reluctant to disavow *Testimony*, because of his hatred for the greater distortions imposed on his father's memory by official Soviet biographers such as Sophia Khentova. 'I hate, I *khkhate* her book,' he told David Fanning in a May 1991 *Gramophone* interview. 'She makes him look like a genuine son of the Communist party'... There is a piece of evidence [about *Testimony*] that [Allan] Ho calls 'a smoking gun'. In 1996 Shostakovich's close friend Flora Litvinova reported that the composer had once told her he had been meeting 'constantly' with an unnamed young Leningrad musicologist who had 'dug everything up, even my youthful compositions... I tell him everything I remember about my works and myself. He writes it down, and at a subsequent

meeting I look it over.' Shostakovich may, however, have been telling Litvinova about the interviews he granted for the preface of Volkov's first book on Leningrad composers... Could an aural memory reproduce texts so exactly and at such length? And if it could, would a note taker punctuate it the same way twice? Even Ho recognizes the difficulty: 'I think I'll always have some doubt,' he reflects, 'because these recyclings are hard to explain with 100 percent certainty'... In *Shostakovich: A Life*, Fay coolly presents verifiable details about her subject in a manner that downplays his engagement with politics. Her Shostakovich is a man nearly broken by the political demands imposed on him, but he does not assume the heroic proportions of a Solzhenitsyn. Fay refuses to portray his compromises with authority as secret attempts at political subversion... In his recently published correspondence with Shostakovich, [Boris] Tishchenko condemns *Testimony* as 'not the memoirs of Shostakovich, not even a book by Volkov about Shostakovich, but a book by Volkov about Volkov'. Tishchenko was one of the six Soviet composers who denounced *Testimony* in *Literaturnaya gazeta* in 1979, in the letter that most Western observers then believed to have been coerced. Apparently it wasn't. In June 1999, the daughter of another signatory [Veniamin Basner] wrote to *Izvestiya* that her father had been familiar with *Testimony* and had firmly believed it was a fake. Ho and Feofanov claim that yet another signatory, the Azerbaijani composer Kara Karayev, had been 'undergoing treatment for a heart condition, [and] had been ordered to sign or be kicked out of the hospital'. Yet Karayev's son, Faradzh, has emphatically denied this account to Laurel Fay. Shostakovich's sixty-five-year-old widow, Irina Antonovna, also remains a skeptic about *Testimony*... Volkov met with her husband three times, she said, and the meetings lasted between ninety minutes and two hours. Since Shostakovich was ill and Irina was acting as his personal secretary and often his nurse, she rarely left him alone. The interviews were supposed to be published in *Sovetskaya muzyka*. 'The rest,' she insists, 'came from Volkov himself.'"

Mitchinson discusses the recent controversy over Solomon Volkov's *Conversations With Joseph Brodsky* [1997]. He concludes that *Testimony* is "a book based on at least some face-to-face interviews with Shostakovich... a vivid portrait of a brilliant composer living in difficult times... a collection of rumours and anecdotes, many of which were such common currency in the Soviet Union of the 1970s that Fay and Taruskin heard them when they visited as exchange students. But can it be considered the authentic 'memoirs of Dmitri Shostakovich'?"

May/June. **Royal S. Brown** reviews Laurel Fay's biography in *Fanfare*: "Fay offers an extremely smooth biographical narrative that seems all the more remarkable when one looks at the copious notes [...] to each of the book's 15 chapters (unlike many writers, Fay happily avoids using the footnotes as a locus for abundant parenthetical observations...). Indeed, Fay's writing makes one sense more the presence of a witness than a scholar... The picture definitely has its ugly side, one that all the attempts of the Volkov mafia to literalize musical meaning as political meaning will never be able to undo. That Shostakovich was more than willing to put his very life on the line for a cause that he believed in is borne out by the fact that, although his country wanted to protect him as a valuable artist, he had to be all but carried bodily out of Leningrad, where he served for a time as a fireman, when it was besieged by the Nazis in 1941. That he was equally unwilling to put his or his family's life on the line when besieged at various points by the Soviet Union's cultural gestapo is borne out by the fact that, throughout his life, whenever he was confronted on the 'pessimism,' 'formalism,' or any one of a number of other sins in his music perceived by the proponents of 'socialist realism,' the composer inevitably backed down, admitted the error of his ways, signed documents, participated on committees -- in short, anything he had to do to keep the commissars off his back... Continuing to sign official denunciations and to refuse to join in protests of ongoing abuse of Soviet artists by the government well past the point where he

was in any great danger, Shostakovich by the last years of his life had managed to alienate more than a few friends and fellow countrymen, manifesting what Fay, whose love of her subject and his music is beyond question, describes as 'moral impotence and servile complicity' (p. 269)... It is precisely in taking Shostakovich's greatest creations and turning them into literal-minded polemics that the greatest disservice to Shostakovich has been done by Volkov and his followers, including Ian MacDonald in his abominable *The New Shostakovich*, which finds anti-Stalin 'motifs' everywhere in the works, and which describes the composer's most profound musical utterances in prose so purple and puerilely descriptive that, had it taken the opposite political point of view, it would have made the commissars ecstatic... As much of Fay's research suggests, Shostakovich expressed himself openly in words only in intimate forms of communication such as letters to long-established friends. Why, then, should we take as gospel the pronouncements of vague provenance compiled by an individual [Solomon Volkov] who came late into the composer's life, particularly when all of his other nonintimate pronouncements are peremptorily dismissed when not revealing the desired political stand? Shostakovich was a great composer, and he knew that he was a great composer. He also knew that great music, like any art worthy of that adjective, communicates on a multiplicity of levels that verbal language, in its linearity, and recreations of chronological history cannot begin to even suggest, and Fay offers more than a smattering of quotations from the composer throughout her biography that reveal this awareness. Had Fay more deeply examined, at least at certain crucial points, the musical nature of Shostakovich's works and their interrelationships, she might have been able to undo a bit more than she has the damage done by the simplistic programmaticism promulgated by the likes of Volkov and MacDonald. Still, Fay has happily presented us with neither a 'new' nor a 'reconsidered' Shostakovich but rather with the incomplete portrait of a brilliant, deeply introspective, often tortured, and forever enigmatic artist on whom,

as Fay is the first to admit, the last word will never be written."

Ian MacDonald comments: "Royal S. Brown's lack of familiarity with the Soviet background was already clear in his review of *The War Symphonies*. He confirms it here in his effective recommendation that statements ascribed to Shostakovich by the Soviet authorities should be taken on an equal footing with anti-Soviet sentiments in the composer's private letters and conversations (overwhelmingly corroborated by Elizabeth Wilson's witnesses). Such elementary incomprehension robs his opinions of consequence. The prejudicial nature of Brown's anti-revisionism is illustrated by his remarkable [accusation](#) that the distinguished senior witnesses interviewed by Larry Weinstein in *The War Symphonies* (many of them also witnesses for Wilson) conspired 'to make their view of history fit the Volkov thesis', for which corrupt end they were allegedly prepared to 'go through great contortions' in their recollections (i.e., falsify their true memories in aid of Solomon Volkov's supposedly counterfeit representation of a man they all knew). A pundit prepared to accuse a dozen elderly but quite lucid ladies and gentlemen of conspiring to lie about Shostakovich (or of all independently lying about him in the same way) does not warrant a serious response."

May 21st. **Paul Driver** (*The Sunday Times*) reviews Fay's biography: "Fay's composer comes across as immaculately dull, a man almost without qualities, a bespectacled mask. The sheer dryness of the presentation is breathtaking. I cannot recall a biography that seeks so little inwardness with its subject, or is so abstemious with anecdotal detail... The book is an animated worklist rather than a portrait of one of the most tempestuous creative careers of modern times..."




July. **David Gutman** (*Classic CD*) reviews Fay's biography: "There is little in this modest volume to ruffle feathers... Fay's methodology is to exclude speculative commentary of the political or even musical variety, relying instead on what she perceives to be the facts. This makes for a dim, rather low-key piece of writing and a shorter book than one might expect... The reliable academic trappings and the comprehensive citations of source material cannot quite compensate for Fay's lack of crusading vigour and heart... If I were buying only one book on the composer, it would still be Elizabeth Wilson's *Shostakovich: A Life Remembered*."

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THE SHOSTAKOVICH DEBATE

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THE SHOSTAKOVICH DEBATE

Witness Statements

--UNDER CONSTRUCTION--

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Prokofiev and Natalia Satz give the first play-through of *Peter and the Wolf* to an impromptu audience at Moscow's Theatre of the Young Spectator, 1936



Lyubov Shaporina's diary and Shostakovich's symphonies 4-6

In his essay "Public lies and unspeakable truth", published in David Fanning's 1995 symposium *Shostakovich Studies*, Richard Taruskin brushed aside any possibility that a secretly dissident outlook is expressed in Shostakovich's Fifth Symphony:

If we claim to find defiant ridicule in the Fifth Symphony, we necessarily adjudge its composer, at this point in his career, to have been a "dissident". That characterization, popular as it has become, and attractive as it will always be to many, has got to be rejected as a self-gratifying anachronism. There were no dissidents in Stalin's Russia... [op. cit., p. 46]

In my review of Fanning's book (DSCH Journal 5 [Summer 1996], pp. 10-29) and later in Ho and Feofanov's *Shostakovich Reconsidered* (pp. 656-67), I sought to show from historical sources that Taruskin's claim has no basis in fact, being instead a clumsy attempt to quash interpretations of Shostakovich's work with which he happens to disagree. Since 1991, the archives of the former USSR have provided plentiful evidence of widespread popular dissent against Soviet rule, especially in the 1920s and 1930s (e.g., Sarah Davies, *Popular Opinion in Stalin's Russia* [1997], Vladimir Brovkin, *Russia After Lenin* [1998], Sheila Fitzpatrick, *Everyday Stalinism* [1999]). In all but name, "dissidence" was a fact of everyday life throughout the history of the Soviet Union.

Taruskin's second line of defence in this case is his claim (made first in "Who Was Shostakovich?", *The Atlantic Monthly* [February 1995], and repeated in *Defining Russia Musically* [1997]) that Shostakovich was not a dissident but an *intelligent* -- i.e., a member of the Russian/Soviet *intelligenty* or intelligentsia. Defending this bizarre antithesis (never before proposed in Soviet studies), Taruskin argued thus:

[Shostakovich] was heir to a noble tradition of artistic and social thought -- one that abhorred injustice and political repression, but one that also valued social commitment, participation in one's community, and solidarity with people. Shostakovich's mature idea of art[...] was based not on alienation but on service. ["Who Was Shostakovich?", pp. 70, 72.]

Taruskin's proposed antithesis of "dissident" and "*intelligent*" is absent from Soviet historiography for the simple reason that there is no evidence for it. On the contrary, as Robert Conquest wrote in his study *The Great Terror* (1968/1990), "the Russian intelligentsia [is] the traditional repository of the ideas of resistance to despotism and, above all, to thought control". Many novels, poems, and memoirs of the Soviet era (including *Testimony*) represent this "repository of resistance" -- a conception of the *intelligenty* shared by historians of the period and, more significantly, by the Soviet secret police.

Ironically, just as Taruskin was launching these eccentric contentions in 1995, a book was published in English translation containing a prime illustration of the resistant intellectual context in which Shostakovich lived and worked: *Intimacy and Terror: Soviet Diaries of the 1930s*, edited by Véronique Garros, Natalia Korenevskaya, and Thomas Lahusen. The particular source involved was the 1935-9 diary of Lyubov Shaporina, wife of the composer Yuri Shaporin (a manuscript deposited with the Saltykov-Shchedrin Public Library in St Petersburg). Described by Solomon Volkov as "one of the rare surviving honest diaries of the period" [1], Shaporina's text is, in itself, a remarkable addition to existing written evidence of intelligentsia alienation from the Soviet regime. It is especially significant in that it represents the tenor of sentiment and opinion within Shostakovich's own Leningrad *intelligenty* milieu. The editors of *Intimacy and Terror* introduce Lyubov Shaporina's diary as follows:

Lyubov Vasilievna Shaporina was fifty-eight years old in 1937, living in Leningrad. The time described (1935-39), is truly Shakespearian: it is "out of joint". In a poignant image, she sees herself inside a painting by [the St Petersburg Romantic artist, Karl] Bryullov [1799-1852], *Pompeii's Last Day*.

Shaporina's diary is, above all, a chronicle of the times of terror in the martyred city of Leningrad, which had been enduring a wave of arrests and mass deportations that began after Kirov's assassination in 1934. It is a diary of resistance, not in the political tradition (the city was the scene of one of the last public demonstrations of the opposition [see *Shostakovich Reconsidered*, pp. 550-1]), but in the time-honored Russian intellectual and

cultural tradition that has sustained throughout history a highly ambiguous relationship with the political power structure. Lyubov Shaporina was the founder of the Puppet Theater and the wife of the famous composer Yury Shaporin. Her world was deeply rooted in the pre-revolutionary intelligentsia, those who returned from emigration and thrived in Soviet reality in spite of everything. Her pen describes how the celebrities succeed one another; we see them at the pinnacle of their glory or fallen low.

In order to resist and survive, the diarist often abandons the present and retreats into reminiscences of her "tsarist" childhood or of the short period of emigration in France where Shaporina seems to have lived between 1925 and the early 1930s. Implicitly dedicated to Alyona, the little daughter who died in 1932, the diary is a requiem for the one who, to cite the diarist's own words, "chose for herself the better fate" -- not to live the civil war of "1937", or the Great [Patriotic] War, which Shaporina foresees with great lucidity at the time of the signing of the German-Soviet Non-Aggression Pact. [op. cit., p. 333.]

For long generally thought to have been the work of Stalin [2], the assassination of Leningrad Communist Party "boss" Sergei Kirov on 1st December 1934 inaugurated an intensification of the normal level of Stalinist terror to such a pitch of savagery that the next five years became known as the Great Terror. (A period of especial ferocity within that span, 1936-8, became known as the Yezhovshchina, or "Yezhov Affair", after Nikolai Yezhov, then head of the NKVD.) Leningrad was particularly badly hit during the early stages of the Great Terror with hundreds of thousands of its citizens, chiefly from the intelligentsia and former nobility, being either executed, deported to internal exile, or condemned to the Arctic camps of the Gulag. Scarcely a family among Leningrad's educated class remained unaffected, this being the social context of, for example, Shostakovich's Fourth Symphony. Anna Akhmatova's partner Nikolai Punin and her young son Lev Gumilyov were among the arrested of 1935; when Lev was rearrested in 1938, the poetess spent seventeen months in the queues outside Leningrad's prisons, hoping, like thousands of other waiting wives and mothers, for news of him -- the experience evoked in *Requiem*. Shostakovich himself suffered many arrests of close relations and friends. This period is likewise the background to Lyubov Shaporina's diary, haunted by her fears for her son Vasya.

Shaporina's diary begins *in media res* with an entry dated March 1935 in which she refers to being interrogated for five-and-a-half hours in an NKVD processing centre at Detskoye Selo, just south of Leningrad. Presumably this was part of the ongoing wave of intelligentsia arrests in the city, although the diary's editors provide little in the way of biographical background about the author, which subject remains ripe for a researcher. For example, they are unable to say whether "M. Yudina", described as rushing to Detskoye to bring Shaporina a food parcel, was Maria Veniaminovna, the pianist and colleague of Shostakovich, or the actress Maria Petrovna. (The diarist was well enough connected in Leningrad arts circles to have known both women.) Shaporina's remarks on NKVD interrogation procedures echo those in letters and memoirs of the time, typical of the information circulated among the

intelligentsia:

On March 15 Vasya hurried to Moscow, wasted five days there and got nothing done, and then when he came back he started calling the NKVD agent in charge of [my] case. That same evening (March 22), he was summoned to Liteiny [the central NKVD administration on the Liteiny Prospekt]. On March 16 Yu[ry] A[leksandrovich] [Shaporin] telegraphed the NKVD -- asking that the daughter of the Vladimirov family, which was being sent into exile, be exempted, that she was Vasya's common-law "wife." This was a lie, but it was the only way to save the girl. They called Vasya in to the NKVD and a dignified, high-ranking functionary started out by reproaching him: "You ought to be ashamed, Vas[ily] Yur[evich], you seem to want to wind up like Nikita Tolstoi [Count Alexei Tolstoy's son]. You're compromising your fathers, this marriage is a fraud." Instead of standing up for himself, Vasya caved in immediately and agreed with him and promised to be a good boy from then on, thus compromising both his own statements and his father's request. They got him, so to speak, by bluffing... With the NKVD you have to act as though you know what you're talking about, as though you were just passing the time of day, and most important, not let yourself be intimidated. How was Vasya, at 19, supposed to know all that? How could he not be intimidated? I recall very vividly my conversations with the Chekists [3] in 1931. Just passing the time of day. That you must not name names, though there are some you can -- and those because you know perfectly well how close they are to the NKVD... In general the best thing is to look dumb and completely self-confident.

The closely interrelated world of the Leningrad *intelligenty* is evinced by the NKVD agent's reference to Nikita Tolstoy. The same age as Shaporina's son Vasya, Nikita married Ina, the daughter of distinguished translator Mikhail Lozinsky, a friend of Akhmatova and the poet Nikolai Gumilyov (father of Akhmatova's son Lev). It was a marriage of convenience designed to prevent Lozinskaya from being exiled, along with her whole family, to Siberia during the post-Kirov purge in early 1935. In the event, Count Tolstoy appealed to Gorky, who managed to get the internal exile order annulled, while the marriage endured, producing, among seven children, the eminent contemporary writer Tatyana Tolstaya (b. 1951). In proposing to Natasha Vladimirova, Vasya Shaporin was, as his mother notes (op. cit., p. 336), emulating Nikita Tolstoy. Shaporina describes the desolate, fearful mood among Leningrad's *intelligenty* as the NKVD's internal exile orders intensified during March 1935:

The month of March, it was like some terrible, nightmarish avalanche coming through, destroying families and homes in its path. It is all so unreal: it came, and it's still here, right before your eyes, but you still can't believe it. Lida Bryullova (Vladimirova) called on March 13, but I wasn't home; I call them on the 14th, their apartment mate answers and says that L. P. is out taking care of things, they're leaving on the 16th. Where? "To Kazakhstan. All three of them." I went to their apartment at 3:00. The room in shambles, just bare walls. We had been there a month ago for tea. It had been so cozy... On March 12 they got an order to leave on the 15th, they barely managed to wrangle themselves a one-day extension. They managed to sell the piano and the wardrobe, and they farmed out

various things to acquaintances. A ticket for Atbasar [a small town beyond the Urals on the railway to Karaganda]... I went to see them every day, I was there on the 16th, too, just before their departure, I regret I couldn't see them off. I stayed there a long time, waiting for a telegram to come from Moscow and save them... Right at that time the newspaper *Vechernaya Krasnaya Gazeta* [The Red Evening Gazette] carried an item entitled "Bird Day": "On this day all school children, Young Pioneers and Komsomol organisations will build starling houses and set them up in gardens and squares, so that when the birds come they will find shelter all ready and waiting for them!" Touching. Meanwhile tens of thousands of people of all ages, from newborn babies to old women in their eighties, are being thrown out in the most literal sense of the word onto the streets and their nests are destroyed. And here we get STARLING HOUSES...

Shaporina's account recalls Edison Denisov's record of Shostakovich's words to him in 1957: "He told how during the period of the purges he would go to visit a friend, only to discover that this friend had disappeared without a trace, and nobody knew what had happened to him. His possessions had been bundled up and thrown out on to the street, and strangers were occupying his flat." [4] Soon orders for internal exile would be replaced by five- and ten-year sentences of hard labour in the Gulag.

A year later, on 15th March 1936, Shaporina reports Meyerhold's speech, given to a packed hall in Leningrad the previous day. "Meyerholdism" had been attacked in the *Pravda* article "Muddle Instead of Music" in January; the director provocatively entitled his speech "Meyerhold against Meyerholdism", defending Shostakovich who was nervously present in the hall. Shaporina recalls some of Meyerhold's statements, probably based on rough notes scribbled while listening to him speak.

The first part [of Meyerhold's speech] was an amendment to the *Pravda* articles. Quite a few brilliant passages. One statement that provoked thunderous applause was: "Soviet subject matter is often a smoke screen to conceal mediocrity." We need Soviet classics, as Com[rade] Stalin said. There was also laughter over the principle of the Pope's infallibility. Obviously people with shattered nerves have a need to believe in the infallibility of their Leader...

They did their best to disgrace Shostakovich. Yesterday was his rehabilitation. The famous "it's just chaos" has been replaced by "bold experimentation." There's a parallel with the agronomist Tsytsin, to whom Stalin said: "Be bolder in your experiments, we will support you."

A great master, Sh[ostakovich] -- a thinker. Here are some of the things M. said that hit the mark: "The path to simplicity is not an easy one. Each artist goes at his own pace -- and they must not lose their own distinctive way of walking in the quest for simplicity... The angry, cruel headlines of the *Pravda* articles trumpet the high standards of the Party,

standards for improving taste... The highest form of poetry is tragedy, if there were no suffering in life, there would only be such anguished longing that we all would go hang ourselves before our time..."

On 30th January 1937, Shaporina discourses on the second of the three great Moscow "show trials" of the Yezhovshchina, the Pyatakov trial, which finished on that day [\[5\]](#). With such stage-managed events, Stalin wiped out his remaining prominent rivals in the Party by forcing them to falsely confess in public to being spies and saboteurs. Only the most perceptive Soviet citizens fully understood the trumped-up nature of these "witch trials", though the penny gradually dropped as the 1937 purge rolled on. Shaporina recalls her hairdresser whispering incredulously to her after the Pyatakov trial: "I can't make any sense of it -- the entire leadership!" Her own remarks on the affair are complex in tone, as if conditioned by fear of discovery. The historian Sheila Fitzpatrick observes that this passage "appears to combine ironic skepticism, genuine hatred of Communists, and the desire to mislead any unauthorized reader" [\[6\]](#):

Each People's Commissariat has in its leadership a traitor and a spy. The press is in the hands of traitors and spies. They are all party members who have made it through all the purges... For the last 15 years, there's been a continual process of decay, treachery and betrayal going on, and all of it in full sight of the Chekists. And what about the things that are not being said at the trial? Think how much more terrible they must be. And worst of all is the very openness of the defendants. Even Lafontaine's lambs tried to justify themselves before the wolf, but our wolves and foxes -- people like Radek, Shestov [\[7\]](#), Zinoviev, old hands at this business -- lay their heads down on the block like lambs, say "mea culpa" and tell everything; they might as well be at confession. Feuchtwanger [\[8\]](#) wondered why everyone is so forthcoming -- how naive can you get! What's hypnosis for, anyway?

Shaporina's last remark reflects the contemporary belief among the *intelligenty* that the emotionless quality of the confessions at the Moscow show trials was brought about by hypnotising the accused. In fact, exhaustion -- induced by the continuous process of sleep-deprivation and constant interrogation known as "the conveyor" -- plus physical torture and the threat of more, sufficed to explain this phenomenon.

By 27th August 1937, Shaporina finds herself living in a communal nightmare: "I keep getting the feeling that I'm inside the Bryullov painting: *Pompeii's Last Day*. Columns falling all around me, one after the other, there's no end to them; women run past me, fleeing with terror in their eyes." On 10th October, she speaks directly of what's going on, beginning a sequence of entries full of reports of arrested friends:

The nausea rises to my throat when I hear how calmly people can say it: He was shot,

someone else was shot, shot, shot. The word is always in the air, it resonates through the air. People pronounce the words completely calmly, as though they were saying, "He went to the Theater." I think that the real meaning of the word doesn't reach our consciousness -- all we hear is the sound. We don't have a mental image of those people actually dying under the bullets. You hear the names: Kadetsky, Vitelko, a singer who'd just recently performed in competition. Nat[alia] Sats -- the director of the Moscow Theater of the Young Spectator. [9] And many others. What I just can't understand is the cruelty of exiling the wives of people who are arrested. A physicist [Vsevolod Frederiks] is exiled to Vladimir, to a concentration camp, and his wife, Marusya Shostakovich [the composer's elder sister], to Alma-Ata. [Film composer N.] Malakhovsky hasn't been sent into exile yet. People tell rumors about him that are so horrible that you have to cover your ears -- but his wife is in Alma-Ata already; from there they are sent out to the "regions," i.e., into the bare desert. Evgeniya Pavl[ovna Starchakova]'s life is like that of a baby mouse with a cat sitting right above her, waiting for just the right moment to finish her off. [Her husband, *Izvestiya* journalist Aleksandr Starchakov, had been arrested in November 1936. The Starchakovs were close friends of Shaporina.]... Who will fall next, will it be you? And it's already so commonplace, you're not even scared anymore... God forgive the living and give rest to the dead.

Executions in Leningrad rose towards the end of 1937, with thousands of naval and military commissars liquidated, in addition to the near-annihilation of the city's Party functionaries, a massacre supervised by Zhdanov. Shaporina heard gunfire:

On the morning of 22nd [October] I woke up at about three and couldn't get back asleep until after five. There were no trams, it was completely quiet outside, except for an occasional car passing by. Suddenly I heard a burst of gunfire. And then another, ten minutes later. The shooting continued in bursts every ten, fifteen or twenty minutes until just after five. Then the trains started running, the street resumed its usual morning noise. I opened the window and listened, trying to figure out where the shots were coming from... The Peter and Paul Fortress is nearby. That was the only place where they could be shooting. Were people being executed? After all, between 3 to 5 in the morning it couldn't be a drill. Who were they shooting? And why?

This is what they call an election campaign. [The first "elections" to the Supreme Soviet following the adoption of the Stalin Constitution in 1936.] And our consciousness is so deadened that sensations just slide across its hard, glossy surface, leaving no impression. To spend all night hearing living people, undoubtedly innocent people, being shot to death and not lose your mind! And afterwards, just to fall asleep, to go on sleeping as though nothing had happened. How terrible. In Yaroslav Province, right where we used to live, everyone who had had anything to do with the church was arrested, all the priests, church elders, pastors, etc., etc. In Detskoe, Irina [the Starchakovs' daughter] came home from school and said, "They told us there are mass arrests going on right now. We need to rid ourselves of undesirable elements before the election!"

Two weeks later, the onrushing waves of civilian arrests broke closer to Shaporina:

2nd November 1937. How can you find the strength to live, if you let yourself think about what's going on all around you? On the 20th I come back from work, and Natasha and Vasya open the door and rush into my arms. Evgeniya Pavl[ovna] has been arrested, and Ir[in]a is here with us. Irina looks terrible. Her face is so swollen from tears that you can't even see her eyes, and there are big blue circles around them. She was at school, and they called her out of class. Ev[geniya] P[avlovna] only had time to say goodbye to her and tell her that she had been sentenced to 8 years of hard labor; the crime: being the wife of an enemy of the people (without a trial or investigation) -- the investigation was done without her knowledge. Mara [Irina's sister] was sobbing uncontrollably. E[vgeniya] P[avlovna] had also told them: "Go to Lyub[ov] Vas[ilevna]." Irina rushed to the Lensovet [Leningrad Soviet], got a pass to see the prosecutor, Shpigel, burst into (her words) his office and told him everything: "How are we going to live without our mama?" Shpigel answered: "The charge and the arrest are justified, why don't you go to your grandmother's in Moscow, maybe your grandmother will take your sisters too; we'll wait five days, if you can't arrange things for them, we will come up with something." But they came up with something immediately, without waiting, and at 6 p.m. some people from the NKVD came to Detskoe, picked up the little ones and took them to the NKVD children's placement center at 66 Kirov Street. When they told me that on the phone, I was just shocked. We had put on shows there before and the teachers had told us about the children. They are delinquents, neglected children. There are children with a long record of incarcerations. There are murderers in there. What could we do? Mara with her bad heart. The poor girls, what they've had to go through: in the morning their mother is taken away, and then they're picked up and taken to a place that is no better than prison. Irina was shocked, though I tried to reassure her that it's not so bad in there. It all seems like a dream to me. In the morning they were still a family, and now there's nothing, everything has shattered.

Shaporina describes the ten-year-old Irina's precocious maturity in applying to the NKVD for custody of her parents' property. Within a week, Shaporina had taken the Starchakov girls out of the state orphanage and into her own apartment. (At this point, the diary's chronology becomes confused, suggesting later interpolations; *op. cit.*, pp. 355-6.) On the 20th November, Irina Starchakova again went to see the file prosecutor for her mother's case; he kicked her out: "What are you doing hanging around her for? You don't watch out, we'll sign you into the orphanage." (Evgeniya Pavlovna, her mother, was sent to the labour camp at Tomsk.) Shaporina continues:

21st November 1937. There was a concert at the Philharmonic, and the orchestra played Shostakovich's 5th Symphony. The whole audience leapt to their feet and erupted into wild applause -- a demonstration of their outrage at all the hounding poor Mitya has been through. Everyone kept saying the same thing: "That was his answer, and it was a good one." D. D. came out white as a sheet, biting his lips. I think he was close to tears.

Shebalin, Aleksandrov [10], and Gauk came from Moscow, the only one missing was Shaporin. Can anyone be more disorganised than poor Shaporin [11]?... I ran into [Gavriil] Popov: "You know, I've turned into a coward, I'm a coward, I'm afraid of everything, I even burned your letters."

Shaporina is, of course, describing the legendary premiere of the Fifth Symphony, given by Mravinsky and the Leningrad Philharmonic, nominally in celebration of the 20th anniversary of the October Revolution. Solomon Volkov describes the *intelligent* audience for the Symphony: "This was a brilliant crowd, dancing on the volcano, the intellectual elite of the city, leading a precarious existence in those terrible days. Theirs was a surrealistic world, the nights spent listening for the Black Maria, guessing on which floor the elevator bearing unwelcome callers would stop, the days pretending everything was fine." [12] Shaporina's next-day entry serves to emphasise the (by Western liberal standards) unusual circumstances of this concert:

22nd November 1937. The joys of everyday life. I wake up in the morning and automatically think: thank God I wasn't arrested last night, they don't arrest people during the day, but what will happen tonight, no one knows. It's like Lafontaine's lamb -- every single person has enough against him to justify arrest and exile to parts unknown. I'm lucky, I am completely calm; I simply don't care. But the majority of people are living in absolute terror.

On 12th December, she fulfills her duty as a Soviet citizen by voting in the election:

Quelle blague! I went into the booth, where supposedly I was going to read the ballot and choose my candidate for the Supreme Soviet -- "choose" means you have a choice. There was just one name, already marked. I burst out laughing uncontrollably, right there in the booth, just like a child... Shame on them for putting grown people in such a ridiculous, stupid position. Who do we think we're fooling?

On 6th February 1938, a week after the Moscow premiere of Shostakovich's Fifth Symphony, Shaporina records the arrest of yet another friend, Veta Dmitrieva:

They came at 7 in the morning, locked them in their room and conducted a search. They made a call to NKVD [headquarters]: "Nothing here." Veta said goodbye to Tanechka (aged 4), she said, "When I come back, you'll be all grown up." My girls (Mara and Galya) were outside in the courtyard, they saw them putting Veta in the Black Maria. They came back in tears. Anisimova (the ballerina) has been arrested. I just feel sick -- from the accumulated weight of all the crimes in our country. They seize their victims and the victims disappear, a great many of them without leaving a trace. Starchakov, Milyaev, Zhenya's father, an old man of 77, Nechai-Tsarskoselsky, an old servant, a Pole without a

single relative still living in Poland. Who needs all this? Evg[eniya] Pavl[ovna] is in Tomsk. The Tomsk prison is a special camp. What threat could she pose to anyone, this unhappy woman who raised her children in such a way that they didn't utter a word of complaint when their father and mother were taken from them? They haven't gotten over their fear yet. Mara said once, while reading *Buratino* [Pinocchio], "How is it Papa Carlo doesn't know how to find the country where all the happy people live? I thought everyone knew it's the USSR!"

On 11th March 1938 -- last day of evidence in the final Moscow show trial in which Bukharin, Rykov, the former head of the secret police Genrikh Yagoda, and a cast of minor victims confessed to espionage, wrecking, and plotting to destroy the USSR and reimpose capitalism -- Shaporina reflects on the fate of her country, showing an understanding of recent Russian history characteristic of the dissenting *intelligenty*:

The great, great Dostoevsky! We now see, not in a dream, but right before our eyes, that great herd of devils that entered into the swine, we see them as they have never been seen before in all human history [13]. All through history people have always struggled for power, have plotted revolutions. Robespierre destroyed all the dissidents, but NEVER in the world have people and parties struggling among themselves worked to destroy their own homeland. Over the past twenty years all those members of our government have inflicted famine, pestilence, plague on their people -- and sold the country off wholesale and retail. And this whole Yagoda inquisition. What we read in the papers is bad enough. But what about what they don't put in the papers? Now Yezhov, there's a smooth operator for you. I hope that my other predictions will come true too and the emperor will be left standing there with no clothes on. [14]

People in Moscow are in such a panic, it's made me sick, literally... Irina's aunt, a lawyer, said that every night two or three defense lawyers from her office are arrested. Morloki was arrested on December 21, and on January 15 Leva, our simple-minded theater fan and prop man, was exiled to Chita. At that rate they might as well arrest the table or sofa. Straight into exile without an investigation... And you won't find any articles now in the legal code that say what it is you have to avoid in our befouled fatherland. When you read about all those mysterious murders -- Gorky, Max, the dying Menzhinsky, etc [15] -- you can't understand who needed the lives of all these people and what they needed them for. The only one they needed, the only really dangerous one was Stalin, plus Voroshilov, Kaganovich... They could have killed them a hundred times over, poisoned them, done anything they wanted to them, but no one has even made an attempt... It is unbearable to live in the middle of it all. It's like walking around a slaughterhouse, with the air saturated with the smell of blood and carrion...

The Terror did not abate. Ten days later, Shaporina records what turned out to be the first moves in a purge of Leningrad writers: "the *Pereval* Case", named after the literary magazine [The Pass] on which these writers collaborated during the 1920s.

21st March 1938. I call and ask for [the writer] E[lena] M[ikhailovna] Tager, and they tell me that she has a high fever, I knew she had angina. After a whole day of ordeals with the government theater administration and three trips to Smolny to see Gribkov, hungry and exhausted, I go up the stairs to Tager's apartment. Masha opens the door, and I go in; the door to E. M.'s room is open, which is unusual. "Isn't your Mama home? Where is she, in the hospital?" "No, Mama's not in the hospital, she was taken away by the NKVD." They came on 19th at 11pm and stayed until 6 in the morning, searching the apartment: they went through everything... They didn't find anything. They took E. M.'s letters to her father, written over 20 years ago. The letters are very interesting, she had wanted to write a novel, the story of a family. [In the margin: Zabolotsky has been arrested.] They took the old bible, and when her aunt asked them to leave it, they answered, "What for? Religion is the opiate of the people."

The Leningrad poet Nikolai Zabolotsky was arrested on the same day as E. M. Tager. Robert Conquest describes what happened to him in Leningrad's prison-system:

Zabolotsky was interrogated for four days without a break, and tortured... On his return to his cell, he tried to barricade himself in and fought the warders who came for him. He was then beaten even more severely and taken in a state of collapse to the prison psychiatric hospital, where he was held for two weeks, first in a violent, then in a quiet ward. On recovery, he was literally pushed into a common cell designed for twelve or fifteen, which now held seventy or eighty, and sometimes a hundred prisoners. "People could lie down only on their side, jammed tight against each other, and even then not all at once, but in two shifts."... At night, the cell was pervaded by "dumb terror" at the screams as "the hundreds of sergeants, lieutenants, and captains of State Security, together with their assistants got down to their routine tasks" in the main Liteyni prison. Meanwhile, several Soviet writers are reported as coming to Zabolotsky's defence, and, together with his failure to confess, this seems to have led to the removal of his name from the list of major plotters. He was later transferred to a two-man cell in the Kresty [\[16\]](#), now inhabited by ten. In September or early October, he was sentenced by the Special Board to eight years. On 8 November, he was sent to Sverdlovsk, and on 5 December started a sixty-day train journey in a forty-man railway wagon, suffering the usual horrors, and ended up at Komsomolsk-on-the-Amur, at hard labor in the notorious Bamlag [\[17\]](#). For part of the time, he is reported employed in the camp craftsman's office, which may have saved his life. He was released in 1944 and returned from exile in 1946; his sentence was annulled in 1951. However, his health had been undermined, and he was an invalid until his death seven years later. (*The Great Terror* [1990], pp. 303-4.)

Also arrested in connection with "the *Pereval* Case" were Zabolotsky's fellow poets Benedikt Livshits and Boris Kornilov (author of the words to "The Song of the Meeting", Shostakovich's hit song from *Counterplan*). Both were shot in prison (Livshits on 21st October 1938). Likewise arrested, Kornilov's first wife, the poetess Olga Berggolts, then pregnant, was released after his execution. Before they let her go, her interrogators kicked her belly; the resulting miscarriage prevented her having more children and, like many other Soviet intellectuals of the Stalin years, she subsequently became an alcoholic. [18] Others linked to the Case included the Georgian poet Titsian Tabidze (shot on 16th December 1937) and the Leningrad poet Daniil Kharms (died in captivity, probably 2nd February 1942). As for E. M. Tager, she was convicted of working for the "Fascist Intelligence Service" and given ten years in Kolyma: a virtual death-sentence. Like fellow writer Eugenia Ginzburg [19], she survived and spent a further six years in exile. Returning to Leningrad in 1956, Tager sought out Akhmatova and told Nadezhda Mandel'shtam of the last days of her husband Osip, who died in a Kolyma transit-camp on 27th December 1938. [20]

On 18th March 1938, Shaporina broods on the disjunctive degeneracy of her times:

It really bothers Vasya sometimes that I don't go out to the movies or the theater. Impressions just slide over them, the young people of today, without making any impact on their conscious mind. They've grown up in these terrible conditions: the words "arrested", "shot" don't make the slightest impression on them. But what about us, who grew up among civilized human beings, not wild animals -- but then why slander the poor animals? Here's what I can't understand: Yagoda was shot, and he, and his action, and his stooges were disgraced. You'd think, if you reason it out, that all those absolutely innocent people, like the hundreds of thousands of members of the nobility who were exiled in 1935 for the death of Kirov (who was murdered by Yagoda [21]) ought to have been allowed to return. But what happens is the reverse. Now after they've served their five years or three years of time, they all are resented to new terms of the same length and sent even farther away. Does this make any sense? [22]

The Great Terror wiped out so many of the country's brains -- its technical experts, experienced administrators, teachers, scientists and economists, as well as thousands of its creative intelligentsia -- that by 1939 the Soviet system was falling into a state of severe disrepair. Services and supplies broke down. Everyday life became ever more difficult; yet the public sphere continued to resound with optimistic propaganda -- a contrast perhaps encoded in Shostakovich's Sixth Symphony. Shaporina was grim:

24th January 1939. Everything has disappeared, why? The city is freezing for lack of coal and firewood. Our theater is using the building of the Tram Workers' Park. You'd think that, even if they won't give you any books, you'd at least be able to get some coal. There's not any, not a speck, they don't even give it out through official channels, and there won't

be any before summer. There's no firewood. No electrical supplies, no stockings, no cloth, no paper. If you want to buy some manufactured product you have to spend all day in line, and stay overnight too... Salaries are being cut everywhere, from workers to writers and composers. The factories are standing idle for lack of fuel. The newspapers are in ecstasy about our happy and prosperous life and the advances being made in worker discipline... Koltsov has been arrested [23]. And he was praised to the skies. And what about must be going on in Al[eksei] Nik[olaevich Tolstoy]'s mind? Lyudmila [24] said that he had been very close to K[oltsov] recently.

19th February 1939. I. I. Rybakov died -- in prison. Mandel'shtam died in exile. People everywhere are ill or dying. I have the impression that the whole country is so completely exhausted that it can't fight off disease, it's a fatal condition. It's better to die than to live in continual terror, in abject poverty, starving. When I go out into the streets looking for something I need, all I can do is repeat the words over and over to myself: *Je n'en peux plus*. Queues, queues for everything. Their faces are blank, they go into the stores and come out with nothing, they fight with each other in the lines.

23rd March 1939. Maybe our great God will take pity on us for the sake of those righteous martyrs, for the sake of those millions who are in captivity. What insane, desperate cowardice not to speak a word of truth at that Congress [25]. How much more convincing it would have been just to come out and say: yes, comrades, the whole country is naked, there are no manufactured goods, there's not enough coal, there's not enough food -- and then explain why it is so. But a deliberate lie doesn't fool anyone.

28th April 1939. I picture the body of Russia covered with purulent abscesses -- everywhere confusion, negligence, sabotage, squabbling, denunciations... I look at the faces of people standing in lines a verst long, dull-faced, embittered, haggard, not a single thought on their minds. They, these people, can stand in line for hours, days, all day and through the night... Sviridov was just here [26]. We got to talking... He's very talented, though he's still under the strong influence of Shostakovich.

In April 1939, against this bleakly static background, Shostakovich began to compose his Sixth Symphony, its opening movement at once a portrayal of the frozen state of mind described in Shaporina's contemporary diary, and a memorial ode to the dead of the preceding five years. (The Soviet writer Lukyanova hears in this music "the rustle of footsteps, the flutter of lowered flags, subdued voices, bitter exclamations, and mournful silence".) Within two months, one of the most distinguished figures in the Soviet Russian arts became added to the roll-call of the repressed: Vsevolod Meyerhold -- Shostakovich's last remaining senior adviser and defender. Shaporina records (precisely accurate) "rumours" of Meyerhold's arrest on 20th June: "Can it really be, that with a man so important, a man who is so well known throughout the world, there's no other way of taking action than to arrest him? For shame." On 24th August, galvanised by her contempt for the non-aggression pact with Germany, she writes an entry which would have got her shot if her diary had been discovered:

"To save the revolution" Lenin paid indemnities, it's easy to give away other people's property, he gave away whole seas, what can we give away this time?... Look where Lenin's betrayal has led us. Seventeen million exiled [27], how many shot, a starving, enslaved peasantry and now a second Moscow-Brest Treaty [28] with Germany... We know that people under Yezhov, and not only under Yezhov either, confessed to crimes that had never taken place. [Satirist M. Saltykov-]Shchedrin couldn't have dreamed up anything like this. I can just imagine [Nazi foreign minister] Ribbentrop's scorn as he sits on the train, looking through the window, into the window of the car, the *russische Schweine-Schurken*[29], who betrayed their country, who ALLOWED SEVENTEEN MILLION PEOPLE TO BE IMPRISONED IN THE CAMPS. AND HE'S ABSOLUTELY RIGHT.

I saw the floor of the room where [Starchakov] was interrogated; it was all covered with blood... A[nna] Akhmatova told me that her son had said that there were such brutal beatings last June, in '38, that people's ribs and collarbones were broken... Akhmatova's son is accused of a plot to assassinate Zhdanov [Kirov's replacement as Leningrad Party boss]... It's very clear now why they had to get rid of Kirov, who was an honorable and forthright man. The German Gestapo needed only pawns. That photograph in *Pravda* tells it all: on the right the stupid, bloated snouts of Stalin and Molotov, and on the left [Joachim] von Ribbentrop standing like Napoleon with his arms folded across his chest and a smug grin on his face. Yes, we've lived to see the day. The triumph of communism! A lesson for all times and all peoples -- this is where a government of "workers and peasants" will lead you! I believe that the only honorable course of action for any true communist and revolutionary would be to send a bullet through his brain. And what about you, INTELLIGENTSIA?

Lyubov Shaporina's diary illustrates in detail what was known and thought among the tight circle of Leningrad's arts intelligentsia during the Great Terror. -- But is it a reliable guide to what Shostakovich himself knew and thought? Without specific confirmation (and there may be many discoveries of this kind yet to be unearthed in surviving private documentary sources), only inferences may be drawn. On the general level, it is reasonable to suppose that Shostakovich knew considerably more even than Shaporina, if only because of his contact with Marshal Tukhachevsky, whose synoptic role as a "military entrepreneur" [30] -- not to mention his longterm closeness to Kliment Voroshilov, one of Stalin's closest aides -- made him arguably one of the best-informed people in the USSR outside the Politburo. Indeed, some of the more accurate information to circulate in the Leningrad arts scene in 1935-7 may have come through Shostakovich, originating in his meetings with Tukhachevsky.

How well did Shaporina know Shostakovich? Her allusion to his elder sister's fate, together with her account of the premiere of the Fifth Symphony (with her recourse to his diminutive, "Mitya"), suggests

that they were on more than nodding terms. In fact, one of his favorite anecdotes seems to have been based on a story Shaporina reports on 19th February 1939: the funeral of the painter Kuzma Petrov-Vodkin, First Chairman of the Leningrad Artists' Union:

The grave diggers... [argued] about how to lower the coffin. The band struck up a funeral march. They grabbed the ropes, pulled the boards out from under the coffin and started to lower it, but suddenly it slipped and tumbled into the grave upright, and the lid flew open. My heart froze. I ducked behind the crowd and turned my back. I thought he was going to fall out of the coffin. Then the loud cursing of the grave diggers again, as the band launched into a spirited performance of the "Internationale."

According to Rostropovich, Shostakovich told this "regularly, maybe twice a year":

I was an eye-witness, you know, an eye-witness to this event. After the siege of Leningrad I saw a funeral procession in the streets... The coffin was being loaded onto an open lorry. Just imagine, an open coffin on the back of the lorry, which is bumping and shaking, together with a band of musicians playing Chopin's Funeral March. All of a sudden the corpse gets up from his coffin, and all the relatives and friends fall into a faint. Can you imagine, it wasn't a corpse they were going to bury, but somebody who was in a state of lethargic sleep. Only the musicians kept their wits about them, and seeing that the man was all right they stopped halfway through a bar of the Funeral March and started playing the "Internationale". Yes, I saw this with my very own eyes...

Shostakovich's anecdote is couched as an Aesopian joke about Soviet Communism, the corpse being that of the discredited ideology itself. (He may have combined the story of Petrov-Vodkin's funeral with his friend Nikolai Erdman's film-script *Mitya*, directed by Nikolai Okhlopkov in 1927, in which a "corpse" sits up suddenly in his coffin, having been in a state of catalepsy.) Was Shostakovich at Petrov-Vodkin's funeral or did he merely hear about the incident through the grapevine? Since the painter, born in 1878, was a cagey but confirmed anti-Semite in the mould of so many highborn Russians of his age, it is unlikely that Shostakovich would have frequented his milieu, even after his death and out of dry curiosity. Yet Shaporina herself blots her copybook with a display of the same patrician prejudice, stirred up perhaps by the anti-Semitic tone of Soviet reportage of the "Trotskyite" show trials:

I recall that scrap of paper that Logvinovich showed me in Vyazma in 1917. Everything in it was clear, the only thing I didn't understand was how they [Russian Jews] could socialize the land, divide it up, and then turn around and re-establish private property so to transfer it into new hands, Zionist ones this time. And suddenly it turns out that Mr. Trotsky already had everything figured out in advance, it was all ready to go, the machinery was already in place. Amazing! But as always with the Jews, it hadn't been planned carefully enough and was bound to fall through. They construct their grand schemes, but forget who's in charge... They took it into their heads to eat the Russians for dinner, figuring they're just pigs anyway. Just you wait, my dearies, the Russian people

will show what it's made of yet...

Shaporina's allusion to "a scrap of paper" shown to her in 1917 seems to refer to an anti-Semitic tract akin to the so-called "Protocols of the Elders of Zion" [31]. Possibly, her prejudice was sufficiently socially generic for her to have considered it vulgar to voice it in public except in the company of more candid types like Petrov-Vodkin. In fact, the Leningrad arts *intelligenty* included so many talented Soviet Jews that she probably kept her sentiments to herself for purely pragmatic reasons. On the other hand, Shostakovich had so many Jewish friends that a close social relationship with him would seem unlikely so far as Shaporina was concerned, even if she knew him well through mutual acquaintances and social events in the Leningrad arts calendar.

Shaporina's diary is a significant source for anyone interested in the background to Shostakovich's symphonies 4-6. They shared a very particular and especially well-informed socio-cultural context in Leningrad, a city exceptionally ravaged during a period of terrible upheaval. They saw the same sights, heard the same rumours, and more often than not knew the same people, including many eminent local victims of Stalin, Yezhov, and Zhdanov. Her views, moreover, are in harmony with other *intelligenty* memoirs and letters of this period; her diary is, in other words, part of a well-established wider pattern. The virulence of her anti-Communism may surprise newcomers to this subject (e.g., 29th April 1939: "Our masters are a streptococcal infection eating away at the organism of the country") but it is, in fact, characteristic of *intelligenty* of her age, who looked upon Stalin's crudely anti-intellectual cadres with privately expressed contempt. (Such scorn was particularly prevalent among the "engineers", the Russian scientific and technical intelligentsia, whose objective expertise was constantly subjected to political "revision" by ignorant commissars.)

In tone, Shaporina's diary is very close to *Testimony*. Both texts are anti-Communist without being pro-Western; indeed, Shaporina is as bitterly cynical about the West as Shostakovich. Twenty-six years his senior, she was of Meyerhold's generation but socially more akin to the outlooks of Stravinsky and Prokofiev. If she shared with Shostakovich a derisive view of Soviet Communism, his wider human sympathies, going beyond feelings for his own social class, would have distinguished them even during the difference-dissolving conditions of the Terror. Shaporina's loneliness and agony over her daughter (who figures in many of her diary entries) induced an escapism which finds an echo in, for example, Shostakovich's First Quartet. Their undeceivable dry-eyed realism is likewise similar. But these traits were common in their milieu and there is no reason to suppose them close friends, if friends at all.

In the light of characteristic documents like the diary of Lyubov Shaporina, Richard Taruskin's offhand contention that "there were no dissidents in Stalin's Russia" appears more preposterous than ever. (He has never defended this statement.) With friends and acquaintances falling all around her, Shaporina's life in Leningrad during 1935-9 closely resembles that of Shostakovich -- unsurprisingly, since their

social circles overlapped so extensively. With arrest, imprisonment, and death a constant fact of everyday life, being alive in that beleaguered pocket of culture cannot help but have been an intensely concentrated experience -- an experience which, I would suggest, is directly reflected in Shostakovich's symphonic music of the time. Shaporina's diary often becomes a roll-call of the fallen in the local arts, but the list of cultural figures done away with during this time is enormously longer than she realised or can be indicated here. For example, according to the Writers' Union, 2000 literary figures were repressed during the Terror, of whom 1500 perished in prison or the Gulag. So vast were the repressions in the arts world that scholars are still piecing the picture together. (For an overview, see Chapter 10 of Conquest's *The Great Terror*, Chapter 6:11 of Medvedev's *Let History Judge*, chapters 5 and 6 of Volkov's *St Petersburg: A Cultural History*, and Vitaly Shentalinsky's *The KGB's Literary Archive*, passim.)

As for Shostakovich, four of his close relations were arrested at the height of the Terror: his sister Maria, her husband Vsevolod, his mother-in-law Sofiya, his uncle Maxim. Furthermore, his losses among friends and colleagues were considerably worse than Shaporina's. One would have to be a very stupid or otherwise impervious person not to feel such losses deeply and assign the blame for them where it quite obviously applied. Whether Shostakovich, in the late 1930s, shared Shaporina's contempt for both Stalin and Lenin is, for now, conjecture; from a commonsense outlook, it is a very strong probability, given his sensitivity, intelligence, and informed awareness of the facts.

Ian MacDonald

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Lyubov Shaporina's diary/Notes

[1] *St Petersburg: A Cultural History*, p. 414.

[2] For an examination of current scholarship on the Kirov murder, see *Who Killed Kirov?: The Kremlin's Greatest Mystery* by Amy Knight (Hill & Wang, 1999).

[3] General term for the Soviet secret police, after the original incarnation of Lenin's security organ, the Cheka (Extraordinary Commission), founded in December 1917.

[4] Wilson, *Shostakovich: A Life Remembered*, p. 304.

[5] Also called the trial of "the anti-Soviet Trotskyite Centre", a fictitious conspiracy supposedly comprising Yuri Pyatakov (Deputy Commissar for Heavy Industry), Karl Radek (former editor of *Pravda*), Grigori Sokolnikov, and Leonid Serebryakov.

[6] Fitzpatrick, *Everyday Stalinism*, p. 215.

[7] A. A. Shestov, an NKVD agent for the Kemerovo industrial district who was ordered to pose as a co-conspirator. (He was found guilty and shot.)

[8] Lion Feuchtwanger, a pro-Communist German writer who covered the Pyatakov show-trial and justified it in his notorious *Moscow 1937*. NKVD rumour has it that Feuchtwanger struck a deal with Stalin to write this book -- as an antidote to Gide's damagingly anti-Soviet *Retour de L'URSS* -- in exchange for not executing Radek.

[9] Director of the Moscow Children's Theatre, Natalia Satz (b. 1930) commissioned *Peter and the Wolf* in February 1936. A former wife of Mikhail Tukhachevsky, she was arrested in 1937 and sent to the Gulag. She survived and later returned to the Children's Theatre, where she resumed her work, eventually dying on 18th December 1993. (See Satz, Roksana Nikolaevna, *Put' k sebe. O mame Natalii Satz, liubvi, iskaniiax, teatre* [Moskva: Voskresen'e, 1998].)

[10] Probably Aleksandr Vasilevich Aleksandrov (1883-1946), composer of the Soviet National Anthem (see Wilson, op. cit., pp. 179-81).

[11] Shaporina had been separated from Shaporin for some years.

[12] Op. cit., pp. 422-3.

[13] The reference is to Dostoyevsky's *The Devils* (1871-2) in which he attacked the amoral radicalism of the late 19th-century Nihilists. Shostakovich read the novel -- as he seems to have read most classic Russian literature -- during his late teens. In his letters to Tanya Glivenko, he speaks of reading lots of Dostoyevsky (5th February 1924) and of writing a poem after the style of Captain Lebyadkin, a burlesque figure in *The Devils*. He writes: "Altogether Dostoyevsky is a brick. He was a master to create such people as Feodor Karamazov and Lebyadkin." (24th January 1924.) In *The Nose*, he incorporated Smerdyakov's song from *The Brothers Karamazov* (1879-80); likewise the final act of *Lady Macbeth* is influenced by Dostoyevsky's *The House of the Dead* (1861-2). In a letter to Abraam Gozenpud, Shostakovich wrote of Dostoyevsky, "I love him and admire him as a great artist, I admire his love for the people, for the humiliated and the wretched". When, in 1971, Gozenpud gave him the typescript of his book *Dostoyevsky and Music*, Shostakovich invited him to visit him at Repino: "He mentioned[...] that he had been re-reading *The Possessed* [*The Devils*] and was more firmly convinced than ever that this was a prophetic book, a warning about the dangers that threaten mankind if political murderers, demagogues and executioners seize power." (Wilson, *Shostakovich: A Life Remembered*, pp. 458-62.)

[14] Shaporina had apparently had "premonitions" of Yagoda's downfall, which she confided to her son, Vasya. By "the emperor", she means Stalin.

[15] Shaporina refers to *Pravda* reports of the trial of the so-called "Right-Trotskyite Centre" (Bukharin, Rykov, Yagoda, 18 others). On 8th March 1938, the prosecution "revealed" Yagoda's alleged murders -- with the aid of "doctor poisoners" -- of Maxim Gorky, his son Max Peshkov, and Vyacheslav Menzhinsky, former boss of the GPU.

[16] The Kresty was Leningrad's largest prison, acting as a holding jail before prisoners were transferred to the Gulag. The Butyrka [Butyrki] was Moscow's equivalent prison.

[17] BAMlag (Baikal-Amur Magistral [Mainline Railway Camp]) is referred to in Vol. 2 of *The Gulag Archipelago*.

[18] See Volkov, op. cit., p. 522.

[19] See Ginzburg, *Into the Whirlwind* (1967) and *Within the Whirlwind* (1979).

[20] N. Mandel'shtam, *Hope Against Hope*, p. 64.

[21] Shaporina here accepts part of the story given out at the final Moscow show trial, whereby Yagoda was blamed for the early purges and several murders of prominent Soviet people, including Kirov. His successor Yezhov, who fell from power at the end of 1939, was in turn charged with similar crimes vis-à-vis his own period in office.

[22] From 1937 onwards, those given relatively short sentences in the Gulag were often, on expiry of their terms, resentenced to further terms of ten or even twenty-five years. They were known in the camps as "repeaters". Most resentenced in this way died of simple moral collapse soon after receiving news of their fresh terms.

[23] The *Pravda* journalist Mikhail Koltsov, author of *Spanish (Civil War) Diaries* (1938), was arrested on 12th December 1938 and shot as a "spy" on 1st February 1940. For more on Koltsov, see Stephen Koch, *Double Lives: Stalin, Willi Munzenberg, and the Seduction of the Intellectuals* (1994).

[24] Lyudmila Tarsheva, Count Tolstoy's second wife, whom he married in 1935.

[25] 18th Congress of the Communist Party, March 1939. "Of the applauding delegates [at the 17th Party Congress, or Congress of Victors, in January 1934], who numbered 1,966, only 59 were to take part on the next congress, the Eighteenth, in 1939. Nearly two-thirds of the delegates to the Congress of Victors were arrested in the intervening five years. Of those, only a few survived." (Heller and Nekrich, *Utopia in Power*, p. 250.)

[26] The composer Georgiy Sviridov, then a composition student of Shostakovich at the Leningrad Conservatory.

[27] Galina von Meck, imprisoned during the first wave of *intelligent* arrests in 1930, claims to have seen the official figures for deportation to the camps in secret files at Borovlianka in 1933: 17 million (*As I Remember Them*, p. 412). Conceivably, this figure was thereafter passed around *intelligent* circles, reaching Shaporina's ears. Cf. far lower figures given in Chapter 11 of *The Black Book of Communism* (1997/9).

[28] The Treaty of Brest-Litovsk, wherewith Lenin ended the war with Germany in 1918 by giving away the Ukraine, Russia's Polish and Baltic territories, and Finland.

[29] "Russian swine-scoundrels", one of Hitler's racial insults.

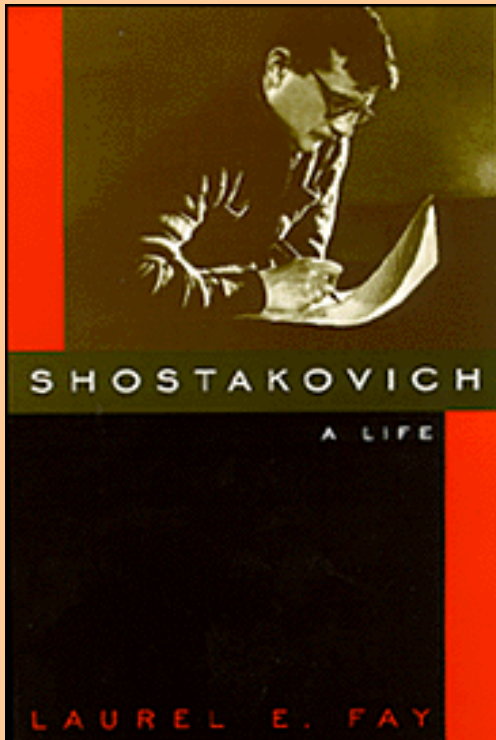
[30] See Sally W. Stoecker, *Forging Stalin's Army: Marshal Tukhachevsky and the Politics of Military Innovation* (Westview Press, 1998).

[31] For anti-Semitism in 1917, on both the Right (Black Hundreds) and the Left (Bolsheviks), see Orlando Figes and Boris Kolonitskii, *Interpreting the Russian Revolution: The Language and Symbols of 1917* (Yale UP, 1999), pp. 91-2, 156-8.

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Laurel Fay's *Shostakovich: A Life*

Reviewed by Ian MacDonald



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Laurel E. Fay's *Shostakovich: A Life*

A review by Ian MacDonald

Part 1: Overview

So far as I am aware (a phrase we would all do well to contemplate for a second or two, whatever our point of view and whatever the extent of our knowledge), Laurel Fay has been working on this book, in one way or another, for at least fifteen years. Certainly there have been rumours that it was about to come out during most of the 1990s. Various speculations arose as to the reasons for her book's continued non-appearance, none of which need detain us now that it's finally here, graced with endorsements from her colleagues in the American anti-revisionist *troika*, Richard Taruskin and Malcolm Hamrick Brown, and a new participant, the critic Michael Steinberg. Mr Steinberg is impressed: "[Fay] is calm, bound by no political *parti pris*, and even when she has been defeated in her research, she is not afraid to say 'I don't know'. Long awaited, this is an immensely important book and hugely welcome." Steinberg's confidence that Fay is "bound by no political *parti pris*" is curious and interesting. Is he close enough to her to know this for certain? If he is, should we be wary of his generous assessment of her worth and her book's importance? If he isn't, and is just guessing about the *parti pris*, must we regard his judgment in general as somewhat impressionistic? Music writers are, after all, often vague about political questions, as the last decade of the Shostakovich controversy has amply illustrated.

I'll return to the subject of Laurel Fay's political *parti pris* at the end of what will be rather a long review. Important or not, her book contains so much to take issue with that only a sustained examination is adequate (or fair) in arriving at a verdict on her labours. Let us, then, begin at the beginning. The cover -- including the remarks of Taruskin and Brown, to which I shall likewise return later -- is par for the course. Photos include a rare one of Shostakovich with his second wife Margarita in Paris in 1958, and another, delightful, shot of Shostakovich at a football ("soccer") match. Apart from that, the picture section is a little thin. (Publishers don't budget much for photos and Fay might have had to bear the cost herself.) At first glance, the text itself is substantial: 458 pages. Then, though, we realise that around a third of this takes the form of post-text paraphernalia: the notes, the list of works, the glossary, bibliography, and index. Fay's main text runs for only 287 pages, a mere eleven pages longer than the text of my own *The New Shostakovich* (which further contains a 38-page chronology), nearly 200 pages shorter than Elizabeth Wilson's *Shostakovich: A Life Remembered*, and a little over a third of the length of Allan Ho and Dmitry Feofanov's fact-packed epic *Shostakovich Reconsidered*. After fifteen years of toil, this is a surprisingly modest result. Fay's notes, which are presumably her book's ultimate *raison d'être*, are copious without being dazzlingly learned and contain little in the way of

further elucidation (apart from some addenda which might have belonged more decorously in the text). The List of Works is presented in standard academic style: subdivided by genre in abstract indifference to chronology, which some would suggest is quite a significant aspect of Shostakovich's career.

Glossaries, like chronologies, are important when dealing with places as large and eventful as the former USSR: accurate summaries of character and actions become critical. Fay's Glossary is functional, giving little more than chief dates and "main claim to fame" info. In the case of the Russian Hemingway, Isaac Babel, the latter data amounts to "he tried his hand at many professions, including the Red Army Cavalry, about which he published stories". Otherwise, Babel features in Fay's book solely as someone of note who was arrested in 1939 and shot in 1940. One of the true barometer figures of Soviet culture in the 1930s, from whose words, actions, and human associations, we can deduce so much about the tenor of those times, Babel is represented here solely as an ex-Red Cavalry chap who "published" stories. (Anyone curious to learn more about Babel's final six months under Soviet interrogation -- a tale waiting for a dramatist to pounce on it -- should consult the opening chapter of Vitaly Shentalinsky's *The KGB's Literary Archive*.) Indeed, Fay's fuzziness about the literary side of Soviet culture is repeatedly apparent: Demian Bedny, a subtle figure as we shall later see, is summarised baldly as "an active Bolshevik from 1912"; Blok, whose work (particularly *The Twelve*, his meditation on the revolution), was so influential on the composers of the 1920s, is "a leading representative of the Russian 'Silver Age'" and nothing more; Bulgakov, who during the late 1920s was by far the most successful dramatist in the USSR with four plays running at once, is described as the author of one hit, his debut *The Days of the Turbins*, the success of which was allegedly "never repeated"; Gorky, one of the most tragically ambivalent individuals in the Soviet culture of the early 1930s, is erroneously characterised as the "conceptualizer of Soviet 'Socialist Realism'" (whereas he was given the outlines of this sterile thesis by Stalin's arts ideologists, required to "make it work", and spent the rest of his time clandestinely defending his fellow writers from the results); Osip Mandelstam, from the start an outspokenly clear-eyed opponent of Bolshevik rule, passes by as a poet whose works "went unpublished" during the Stalin era; Mayakovsky's late rebellion against -- and fatal clash with -- the Soviet regime goes unmentioned; and so it goes...

Aside from the polymathic emigré writings of Solomon Volkov, a lack of interest in the dominant (literary) stream of Russian culture has always been characteristic of Western writing on Shostakovich. (One Shostakovich author refers to Bulgakov's famous play as *Days of the Turbines*, apparently under the impression that it was a "Five-Year Plan" drama set in a factory.) It might seem reasonable to expect the preponderance of literary influence and acquaintance in Shostakovich's life to have piqued the curiosity of musicologists sufficiently to persuade them to consult with their literary colleagues; alas, not so. Yet Fay sometimes shows a comparable lack of curiosity about certain key musical

figures -- for example, Gavriil Popov, who is summarised as having "devoted much of his career to film music" (much as if he made this peculiarly restrictive choice entirely off his own bat). Valentin Berlinsky recalls Popov as one of Shostakovich's closest colleagues, yet his Glossary entry is considerably less informative than those on such Soviet bureaucrats and "favoured sons" as Dmitri Shepilov, Mikhail Sholokhov, Kliment Voroshilov, et al. On the whole, the impression is that Fay's grasp of who was who in Soviet Russia is based on a familiarity with the *habitués* of the Composers' Union and not much else.

In the main text, Fay announces her methodology as follows: "To allow the book to function as a resource, I have endeavoured to lay out [sic] the circumstances of Shostakovich's life in as balanced and objective a manner as possible." This being so, one might have thought a list of facts would have sufficed. Having to wade through a mass of neutral verbiage to apprehend "the circumstances" seems rather superfluous. Accessibility, though, is a red herring. Even to supply someone's birth and death dates, along with the bare details of their interim locations, raises immediate questions. Take Shostakovich: born 1906, died 1975, lived in Russia. The instant response of an intelligent layperson would be: "Ah! He lived under Stalin and his political heirs in one of the most murderous ideological dictatorships the world has ever seen. How did he deal with this?" The question "How?", along with its deeper and more troubling travelling companion "Why?", cannot, as Fay seems to believe, be detached from a recital of "the circumstances". Even a list of cold facts would be selective -- which is to say, interpretive. Her methodology is thus false in principle.

Descending from the implacable plane of logic to the grubby domain of actuality, we find, for example, that when describing Shostakovich's 1931 article "Declarations of a Composer's Duties" (about which more later), Fay overlooks, or misinterprets, the deeper issues it raises. Since she is at pains to appear to adopt no attitude to the "circumstances" she relates, it is almost impossible to decide whether she misses these deeper issues because of a failure of insight, or because she prefers not to see Shostakovich as a real human being, or because she is concerned to present him as politically orthodox. The innocent reader will study her ostensibly dry recital of radically contradictory extracts from Soviet publications with bemusement: what conclusion is one to draw? (How? Why?) Soon after this comes a plainer example of misrepresentation by omission. In briefly outlining Shostakovich's work for the Vakhtangov Theatre production of *Hamlet*, Fay (p. 71) quotes a bland assessment of the music by one of its players, Yuri Yelagin, without mentioning the same writer's report of the notorious "flute-fart" joke by which the composer thumbed his nose at the Soviet authorities and RAPM for what they had done to Russian music during the Cultural Revolution. There is a lot to say about this vulgar gesture of defiance (see *The New Shostakovich*, pp. 81-2; Wilson, op. cit., 80-82); in particular, there is the question of its relevance to a certain remark allegedly made by Shostakovich in *Testimony*, a matter I raised a decade ago:

Shostakovich mocked the Proletkult by making the Prince appear to fart through a flute while, in the orchestra pit, a piccolo squeaked out a parody of Davidenko's famous mass-song *They Wanted To Beat Us*. The idea was stolen from Yuri Olesha's much-discussed play *A List Of Assets* produced a year earlier at the Meyerhold Theatre. In this largely conformist work, Olesha had attempted to square himself with the regime while clinging to the last vestiges of his self-respect, a feat Shostakovich would have found instructive, if nothing else. Part of the play's action involves a debate on the Socialist significance of *Hamlet* in which a Proletkult spokesman attacks the tragedy as "slobbering soul-searching" inappropriate to "the breathtaking whirl of national development". To this, Olesha's actress-heroine Goncharova replies by quoting Hamlet's remark (III:2) to the effect that he is not a pipe for others to play on, adding: "Esteemed comrades, I submit that in this breathtaking, swirling era, an artist must keep thinking slowly." Listening in the audience, the 24-year-old Shostakovich must have been impressed. "Thinking slowly, writing fast" became his creative motto, while Hamlet's declaration of independence was still haunting him fifty years later in *Testimony*: "A marvellous passage. It's easy for him, he's a prince, after all. If he weren't, they'd play him so hard he wouldn't know what hit him."

Yuri Olesha presumably fails to appear in Fay's book as a result of her lack of interest in Russian-Soviet literature. Yet *Testimony* itself features in *Shostakovich: A Life* only peripherally. Indeed, it is from the principles of exclusion announced in her Introduction that we see most clearly just how selective Fay's methodology actually is. For example: "Whether *Testimony* faithfully reproduces Shostakovich's confidences, and his alone, in a form and context he would have recognized and approved for publication, remains doubtful." In view of the now massive quantity of endorsements of *Testimony* from those who knew Shostakovich (many of these expressly confirming that they heard such stories from the composer's mouth), Fay's "doubtful" verdict is itself, at best, doubtful; at worst, deliberately misrepresentative. As for *Shostakovich Reconsidered*, with its exhaustive demolition of her case against *Testimony*, her only comment is that "it raises as many questions as it purports to answer". It would be enlightening to know, in due course, what these questions are. Meanwhile, it seems not unjust to point out that her own book far outstrips that of Ho and Feofanov on this score, raising *several times as many* questions as it purports, by various means, to answer.

Of the as yet still-hidden archival resources on Shostakovich, Fay is undoubtedly correct in saying that "the process of uncovering them has barely begun". One can only register the cordial hope that it isn't left to her to accomplish this task, since, on the basis of her tardiness in producing the present book, it may take a further fifteen years to produce any

such results. There is, of course, another good reason to hope that she won't be left alone to rummage through these sources: the fact that she is obviously of the opinion that Shostakovich was rather a dull man who didn't know much about what was going on in his country and consequently kept blundering in his earnest attempts to produce "a progressive new art necessary and appropriate to the new socialist reality" (Fay, notes for the Chicago Symphony Orchestra season of June 1999). Of course, there is always the chance that Fay will report archival sources which conflict with her prejudices -- yet Steinberg's claim that "even when she has been defeated in her research, she is not afraid to say 'I don't know'" fails to answer requirements. Like any of us, she must be prepared to admit, when she is wrong, that this is so. "I don't know" won't do as an excuse for anything more than local details. The big picture is a different matter -- one which demands overt (rather than, as we get here, covert) interpretation. Fay must one day frankly speak her mind on Shostakovich, justifying her interpretation in full detail.

For now, she is content to sweep aside all previous Shostakovich writing, as if her book is the only dependable thing in existence on the composer: "There is not a single even remotely reliable resource in Russian, English, or any other language for the basic facts about Shostakovich's life and works." This presumably includes her friend Elizabeth Wilson's *Shostakovich: A Life Remembered*. Yet for anything more elevated than factual trainspotting, Wilson's book is immensely more "dependable" than Fay's relatively slight volume; indeed, it would be fascinating to see Fay spell out precisely what she finds factually lacking in Wilson's book. As for my own work and that of my colleagues Allan Ho and Dmitry Feofanov, I leave it to readers to decide whether Fay's "year zero" declaration is anything more than irritability.

A particular target of Fay's documentary wrath is Sofiya Khentova, the semi-official biographer of Shostakovich in Russia, whose published works on aspects of his life run to many volumes. Dismissing Khentova's main two-volume biography as "a minefield of misinformation and misrepresentation", Fay nevertheless quotes from Khentova fairly liberally, as a trawl through the Notes to *Shostakovich: A Life* will reveal. Fay, it must be said, is "balanced" enough to report Khentova's "ideological slant" (an inevitable characteristic of anything published in the Soviet Union) but not quite so balanced as to mention Maxim Shostakovich's hotly angry dismissal of Khentova's biography reported by David Fanning in *Gramophone* in May 1991: "I hate, I *khhhate* her book. She makes him look like a genuine son of the ****ing Communist Party!" More serious is Fay's attitude to the memoirs and interviews which have emanated from a multiplicity of former friends and colleagues of the composer since *glasnost* made it safe to speak truthfully: "Reminiscences *can be* [my emphasis. -- I.M.] self-serving, vengeful, and distorted by faulty memory, selective amnesia, wishful thinking, and exaggeration[...] Memoirs need to be treated with extreme care, evaluated critically, and corroborated by reference to established facts... I have not excluded the evidence of memoirs -- Soviet, ex-Soviet and post-Soviet -- but I have treated it with the utmost caution, filtering out false or improbable allegations and screening for bias and hidden agendas..." In practice, this

appears to mean that Fay quotes from primary sources what suits her, leaving the rest, for the most part, out of her exposition. Compare, for example, what she quotes from Shostakovich's letters to Tanya Glivenko and what I quote from the same source in *Shostakovich Reconsidered* (pp. 530-554). Look carefully, too, at what she elects to acknowledge as being said by Elizabeth Wilson's witnesses.

Readers are entitled to ask on what basis Fay distinguishes probable from improbable allegations or screens out "bias" (let alone "hidden agendas"). In the case of controversial figures like Shostakovich, it is the duty of a scholar to conduct such screenings-out in the public eye, not to privately censor evidence which she, for undeclared reasons, considers suspect. This is especially true of a book which its author announces as a "resource". In truth, the "resource" which Fay claims to have compiled would have to consist entirely of raw, unedited documentary material in order to qualify as "objective"; yet we already have something of this sort before us -- Grigoryev and Platek's *About Himself And His Times* -- showing that even the plain documentary record requires editorial exegesis of the sort Fay wishes to us to believe that she is not indulging in. For those new to this subject, *About Himself And His Times* is a KGB snow-job comprised of public statements and articles officially ascribed to Shostakovich under the Soviet dispensation. The profound unreliability of this material -- vastly more untrustworthy than *Testimony* could conceivably be claimed to be, even by the most sceptical analysis -- is rarely acknowledged by anti-revisionists. Much of what Fay quotes or otherwise cites in order to establish what she calls "the circumstances" of Shostakovich's career derives from this fundamentally disinformational ethos. In short, Fay's methodological stance in *Shostakovich: A Life* is both theoretically and practically untenable, to put it politely. Hers would have been a more valuable book if she had simply done what any other biographer does: concede the inescapability of judgmental selection and present us, openly and honestly, with her view of things. Her assertion that she is merely providing us with the raw material wherewith to come to a balanced view of Shostakovich will not wash and one can only marvel that she comes before us with such a disingenuous claim.

It goes without saying that facts and statements about Shostakovich and others in his milieu need to be handled with kid gloves on account of the devious political currents flowing below the surface of almost every word and action in the USSR. That delicate handling, however, depends primarily on interpretation -- and such interpretation depends in turn on contextual understanding. An important part of this understanding in Shostakovich's case involves an in-depth appreciation of why his public statements, in the form of articles, speeches, and interviews, are not to be relied on at face-value. Fay acknowledges that "he destroyed the letters he received and counseled his correspondents to do the same". She does not seem fully (deeply, empathetically, imaginatively) to grasp why Shostakovich did this. Her failure to comprehend the psychological *tone* of the epoch she is purportedly representing -- along with her disregard of the real intellectual inner life

behind the conformist facade which was then obligatory -- cripples her interpretation at birth.

Now is the time for a detailed examination of Fay's view of Shostakovich (for that is what *Shostakovich: A Life* is). We will see that she prefers to depend on the official Shostakovich of sanctioned Soviet publication than on the unofficial Shostakovich found in the memories of his family, friends, and colleagues. We will also see that her bias in this respect is uncoincidentally attached to a basic incomprehension of the broader politico-cultural background to Shostakovich's life, work, and opinions.

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Laurel E. Fay's *Shostakovich: A Life*

A review by Ian MacDonald

Part 2: 1923-32

The significance of the Cultural Revolution

Fay's contention, more or less, is that an unadorned recital of the facts will provide us with a secure basis for making up our mind about who Shostakovich was. Yet in the case of the former Soviet Union, where appearance and reality were tenuously related, "facts" are rarely neutral and consequently demand a process of ordering and exegesis founded on a discriminating grasp of the wider background. In the case, for example, of Fay's fourth chapter (entitled, for some reason, "Pioneer", and dealing with 1929-32), the wider background to her narrative is that of the Soviet Cultural Revolution, a convulsive upheaval -- itself part of a larger cataclysm involving agricultural collectivisation and show-trial purges of the scientific-technological élite -- in which Stalin effectively mandated Leftwing art groups to cleanse Soviet culture of any remaining vestiges of "bourgeois individualism" by herding the country's creative minds into the service of the "superindustrialisation" of the USSR. Writing "brigades" were accordingly formed, composers were told to forget their "bourgeois" technical skills and churn out mass-songs for factory and field, while visual artists were instructed to glorify technology and depict humans as semi-mechanised "cogs" subordinate to the machine. A fundamental attack on individual consciousness, the Cultural Revolution raised the curtain on Stalin's era of totalitarianism; indeed, as we are now aware (Brovkin, *Russia After Lenin*, passim), this shattering epoch represented a *second revolution* -- a "revolution from above" enacted in order to secure the continuation in power of Bolshevism after Lenin's party had gradually lost social control during the mid-1920s.

While writing *The New Shostakovich* in 1988-89, I was amazed that nothing available about the composer acknowledged the Cultural Revolution as having any significant impact on him; in fact, till then, no writer on Shostakovich had mentioned the Cultural Revolution *at all*. I remedied this, as I hoped, in the long second chapter of my book, attempting to show that the ostensible contradictions in Shostakovich's career at this time could be reconciled only in the light of this wider background -- and that 1929-32 should therefore be added to 1936 and 1948 as the third of his major clashes with Soviet political power (which, being chronologically the first of these, would illuminate his conduct during the later ones). No reviewer ever addressed the issues raised in this chapter and it wasn't until the prologue of Richard Taruskin's essay-polemic on the reception of the Fifth Symphony (Fanning, *Shostakovich Studies*, pp. 17-56) that a mainstream musicologist

formally recognised that the Cultural Revolution had even happened.

In her "Pioneer" chapter, Laurel Fay mentions the Cultural Revolution once -- in passing and in lower case, as if unworthy of any special focus. As for the rest, there are several isolated references to "proletarian" criticism of Shostakovich's music and one or two remarks on his controversial preferences for non-ideological literature. Apart from that, Fay's narrative is strictly foreground, as a result of which all the old ostensible contradictions are resurrected, to the complete mystification of the reader.

Shostakovich's apoliticism

So far as Shostakovich is concerned, the key question in elucidating his serpentine pathway through the perils of the Cultural Revolution is that of his political beliefs. The testimony of the witnesses assembled by Elizabeth Wilson in *Shostakovich: A Life Remembered* is that, from his earliest years, Shostakovich was more or less completely apolitical, being instead absorbed in music, literature, and the arts (with a special character-defining focus on "grotesque" humour and debunking wit). Since Fay's anti-revisionism is based on the assumption that Shostakovich was politically orthodox (i.e., pro-Communist to the extent of faithfully serving the state wherever called to), her disinclination to deal with the testimonies of Wilson's witnesses is a revealing illustration of how selective her supposedly objective approach really is.

The evidence in support of the composer's [apoliticism](#) persistently leaks through despite Fay's subtle endeavours to slant her narrative wherever possible in order to justify her Faithful Servant hypothesis. We discover, for example, that the "October" sub-title of the First Piano Sonata wasn't Shostakovich's and that he repudiated it. We also discover that he confessed to Boleslav Yavorsky that he feared he'd fail his Conservatoire exam in Marxist methodology in December 1926 and thus be declared "politically unreliable". His initial term for "Marxist methodology", ostentatiously crossed through in his letter to Yavorsky, was "Scripture" -- a fact, among others, which obliges Fay to concede that "he did not take the matter very seriously" (p. 35). Indeed, in a subsequent letter to Yavorsky, Shostakovich describes his ideological examination in comic terms, recounting how he and a classmate had collapsed in hysterical laughter when the examining Marxist methodologist had asked a fellow student to outline the socio-economic differences between Chopin and Liszt. That Shostakovich, having been summarily failed, returned the next day and managed to pass the same exam troubles Fay not one whit. Why? As everyone in the Soviet university system was aware, such "political" questions were absurd. According to Malko, Shostakovich had failed all of the questions in a similar exam in 1923. How, then, in 1926, did he manage to pass his second exam in Marxist methodology within 24 hours of failing it? There are three obvious explanations: (1) he

really knew all about Marxist theory on music and had simply been pretending not to; (2) he was adept in mimicking Soviet ideological formulae and managed to scrape by on the basis of a serious expression and a lot of likely-sounding waffle; (3) someone in the Conservatoire hierarchy realised that the world-famous composer of the First Symphony could not be officially represented as "politically unreliable" and so sent down instructions that the young man was to resit his exam and be allowed to pass. The commonsense deduction would be a mixture of the second and third options. (On the other hand, his failure thereafter to obtain a foreign travel grant shows that, as ever with the Soviet system, someone had noted his original examination failure and reported this to the appropriate authorities with the inevitable consequences.)

Attempting to deal with this blatant evidence of Shostakovich's laughingly sceptical apoliticism, Fay carefully concedes that he was "politically naive" and "not especially active politically" -- yet calls him "patriotic and civic-minded" and imputes to him "a supportive stance towards communism" in his contemporary letters to Tatyana Glivenko. In fact, there is no such stance, overt or implied, in the Glivenko letters. Shostakovich tells Tanya (24th January 1924) that he is "sad, very sad that V. I. Lenin has died" -- but, soon after, he is writing letters from "Saint Leninburg" and making sarcastic remarks about "Red" critics and the ineptitude of the collectivist orchestra Persimfans. Fay (having presumably read pp. 530-554 of *Shostakovich Reconsidered*) adds: "The possibility cannot be ruled out that [Shostakovich's] comments to Tanya were responsive to her own interests and convictions." Indeed not. His letters to his girlfriends, like those of any young man, are full of tragi-comic posturing, teasing, and attempts to make himself seem fascinating and experienced. For example, on 31st August 1925, he writes from Slovyansk, on the railway between Kharkov and Rostov, to tell Tanya of an exciting incident involving a pig which had knocked him over. Nine years later on 29th June 1934, he wrote to Yelena Konstantinovskaya about a similarly obstreperous porker. He seems to have interjected such tales -- irate pigs, rabid cats, and so forth -- to pique female interest, probably taking them from books. (Additional examples of Shostakovich's pose-striking as embodied in his letters to Glivenko are to be found in the pages of *Shostakovich Reconsidered* cited above.)

The Second Symphony

Fay is thus left with "patriotic and civic-minded", which she duly processes into her Faithful Servant hypothesis; yet Russian patriotism carried absolutely no logical association with belief in Bolshevik ideology, while "civic-mindedness" is a moral disposition only unequivocally expressible in political terms in a democracy.

Shostakovich showed no positive interest in or allegiance to the Soviet Communist Party; insofar as his sentiments towards the Party were expressed, they were of the very opposite

sort. Fay is on her best behaviour in *Shostakovich: A Life*; her own beliefs are rarely explicit. All the more revealing, then, that in her notes for the Chicago Symphony Orchestra concerts of June 1999, she declares that "there is no reason to doubt the sincerity of Shostakovich's political or aesthetic convictions [in 1927-36]. He was not an elitist composer. He was a patriot with a deep commitment to his people and culture[...] endeavouring to create a progressive new art necessary and appropriate to the new socialist reality." (The elementary mistake of confusing Russian patriotism with Soviet political orthodoxy is astonishing in 1999.) Fay goes on: "That art did not exclude overt propaganda; for the climaxes of his Second and Third symphonies, Shostakovich used a chorus to deliver stirring idealistic texts." Fay's claim that, in his Second Symphony (1927), Shostakovich, out of "sincere political convictions", used the "overtly propagandistic" verse of Alexander Bezymensky in the service of "a progressive new art necessary and appropriate to the new socialist reality" cannot easily be reconciled with Shostakovich's admission, in a letter of 28th May 1927 to Tanya Glivenko, that he wrote the Symphony in haste, became "tired of occupying [him]self" with it, and thought Bezymensky's (supposedly "stirring, idealistic") lines so "abominable" that he feared he'd be unable to set them. And there's more: not only did Glivenko tell Elizabeth Wilson in 1989 that Shostakovich had considered Bezymensky's poem "quite disgusting", but Nikolai Malko, who conducted the premiere, recalled that "Shostakovich did not like [Bezymensky's verses] and simply laughed at them; his setting did not take them seriously, and showed no enthusiasm whatever". Where is the stirring, idealistic political sincerity of which Fay speaks?

Wearing her "objective" hat in *Shostakovich: A Life*, Fay is obliged to acknowledge the foregoing evidence ("a notable lack of enthusiasm... he had to keep prodding himself in order to meet the 1st August deadline") but, a few pages on, she subtly resurrects her credence in the Second Symphony's political sincerity. Quoting the composer in "a contemporary report" (collected by Manashir Yakubov in a book published in 1986), Fay presents Shostakovich as describing the work's polyphonic method as "dialectically linear". This curious locution might appear to make sense in terms of the requirements of Marxist methodology (which is what such a "report" would have been prepared in order to fulfill) but it sounds about as much like the real Shostakovich -- the one who failed two ideology exams -- as his epistolary pigs sound like real animals which he genuinely encountered on two separate but seemingly identical occasions.

Desperate to justify her faith in the Second Symphony's canonical Bolshevism, Fay goes on to quote a letter from Shostakovich to Yavorsky in which he claims to have tested the score on "four workers and one peasant". "Understandably," Fay reports, "they found the 'ultra-polyphony' tough going. But the composer claimed they went into ecstasies over the chorus[...] and attempted to sing it." If this is all that's left of Fay's belief in the Second Symphony's "sincere political conviction", one can only suggest that her lack of humour

(the lack of humour which, for example, hides the Ninth Symphony's satire from her earnest ears) prevents her from identifying what is almost certainly another of the composer's po-faced shaggy-dog stories (cf. *Shostakovich Reconsidered*, p. 197). Whence, one wonders, did Shostakovich obtain his peasant? And did he stand dutifully in line with the four workers to listen to Shostakovich (and presumably at least one other pianist) play a reduction of this wildly modernist score? Or was he allowed to come by on his own on another occasion? The image is intrinsically so comically preposterous that it can only have sprung from the mind of a born connoisseur of absurdism: the mind of a composer so bored by his struggle with the Second Symphony that he began *The Nose* in the middle of it just to give himself something amusing to do -- and who, having vented his Gogolian absurdism with *The Nose*, intended his operatic follow-up to be based on the Dadaist absurdism of *The Carp*, a satirical poem by the elusive OBERIU parodist Nikolai Oleinikov.

Laurel Fay does not list in her bibliography Solomon Volkov's indispensable *St Petersburg, A Cultural History* -- which is a pity, since, had she been able to bring herself to read it, she would have found rather more to tell us about Oleinikov's *Carp* than she actually does (which is virtually nothing). For example, Volkov tells us that Oleinikov was a man "who possessed, according to some, a demonic charm":

Oleinikov, like Leningrad's other avant-gardists of the time, approved of Shostakovich's music, while Shostakovich was smitten by Oleinikov's absurdist poem *The Carp*, which, although unpublished, was nevertheless popular in Leningrad's elitist circles. It was a parody of a passionate Gypsy love song that recounted the tragic story of the unrequited love of a carp for the "marvelous madame", a smelt. The rejected carp throws himself into a net and ends up in a frying pan. The poem concludes with a requiem for the passionate lover: *Roll on, murky / Waters of the Neva. / The little carp / Won't be swimming anymore.*

The plots of *The Carp* and *The Nose*, for all their superficial dissimilarity, are united by the way a tragic theme is rendered as a parody. In Oleinikov's poems, Shostakovich saw parallels with Zoshchenko's prose. Both authors wrote in brief, intentionally primitive phrases, using and mocking the clumsy language of the urban masses. Both hid behind the mask of a frightened and almost retarded observer. Lydia Ginzburg, who knew Oleinikov well, wrote that he was "formed in the twenties, when there existed (along with others) the type of the shy man, who feared lofty phraseology, both official and vestigial-intelligentsia versions. Oleinikov was the expression of that consciousness. These people felt the inadequacy of 'high' values and 'big' words. They used jokes and irony as a defensive cover for their thoughts and feelings."

Oleinikov, Zoshchenko, and Shostakovich appropriated this specifically Petersburgian mask of the "shy man," who was simultaneously infantile and ironic. For Zoshchenko and Shostakovich it became a second face. Oleinikov used it in a more theatrical manner. He was helped by the tragically carnivalesque atmosphere of Leningrad in the mid-twenties, when the acute and tragic awareness of the disappearance of the old city and its values was transformed into a marked theatricality in the intellectual elite's daily life. [op. cit., pp. 390-391]

Compared with Volkov's analysis, steeped in the psychological subtlety of a native "Peterite" *intelligent*, Fay's wistfully ideological conception of Shostakovich seems almost childlike. Her absolute lack of interest in, or acquaintance with, the intricate intellectual life of those "Leningrad elitist circles" -- the individualists, Formalists, dadaists, and traditionalists whose world will open to anyone intrigued by the real story behind [New Babylon](#) -- deprives her narrative of a vital layer of perspective, in the absence of which her judgments sleepwalk from contradiction to contradiction, some of them real, some only apparent. Nor is Fay even remotely engaged with the political dimension. For example (speaking of children), she reports that, in a letter to Boleslav Yavorsky, Shostakovich refers to the episode just before the entry of the chorus in the Second Symphony as "Death of a Child". She continues (p. 40):

Offering no explanation, he plunges directly into a lengthy encomium for Pyotr Voykov -- the Soviet ambassador to Poland, assassinated there on 7th July 1927 -- expressing his deep distress and personal grief at the loss of someone who had gone above and beyond the call of duty looking after him during his stay in Warsaw [in February 1927].

Fay shows no curiosity about who Voykov was and why he was assassinated. As it happens, Voykov, as a former member of the Urals Executive Committee, took part in the bloodily horrible slaughter of the Imperial Family at Ekaterinburg on 17th July 1918 (for which action above and beyond the call of duty his emigré killer took vengeance a decade later). In other words, Voykov himself was a child-murderer. If Fay is looking for an explanation for Shostakovich's provocative segue from the "Death of a Child" episode in his Symphony to the episode of Pyotr Voykov's death, here it is. Such unannounced associative discourse was entirely typical of the milieu to which Volkov alludes in the passage quoted above. To use "the clumsy language of the urban masses", Zoshchenko and Oleinikov -- in the vulgar English phrasal equivalent -- were "piss takers". They kept their faces straight but almost everything they uttered was said in a spirit of near-innocent, yet knowing, irony. Shostakovich too, though some professors will blanch at the idea, spent much of his time "taking the piss" in exactly the same way. To put it, perhaps, in more academically acceptable style, Shostakovich, in Glikman's words, "always spoke with a nuance of irony". It is this aspect of Shostakovich which Laurel Fay entirely and

calamitously overlooks.

New Babylon and The Bedbug

The questions about Marxist methodology which provoked the normally controlled Shostakovich into hysterical giggles in December 1926 were no laughing matter to the occupants of the Soviet Union's seats of higher learning two years later when the Cultural Revolution was approaching its malignant height. Here, Fay's belief that Shostakovich was politically orthodox begins to distort her declared objectivity. In an apparent attempt to play down the extent to which he, a satirical individualist, was at odds with the "proletarian" arts groups which Stalin was then allowing to run things in Soviet culture, Fay ignores the political furore over *New Babylon*, saying nothing about KIM's attack on the film (and specifically on Shostakovich) or the acrimonious controversy which followed this. Instead, she presents the "failure" of the film as merely a technical matter. She shows no inkling of the background to FEKS (Kozintsev and Trauberg's individualistic Factory of the Eccentric Actor); nor does she seem aware of the cultural events of 1928 which prepared the ground for what happened in 1929-32. (See *New Babylon* [II](#) and [III](#).)

Likewise, she passes over the similar furore about *The Bedbug*, some of which was aimed at the play's author Mayakovsky, the rest coming the way of Meyerhold and Shostakovich. Seemingly oblivious of the actual content of *The Bedbug*, she describes it as a "scathing satire of the new bourgeois spirit" (i.e., Nepovshchina, the ethos of the New Economic Policy or NEP). In fact, it is standard in Mayakovsky studies that *The Bedbug* uses an apparent satire on NEP to express its author's alienation from the coercive collectivism of the Soviet regime. No one who went by Fay's account would guess that the Leftists, having begun to stalk Mayakovsky after *The Bedbug*, descended on him like wolves after his next play *The Bathhouse* (which satirised both RAPP, the proletarian literary group, and Glavlit, the literary censorship board) -- let alone that, driven to desperation, the poet shot himself only a year later. And where is there any suggestion of the Leftist attacks on Shostakovich's incidental music for Mayakovsky's play? "We must advise Comrade Shostakovich that he should reflect more seriously on questions of musical culture in the light of the development of our socialist society according to the principles of Marxism," warned *Sovremenniy teatr*, referring to *The Bedbug* soon after its premiere in 1929. Did Fay lack space to mention this?

The absence of any indication that, by early 1929, Shostakovich was in major trouble with the proletarian arts groups prosecuting the Cultural Revolution allows Fay to treat the composer's next big work, the Third Symphony, as if it is self-evidently a work of orthodox communist zeal. Whether the blandness of her accounts of *New Babylon* and *The*

Bedbug is intentionally calculated to produce this effect is difficult to say. As we shall see, it is not the only instance of such arguable sleight of hand.

The Third Symphony

In *The New Shostakovich* (p. 61), I suggested that, by July 1929 (when he went away with Nina Varzar to the Georgian resort of Gudauta), Shostakovich had realised that "it was time to make himself scarce". This was because of the controversies over *New Babylon* and *The Bedbug* -- but also because, less than a month earlier, a public hearing of *The Nose* in Leningrad had resulted in RAPM delegates denouncing the composer for "formalism" and "anti-Soviet escapism". Rejecting the opera as "irrelevant to students, metal and textile workers", the (then-proletarian) Daniil Zhitomirsky warned: "If [Shostakovich] does not accept the falsity of his path, then his work will inevitably find itself at a dead end." Fay records this (p. 55), but out of chronological sequence so that this event appears to come after, rather than before, the composition of the Third Symphony.

In the absence of much documentary evidence of what Shostakovich was up to in this hectic piece (dashed off in the fastest burst of work on a symphony in his entire career), Fay falls back on reproducing the usual "statements for public consumption" made by the composer -- i.e., things he had no choice but to say at certain junctures under the circumstances in which he and his colleagues worked. Thus, we are regaled with a statement published in *Smena* on 21st January 1930 -- i.e., a little over a month after the megalomaniac celebrations for Stalin's 50th birthday and about three weeks after the dictator had ordained what became the genocidal campaign to collectivise Soviet agriculture and "liquidate the kulaks as a class". Here, Shostakovich declares that his Third Symphony will be the second part of a projected cycle of symphonic works illustrating the Soviet revolutionary calendar. As with another similarly virtuous ideological composition which the composer announced around this time (1931) -- the "large symphony" *From Karl Marx to Our Own Days* -- nothing more was heard of this symphonic-calendrical cycle. Can it be that, like the later rumours of a Lenin Symphony and an opera based on *The Quiet Don*, this epic was a diversionary tactic intended to deter the proletarian hounds then snapping at his heels? If so, where is Fay's exegesis? Are "the facts" enough in this case? Plainly they are not.

Continuing in the same neglectful manner, she quotes Shostakovich from a letter to Yavorsky: "Whereas in the 'Dedication' [*To October*] the main content is struggle, the 'May First Symphony' expresses the festive spirit of peaceful reconstruction, if I may put it that way." Like all of the letters of public figures in the USSR, Shostakovich's were subject to routine interception and scrutiny. At this juncture in particular, he had to present

a conformist face or risk the relentless persecution then being wreaked on Mayakovsky by RAPP. What is extraordinary (yet unremarked as such by Fay) is that Shostakovich originally included in the Symphony's score a part for "machine gun" -- a fact difficult to assimilate to "the festive spirit of peaceful reconstruction" but all too easily reconciled with the view (expressed in *The New Shostakovich*, pp. 61-64) that this febrile work is darkly ambiguous, ranging from hysteria to naked dread.

It is, of course robustly arguable that Shostakovich wrote his supposedly "festive" Third Symphony mainly to shield himself from the ideological gale of the Cultural Revolution (which overbearing background we glimpse in occasional snatches in Fay's narrative). Indeed, his brusquely utilitarian attitude to this calculated work is indicated by the fact that he copied its *deus ex machina* "positive coda" directly into his contemporary score for *Golden Mountains* -- instant rejoicing in seven bars. Fay usefully discloses that the Second Symphony did not become so designated until the publication of its successor, observing in the same note (p. 299) that "curiously, in this edition [1932] the author of the choral text was camouflaged as '* * *', an omission all the more conspicuous since the name of the translator into German is supplied". The camouflaged name was that of the poet Semyon Kirsanov who, as a colleague of the late Mayakovsky and a proponent of the pyrotechnical Futurist style so loathed by the proletarians, happened then not to be "acceptable". In his ugly verses for Shostakovich's Third Symphony, Kirsanov dutifully strove to conform to the prevailing proletarian model, but his LEF links (Left Front of Art: Mayakovsky's group, detested by RAPP) compromised him. Later, he came back into aesthetic vogue, but his own position was always ambiguous and, during the first "thaw" of the Fifties, he contributed a famous poem satirising the Soviet bureaucracy.

The original choice for the Third Symphony's choral text had been the proletarian poet Demian Bedny. Fay seems not to have looked into why he failed to come up with the goods; yet, behind the apparently simple facade, his position, too, was ambiguous. In private deploring the destruction of Russian literature carried out by the proletarian groups during the Cultural Revolution, Bedny assisted Osip Mandelstam during his first run-in with Stalin -- a striking measure of the human sympathies behind surface "oppositions" in the USSR. (During 1932, Bedny likewise fell from favour when his secretary betrayed him, recovering later only to lapse into deeper disgrace in 1936. Commenting on Bedny's first fall, Trotsky observed that he had been able to sell himself wholesale but found it hard to do so retail, i.e., Bedny could countenance serving the regime in a general sort of way, but couldn't stomach kowtowing to every tiny adjustment in "political reality" made by Stalin's Orwellian rewriters of history. The same was true of Mayakovsky in the final years of his life.)

Fay moves from the Third Symphony to an account of the vicissitudes of *The Nose* -- whereupon she can no longer avoid revealing the extent of the proletarian attacks on Shostakovich, and duly does so. Again, though, she presents his public face as if it were his real one, quoting him from an address made to an audience of workers at the Moscow-Narva House of Culture on 14th January 1930 (coincidentally the apex of the Cultural Revolution):

I live in the USSR, work actively and count naturally on the worker and peasant spectator. If I am not comprehensible to them I should be deported.

Apart from the manifest nonsense of the idea that workers and peasants would understand a note of *The Nose* (or of almost anything else he'd ever written which was not intended as a strategic sacrifice to the populist-political domain), Shostakovich was here speaking at a major Soviet cultural event of the epoch and, as he knew, *on the record*. After so much vilification by proletarian critics over the previous year, he had to present himself as plausibly orthodox. Probably, too, the occasion caused him (then only 24) to go over the top in his resounding demand to be deported in case of ideological failure -- something which he may secretly have wanted, since his inability to obtain a foreign visa prevented any other means of escaping to the West. (Mikhail Bulgakov made a similar request to Stalin in the same year, hoping to be sent into foreign exile.) As with all of Shostakovich's public declarations of this period, it is crucial to place them in the landslide context within which he and most of his colleagues were then forced to manoeuvre to stay upright.

TRAM

Shostakovich's association with TRAM (Leningrad Theatre of Working Youth) allows Fay to develop her contention that he was, behind the contradictory facade, politically orthodox: "For Shostakovich, collaboration [sic] with TRAM undoubtedly represented something more positive than simply a defence against the onslaught of proletarian values, although to at least one other composer trying to camouflage his own allegiances, Andrey Balanchivadze, Shostakovich's example offered a model." In this judgment, Fay parts company with Elizabeth Wilson, who writes as follows:

No musician could afford to ignore the implications of RAPM's militancy. The need to protect himself from their attacks was a guiding factor in Shostakovich's decision to accept a position at TRAM in 1929, and also influenced his choice of themes in the Third Symphony and the ballet scores [...] Shostakovich worked at TRAM from 1929 to 1931. His position there shielded him from ideological attack at a time when the proletarian associations such as RAPM were at the height of their power.

Shostakovich's Conservatoire report of October 1929 shows that he was aware of the ideological issues at stake. [*Shostakovich: A Life Remembered*, pp. 71, 78.]

Fay is entitled to take a different view from Wilson. Less legitimate is her insinuation that Balanchivadze's cynical attitude towards TRAM was not reciprocated by Shostakovich. Turning to Wilson (p. 79), we find Balanchivadze's statement:

As I remember, in the late 1920s Shostakovich started working at the Leningrad TRAM. At that time the young workers' theatre defended its position and artistic principles from the attacks of "proletarian" critics. I followed Shostakovich's example, and so as to avoid being hounded from all sides by the Georgian branch of [R]APM, I started to work at the equivalent TRAM theatre in Tbilisi as musical director. In that period I often met and corresponded with Shostakovich.

Balanchivadze clearly states that, in using TRAM as a shield, he was following Shostakovich's example. Fay's reference to Balanchivadze's memoir, which she is careful not to quote, is slanted to present a different reading: that Balanchivadze, in taking cognisance of Shostakovich's earnest decision to work for TRAM, realised that to do likewise, in the absence of any other compelling motive, would serve to "camouflage" him. In fact, Balanchivadze saw that TRAM offered Shostakovich a haven from attack by RAPM and emulated him for that very reason, presumably comparing notes at their meetings at this time. (As for the letter to Balanchivadze, quoted by Wilson, see the reference under his name in [Witnesses for the Defence](#).) Why, though, would TRAM have provided shelter from RAPM and RAPP? The reader will glean no insight from Fay's account -- yet the explanation is crucial.

While -- like the "proletarians" of RAPM and RAPP (each covertly set up by Soviet agencies) -- TRAM was "close to the workers", its was nonetheless far enough from proletarian orthodoxy to be drawn into a savage turf-war with RAPM/RAPP during 1929-31. A genuine grass-roots theatre founded in 1925, TRAM was a heterogeneous company of proletarian amateurs celebrating the real life of local Russian workers in "pithy, rollicking and enormously popular productions" (Katerina Clark, *Petersburg*, p. 207). Following the Agitprop conference on theatre at the end of 1927, TRAM, as the only real workers' theatre company in the USSR, found itself ushered into the limelight and, with state support, soon had branches all over the Union. However, as TRAM's popularity spread, the real power-brokers of the Cultural Revolution -- the politically dogmatic "proletarian" arts groups, chief among them RAPP and RAPM -- began to campaign against TRAM's boisterously visceral lack of ideological orthodoxy. And there was reason

to do so: Stalin, through his "proletarian" proxies, wished to bring about a cultural dictatorship in which all artists submitted to the "social command". The basis of TRAM's aesthetic from May 1928 onwards was quite different: a variant of the Formalists' subversive principles of "heteroglossia" and "defamiliarisation". Publicly stated to be based on Brecht's concept of "alienation", TRAM's theories were probably more local in origin, owing perhaps to the presence in their ranks of Adrian Piotrovsky, who had links with the Formalists. Not that TRAM's thrust was, from its own point of view, any less "Marxist" than that of its proletarian rivals. Katerina Clark:

TRAM wanted to transform not just the external behavioural patterns of the audience members but their mindsets as well. The first step towards this was, as with the Russian Futurists and Eisenstein, to shock the audience into paying attention by presenting all manner of contradictions, incongruities, radical "displacements" (*sdvigi*), and "montage"[...] The directors aimed to present a conflicted and multilayered account of reality such that no single and coherent account of anything should be presented; its opposite would always be there simultaneously. A TRAM script was to present no conclusions to its audience as a guarantee of true collectivity (no overriding voice). There should, the group maintained, be no finality, a characteristic they identified with a Marxist account of the dialectic whereby all would be in a state of contradiction, of becoming[...] Thus in a TRAM play[...] there was to be no explicit message. But how could such complex and confusing plays meet Agitprop's central stipulation in its decrees on drama of 1927 that plays be readily accessible to the masses and effective as propaganda? [op. cit., pp. 271-2]

By adopting an anarchic and essentially pluralistic line only a short distance to the left of FEKS and the Formalists, TRAM was bound to fall foul of Stalin's overriding totalitarianising agenda. It was inevitable that RAPP would be directed to engage in ideological warfare with TRAM; and inevitable that TRAM should, as a result, fall as swiftly as it rose. Struggling vainly with RAPP's state-backed might, TRAM was, by 1931, a spent force. (Less than a year later, having done its job, RAPP, like its fellow proletarian organisations, was likewise terminated by Stalin.) Fay does not say when Shostakovich became TRAM's musical director. (Wilson says 1929; others say 1927.) What is clear is that the composer enjoyed the sheer vivacity and street humour of the original TRAM productions enough to drop by and offer his musical advice from time to time. As the Cultural Revolution loomed and the battle for control of Soviet workers' theatre began between TRAM and RAPP/RAPM, Shostakovich's choice of the freewheeling TRAM, pseudo-Marxism included, against the oppressive vulgarity of the "proletarian" groups once again shows his anti-totalitarian instinct.

For a while, it was safe for him to rebut the proletarians at TRAM meetings (Wilson, pp. 78-9). Very quickly, though, things got more serious. Abandoning its amateur status,

TRAM commissioned professionals like Alexander Bezymensky to write for them. The result -- *The Shot*, the first TRAM production for which Shostakovich belatedly set pen to paper, soon after the similarly calculated Third Symphony -- was attacked by RAPP but allowed to proceed by courtesy of the intervention of Stalin, who, as an innate voyeur, was at that stage still enjoying watching his puppets jerk. Shostakovich managed only two more brief scores for TRAM during the following two years. In a note on p. 299, Fay reveals that he retained his TRAM "sinecure" [sic] until at least autumn 1932, writing to Sollertinsky on 16th September that he'd taken an advance of 400 rubles from the company and promptly decamped to Gudauta -- an echo of his July 1929 flight there (funded by the advance for *The Golden Age*) to dash off the Third Symphony. He added that he was expecting trouble when he got back: "If TRAM kicks me out, I will seek another spot for myself." Again, one is at a loss to discern the "sincere political convictions" which Laurel Fay ascribes to him.

Shostakovich's survival tactics 1928-32

During the Cultural Revolution, Shostakovich ducked and dived like anyone else who wasn't a part of Stalin's domineering collectivist vision. He signed contracts for works he had no intention of writing -- Fay reveals yet another one in n. 48 on p. 300 -- and skedaddled to the Black Sea with the money, there writing sections of what he really wanted to compose: *Lady Macbeth of Mtsensk*. If he'd harboured any genuine political conviction, he would have written music that matched up to it; yet he despised most of what he wrote in his propagandist ballets and spent a lot of time pretending to compose politically orthodox works which were never even begun, let alone finished. If it were not already obvious that nearly everything Shostakovich committed to paper or said in public -- if not the opposite of what he really thought -- was meant in an ironically distanced or even a parodistic way, then the case of "his" 1930 article complaining stridently about light music (Fay, p. 59) should suffice as a demonstration.

Aware that she is writing about a composer who relished circus marches, New Orleans jazz, Gypsy and Jewish romances, and the skits of the music hall, Fay carefully describes this article as "published over Shostakovich's signature" -- yet, further down the page, discussing the same article, she rebukes him for ticking off Nikolai Malko for having played *Tahiti Trot* outside the context of *The Golden Age*. "Shostakovich's shifting of the blame for his popular arrangement," she tuts, "was neither honest nor fair." Either Shostakovich wrote this article or he didn't. Is it too much to ask Fay to make up her mind? If -- which is vanishingly unlikely -- he *did* write it, there is such a flagrant contradiction between what the *Tahiti Trot* article proclaims and what was then publicly very well known about Shostakovich's musical preferences that one can only conclude that, here writing in a proletarian journal, he was being ironic (or, to put it more sharply,

"taking the piss"). In any case, as with the KIM attack on *New Babylon*, we are entitled to ask why Fay didn't think to pursue this during her fifteen years of sitting around in the Soviet archives.

Wooing his proletarian enemies of 1929-32 in his programme note to *The Golden Age*, Shostakovich excused the ballet's "jazz" dances -- including a reorchestration of *Tahiti Trot*, which RAPM puritanically loathed -- as satires on "the depraved eroticism typical of contemporary bourgeois culture" to be heard as a contrast with its assorted Communist dances exemplifying "the wholesome elements of sport and physical culture". To this last phrase, he added, ambiguously: "I cannot imagine Soviet ballet developing along any other line." It is clear from the mischievous sexual asides in his contemporary letters to Tanya Glivenko that "depraved eroticism" was no ideological bugbear to the 24-year-old Shostakovich, while his penchant for dance-band music was so far from being a secret that his barefaced cheek in purporting to pretend otherwise is, in itself, almost balletic in its extravagance. Like the half-naked tarts then parading up and down the stage in Bulgakov's bordello drama *Zoya's Apartment* (1926), the "depravedly erotic" Western dances of *The Golden Age* were, naturally, the main fun of going to see such shows in the first place. Laurel Fay may imagine that Soviet audiences sat in their theatre seats grimly hoping for an edifying Socialist Realist lecture rather than a ribald evening away from the grind of work and the creeping tide of fear -- but, if she does, she is hopelessly wrong. Russians of the 1920s wanted to be entertained as much as people anywhere before or since; only the demented political fanatics of the "proletarian" groups believed otherwise. (Stalin, though he approved of straight propaganda, personally preferred entertainment, too -- which is partly why he got rid of the "proletarians" as soon as they'd swept the scene clean.)

Fay mentions (p. 63) that Shostakovich "commented sardonically" in his letters to Ivan Sollertinsky about the contemporary RAPP campaign against cultural fellow travellers (i. e., those who declined to join either a proletarian art group or the Soviet Communist Party). Does she give us any examples of these sardonic comments? No -- because to do so would undermine her case for his "sincere political convictions". Instead, we are given an excerpt from Shostakovich's "Declarations of a Composer's Duties" (20th November 1931), in which, tired and besieged by theatres demanding the works for which he had taken advances, he took his fate in his hands by writing to the RAPP periodical *The Worker and the Theatre* to explain that he was pulling out of no less than four incidental music contracts. Pleading exhaustion, he argued that the demand for this instant art was "depersonalising" Soviet music and, in a transparent attempt to disarm his enemies, promised to start soon on the previously mentioned *From Karl Marx To Our Own Days*. Fay leaves *Karl Marx* until her next chapter, remarking that "no trace of this work seems to have survived" -- hardly surprising since it was obviously a scam designed to please the political activists and thereby provide the composer with an impregnable alibi for not fulfilling his theatre contracts. (A footnote to the "unreliable" Khentova confirms that

Shostakovich did a little desultory work on it before he deemed it safe to drop the project; cf. *The New Shostakovich*, p. 78.)

As it happened, RAPM instantly smelt a rat in Shostakovich's pretence of selfless concern for the state of Soviet music, lambasting him afresh for "ideological wavering". Fay meanwhile muddles along, overlooking Shostakovich's desperate ruse to avoid having to write four scores for which he happened to have already pocketed the advances, and solemnly observing that for him to have strictly complied with his "high-minded" resolution not to do any more incidental music "would certainly have caused hardship to [his] family by eliminating [his] primary source of income" (p. 71). It certainly would -- but does she puzzle this out? No. Observing bemusedly that "during the next three years, Shostakovich's projects in the dramatic theater and movies hardly diminished at all", she moves on. Once again, her narrative can at best be described as irredeemably cockeyed and confusing -- at worst deliberately misrepresentative. Surely the reader deserves better?

Given her concern to convey the impression that Shostakovich was an orthodox adherent of Soviet ideology, it is odd that Fay does not quote his *New York Times* interview of 5th December 1931, which established his reputation in the West as "the Communist composer". Perhaps she belatedly realises that this can only have been a put-up job behind which the Soviet authorities had the young genius under close surveillance. *The New York Times* always had a curious "special relationship" with the USSR, most notoriously in the form of its Moscow correspondent Walter Duranty's reports of what was supposedly going on in the Soviet Union during the 1930s. In the dry judgment of Robert Conquest, Duranty "built a disgraceful career on consciously misleading an important section of American opinion". It would be going too far to say "plus ça change, plus c'est la même chose", but Fay's supposedly factual and unprejudiced narrative of Shostakovich's career during the era of the Cultural Revolution is manifestly a blend of the obtuse and the frankly misleading.

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Laurel E. Fay's *Shostakovich: A Life*

A review by Ian MacDonald

Part 3: 1932-48

The indispensability of historical context

The blandness of Fay's progress through the era of the Cultural Revolution (see Part 2 of this review) seems partly to stem from a desire to play down Shostakovich's essential artistic incompatibility with the ideology of the Soviet regime -- but, more basically, from her innocent lack of acquaintance with the realities of the broader background. Her naivety comes shockingly into focus with her fifth chapter, where she describes, without irony, the intention of the makers of the film *Counterplan* "to evoke the revolutionary romanticism of the massive industrialisation drive" of 1928-32, adding that the project "had to advance at an unforgiving pace, not unlike the momentum of its subject matter, the factory workers' strenuous push to meet the Five-Year Plan". One can forgive much in Fay's narrative on the supposition that she clearly has no idea what she's talking about, but this "romantic" impression of Stalin's "superindustrialisation" campaign (about which we now know the gory details at almost unbearably exhaustive length) is beyond the pale of acceptability in 1999.

The First Five-Year Plan cost hundreds of thousands of lives, nearly broke the USSR completely, and ended in a countrywide mood of rebellious resentment for the insane production quotas and abject living conditions inflicted on the Soviet populace in this terrible time. Those thousands who died of cold or hunger in the rush to construct industrial cities in the Urals, or who perished in the mines due to the government's indifference to health and safety, or who expired from sheer exhaustion whilst driving new roads and railways through the *taiga*, or who were shot on the spot on the White Sea Canal so that their bodies could be used to stuff flood-gaps -- not to mention the millions of starved corpses strewn across the Ukraine as a result of collectivisation -- has Laurel Fay even heard of them?? The "unforgiving pace" which destroyed so many lives -- has she the slightest idea what it involved? Does she imagine that the "strenuous push" of the factory workers was accomplished with cheerful grins and merry songs? Does she not realise that food shortages (in particular the scarcity of bread resulting from Stalin's decision to export grain in order to buy machinery) made life unutterably miserable for Russia's urban proletariat in these gruelling years? Has she no concept of the show-trial hysteria and GPU terror employed by the authorities to keep Soviet citizens slave-labouring through their hectic ten-hour days? Does she know how irredeemably cynical these people had become by 1932? As a "short course" of enlightenment in these matters,

Fay is advised to consult the chapter "Hard Times" in Sheila Fitzpatrick's *Everyday Stalinism*, supplementing this by reading Andrey Platonov's *The Foundation Pit*. But no one pretending to write authoritatively on Shostakovich can seriously expect to get away with a "short course" in the Soviet background these days. Fay should have read the several full-length studies of the First Five-Year Plan published since 1990 before purporting to allude to the milieu in which Shostakovich then worked.

Shostakovich and the "second NEP"

The falsity of the pretence that we can understand the music Shostakovich wrote (or didn't write) without reference to the wider politico-cultural context is inadvertently exposed with deadening regularity in Fay's chapters covering his career of the 1930s. In Chapter Five, this effect is particularly subtle and cries out for exegesis. During the years 1934-5, Shostakovich's life became easier. He had a hit opera and his RAPM foes had been stifled. Regarded as the leading light of young Soviet music, he was effectively untouchable, even if Leftwing critics continued to snipe at him. He was handsomely paid for his work in film and theatre, and his material life began to be almost luxurious. After a tricky time, his marriage straightened itself out and Nina became pregnant with their first child, Galina. Shostakovich's on-the-record expressions of the period appear bland and the impression is of complacent self-satisfaction. This, though, is purely surface. The reality, between and behind the public statements which Fay assembles in order to build her impression of Shostakovich in the mid-1930s, has no more necessary bearing on the reality between and behind public statements made in other stages of his career. We have to address context in order to evaluate them.

After the famine years of 1932-3, Stalin needed to get control again of failing public support. The launch-pad for this was the Seventeenth Party Congress in January 1934, fanfared by press editorials and street slogans assuring the Soviet people that "Life has become better, life has become happier". In fact, owing to the industrial advances of the First Five-Year Plan, a genuine economic recovery did begin around this time -- built on the bodies of those buried beneath the concrete of Magnitogorsk or in the lock-walls of the White Sea Canal, but nonetheless real in its social impact. Stalin had to create an "interested" class: people in varying degrees of influence who could at last see some material benefit from the Soviet Communist system and who, buying into this in whatever way, would consequently be not only less inclined to complain but likely to proselytize for it. So far as artists went, the union system was part of this masterplan, bequeathing them financial security and shelter from the "proletarian" storm in exchange for obedience when the *apparatus* called to collect its protection money (in the form of occasional pieces, propaganda soundtracks, and so forth). Rationing still applied outside the cities where no intellectuals dwelt, and for a while even the urban proletariat had to go on living harshly.

The society of the new urban "interested" class, however, began to flourish in what became known as the era of "the second NEP" (1934-39). This was heralded by the reappearance of all the trappings of the first NEP of the mid-1920s: jazz-band dance music, "bourgeois" silk stockings, exotic foodstuffs in the special stores, musical comedies in the Soviet cinema, and a thriving city restaurant industry. In one of his letters to his girlfriend Tanya Glivenko during the first NEP, Shostakovich was proud to say that he had never set foot in a restaurant, which were then reputed to be solely the haunt of the Party-privileged and a lookalike *clientèle* of spivs, gangsters and secret policemen. During the "second NEP", Shostakovich discovered a taste for the Restaurant Life. His "Soviet *embourgeoisement*" is symbolically preserved in *The Limpid Stream*.

In effect, the story of his life in 1934-5 is that of a man being incrementally bought up by Stalin's system. Shostakovich was being sucked gradually into the *nomenklatura* -- and he was rather enjoying it. Of course, he was no less intelligent than he'd been whilst at loggerheads with the Soviet system (either directly or by proxy) during the Cultural Revolution. His friends were still the same smart, sceptical crowd. Indeed, we know from recent archival studies by Western sociological historians that every level of Soviet society during this economic honeymoon -- from the most cosseted *intelligenty* to the lowliest workers -- seethed with cynicism about the USSR's political system (and, in particular, its leaders). What took the edge off this was an amoral, seize-the-day mood induced by relative urban prosperity. Yet, while this affluence lasted (until shortly before the war), the steadily building background hum of political terror, beginning in late 1934 and peaking in mid-1937, gradually took away the mood of comparative relaxation. By late 1935, people of Shostakovich's ilk were becoming profoundly uneasy about the future, especially in Leningrad, which had suffered inordinate quantities of political arrests following the murder of Kirov.

Although Fay, as usual shows little awareness of this background, it is to her credit that she has the commonsense to see that Shostakovich's letter to Sollertinsky about Stalin's attendance at the Bolshoi rehearsal of *The Limpid Stream* (p. 83) is "wry", which is to say dryly ironic: "Today is the happiest day of my life. I saw and heard Stalin." This sentence, which it would have been fatal not to write in view of the Soviet censors' intense scrutiny of private mail during the build-up of the Great Terror, was simply a reproduction of what "ordinary citizens" were continually reported as saying in the Soviet press upon glimpsing Stalin from afar. Stalin was now being presented as a man-god and his personality cult was becoming stentorian. Shostakovich could not help but be aware of all this. (Not to have been aware of it would have amounted to a dereliction of civic duty.) Indeed, it would be perverse to miss the presence of the megalomania of Stalin's cult in the opening measures and penultimate section of the finale of Shostakovich's Fourth Symphony. In some ways, Soviet society was going mad at this time, Stalin's praise-singers flying as far into the purple superlative as those who formerly apostrophised Nero and Caligula.

Shostakovich in 1936-7

Fay has little to say in the way of assessment of the Fourth Symphony but does tell us that, when it entered rehearsals, Shostakovich's income had, as a result of the *Pravda* attacks at the start of 1936, fallen to between a quarter and a fifth of what he had earned during 1934-5. It is, in fact, in the 1936-8 period that Fay justifies herself by providing new information which, while requiring interpretation (which she sometimes risks), is interesting and illuminating. Her narrative thereafter continues to bump around, accepting conflicting information without apparent awareness of the need to reconcile such things (or, if unable to do so, to acknowledge as much), but her book, while never more than functionally written, does become worth the effort around its 100-page mark. Sadly, this brief promise does not last and we soon return to an artless recital of factual assertions whereof nearly every page contains a passage that requires explaining and almost nothing is as simple as the author assumes.

Prominent among Fay's more misleading assumptions is that Shostakovich, while manifestly a musical genius, was in other respects not very bright, often stumbling into situations which he had not anticipated and did not fully understand until later, if ever. This, perhaps, accounts for her willingness to tolerate without query his quoted opinions where these directly contradict each other, often within a small time-span. She must, one can only suppose, imagine that he was muddled and changeable -- as distinct from constantly involved in gauging what he could get away with saying and what he would need to pay to Caesar in order to be allowed to continue living the following day. Shostakovich's contradictory disposition in respect of *The Limpid Stream* is an especially intriguing example of this perpetual dilemma. His attitude to the project at first seems relaxed and comfortable -- but "seems" is the word. Soon he is admitting to Sollertinsky how awful it is (and, if Fay's note 9 on p. 305 is borne in mind, hoping that it won't turn out to be compared favourably with *Lady Macbeth*).

As for how smart Shostakovich was, even the half-awake will see that his instant reaction to learning of the first *Pravda* attack on 28th January 1936 -- phoning Isaak Glikman and instructing him to take out a subscription to a newspaper clipping service -- was brilliant thinking. As one man against a totalitarian state, Shostakovich needed to gather data about his situation fast. How serious was the attack in terms of "syndication" to other Soviet newspapers? Who was saying what about him, high or low? Without this finger in the wind, he would have been prey to paranoia of far greater intensity than was inevitable for someone in his "unpersoned" circumstances. Under normal conditions, Shostakovich read *Pravda* to stay in touch, to gauge the weather; when the storm came, he read every scrap of relevant information he could lay his hands on. This man was no fool.

And it was some storm. In this respect, Fay does herself proud by pointing out that "it was

hardly a coincidence that on 17 January 1936, the same day Stalin attended the performance of Dzerzhinsky's opera, the establishment was announced of an All-Union Committee for Artistic Affairs (subsequently transformed into the USSR Ministry of Culture) to oversee all artistic organizations, including theaters and educational institutions". In other words, the attacks on all the arts which followed in a continuous tumult throughout the year were *planned well ahead of time* as part of a miniature Cultural Revolution to reinforce Socialist Realism (probably under the influence of high-level Soviet anxiety about what was then unfolding in Germany). But was the attack on *Lady Macbeth* also planned as part of this new campaign -- the curtain-raiser, as it were? Fay seems to have missed this eye-opening possibility. Certainly the *Pravda* attack on *The Limpid Stream*, a week later, appears to have come, not from a non-musical source close to Stalin, but from someone in the Composers' Union -- someone who was aware that the ballet included material imported from *The Bolt*.

Fay's description of Shostakovich's predicament following the *Pravda* attacks shows her at her best: the composer's visit to Kerzhentsev, Gorky's conscientious appeal on his behalf to Stalin, Meyerhold's brave defence of a young man then shunned by all of his friends but Sollertinsky and Shebalin. Even better is her collocation of rival theories as to the cause of the withdrawal of the Fourth Symphony. Again, though, a footnote reveals something which certainly ought to have been in the main text: Levon Atovmyan's description of visiting Shostakovich and asking him what he thought *Pravda* would make of the Symphony. The composer reportedly "bristled":

I don't write for the newspaper *Pravda*, but for myself. I basically don't think about who will say what about my work, but write about what moves me, what has sprouted in my soul and mind. As for how they evaluate the symphony, that is the business of critics, who get paid for it.

Here, surely, is the real Shostakovich: mask off, speaking the truth to a close friend. Yet where is the selfless "civic" devotion, the Faithful Servant of the state? This is the stance of a creative individualist, the standard type of composer since Beethoven -- not of an ideological factotum whose priority is to comply with a norm dictated by his "employer" (whether that be Stalin or some ideal vision of a "socialist" future).

In recounting the arrests of relatives and other personal losses which Shostakovich suffered during 1936-7, Fay provides trustworthy information. Her purely political narrative, though, continues to betray a lack of acquaintance with the reality behind "the circumstances". Speaking of Stalin's murderous elimination of his surviving Bolshevik rivals in this period, she writes: "The laxness of the security service in exposing the Trotskyite-Zinovyevite conspiracy led to the appointment of Yezhov as head of the NKVD in September 1936." It is clear from this that Fay believes such a "conspiracy"

actually existed, whereas one would be hard pressed to find a reputable scholar who does not consider the whole Trotsky-Zinoviev affair to have been got up by Stalin as an excuse to kill off his enemies. The political truth is always more sordid than she seems to realise, a naivety best illustrated by contrast with the real gangster evil then ruling the Kremlin, as described by Edvard Radzinsky in *Stalin*:

Among those in attendance at the execution of the old Leninist leaders [of the "united Trotskyist-Zinovievite centre"] were the NKVD chiefs Yagoda and Yezhov, and also the commander of Stalin's personal bodyguard, Pauker. Pauker was a theatre lover, and himself an inimitable clown. [Aleksandr] Orlov described Pauker's performance of the Boss's [Stalin's] favourite turn -- an impression of Zinoviev on his way to execution: Pauker's Zinoviev clings helplessly to the GPU men's shoulders, drags his feet, whimpers pitifully, then falls on his knees and howls: "Please, comrade, please, for God's sake call Joseph Vissarionovich." Stalin "laughed uncontrollably". He laughed all the louder because he knew how the daring raconteur himself would end... He would be shot, just like Zinoviev, and just like Zinoviev he would beg his murderers for mercy.

The "laxness in the security service" to which Fay refers was actually Stalin's excuse for framing Yagoda in order to replace him with Yezhov. Like Boris Yeltsin's prime ministers, Stalin's henchmen came and went in quick succession, the difference being that his appointees were not fired but shot (and often, to satisfy the demands of the Boss's sadistic sense of humour, immediately after being happily promoted).

The Fifth Symphony

Fay's account of the circumstances surrounding the Fifth Symphony is honest and clear -- clear enough, at any rate, to confirm that Richard Taruskin's essay-polemic on this subject in Fanning's *Shostakovich Studies* (with its claim that the Symphony was, in the eyes of the Soviet *apparat*, a "foreordained triumph") is devious nonsense. Fay naively accepts that Alexei Tolstoy penned the "formation of personality" essay without being officially "enlisted" to do so and takes seriously Shostakovich's various supposed observations on the alleged significance of the Symphony made within the framework Tolstoy's essay erected. Apart from that, her reflections are shrewd: "The symphony showed no signs that he had taken Kerzhentsev's advice to study Russian folklore or followed any of the other obvious recipes for rehabilitation. He neither affixed nor endorsed any subtitle to his Fifth Symphony[...] Shostakovich's reluctance to describe and discuss his music publicly in any terms but the most sweeping platitudes, a trait that would endure for the rest of his life, was born of common sense and a survival instinct." (And not, as Taruskin pretends,

because the composer "insisted on keeping latent content latent -- and keeping it labile".) Only one other blemish appertains to Fay's treatment of the Fifth Symphony's reception -- her quotation from Osip Mandelstam (p. 103): "Tedious intimidation... I cannot approve." Without seeing the full text of this verdict (which is not reproduced in Jane Gray Harris's *Collected Critical Prose and Letters*), it is impossible to determine what Mandelstam meant by this. He knew little about music -- so why quote him?

Fay continues in a vein of faultless efficiency with her description of Shostakovich as an inveterate gambler and "risk-taker", and her detailed account of his informed passion for football ("soccer"). While reading passages like these, for all their rather utilitarian style, one begins drumming one's fingers with frustration that this writer should be burdened with so obtuse a delusion about Shostakovich's political views; relieved of this fundamental distortion in her judgement (along with her resulting irrational animus against anything to do with *Testimony*), Fay would be a perfectly acceptable authority on Shostakovich. Instead she is as irredeemably controversial as she stoutly believes *Testimony* to be: a mirror-image of what she despises. Irony, of course, is not Fay's strong suit, as her rather defeated paragraph on Shostakovich as a "civic" personality (p. 111) shows. At least she realises that it is "virtually impossible to distinguish between those activities he engaged in willingly and those he simply found himself incapable of declining". Compared to Taruskin, Fay is almost subtle.

Unfortunately, she is content to recite the usual "Official Shostakovich" comments on the First String Quartet, flouting her own proviso about "sweeping platitudes" made a few pages earlier. Likewise, the composer's unfulfilled promise of a Lenin symphony in September 1938 remains unconnected with the effects of the ongoing Terror at that time. More rubbish-for-official-consumption gets quoted about the Sixth Symphony (e.g., that Shostakovich claimed it to be redolent of "spring, joy, youth, lyricism") and Fay has nothing -- let alone anything penetrating -- to suggest about the work's expressive content. Blandness gradually settles over her narrative as she proceeds towards the outbreak of war. It as if, unable to avoid dealing with the realities of the Terror of 1936 and 1937, she found herself willynilly becoming more insightful as a result; but with no pressing need to attend to the continuing Terror of 1938 and 1939 (and besides having a lot of disparate works to process), she thereupon lapses back into her usual humdrum absence of sympathetic imagination. The only perceptive remark she makes during a dozen pages is that Shostakovich "may have" identified with the Fool in *King Lear* -- something which, after all, is scarcely news.

The war years

Fay prefaces her section on the Seventh Symphony with a paragraph on the patriotic song

"Oath to the People's Commissar" to a text by Vissarion Sayanov. It would be pleasant to report that she balances this by telling us more about the contemporary satirical songs mentioned by Yakubov in his [LSO notes](#) as having been co-composed by Shostakovich and Glikman: "Going Along With Kaganovich" and "The Song of the People's Iron Commissar Nikolai Ivanovich Yezhov". Sadly, she does not. Fay likewise ignores the problematical conflicting information about the genesis of the Seventh Symphony published by Ho and Feofanov in *Shostakovich Reconsidered* (pp. 150-158), describing this work in the traditional way as a war symphony (though quoting Litvinova's well-known memoir to the contrary). The narrative proceeds in a neutrally impersonal recital of facts through the war period. A touch of personal judgment comes when Fay calls the ending of the Eighth Symphony "pellucid" -- a word some might think more appropriately replaced by "drained" or "broken". No mention is made of Zhitomirsky's revealing remarks concerning the reception of the Symphony. Fay's verdict ("obviously disappointed") on Shostakovich's letter to Glikman of 8th December 1943 (p. 138) shows her innocently immune to his black irony -- although, inexplicably, she is aware of the [same tone](#) in the letter of 31st December 1943 to Glikman reproduced on p. 140. (Her footnote, though, appears to backtrack on this. Neither the date of the letter nor the name of its recipient are given, suggesting that they were excised to make room for a late alteration.)

One of the most provocative episodes in Shostakovich's career from the point of view of interpretation is his abandonment of the first, seemingly heroic, version of his Ninth Symphony for the light and brief work which eventually emerged. This cries out for a musicological analysis of surviving materials, not to mention some persuasive explanation for Shostakovich's change of course. Fay reports only the facts, making no comment on them. This lack of a verdict on what Shostakovich was up to in this extraordinary piece typifies the ultimate emptiness of her book. Here, her dull ambition to provide only "a resource", a compendium of cold facts, reaches its tedious apogee. A new Shostakovich biography on the cusp of the Millennium should, one feels, have something more to offer than mere glorified concert notes.

1948 and *From Jewish Folk Poetry*

Fay's account of the January 1948 conference is curiously lightweight. Considering that she had access to the unedited transcripts, it is quite extraordinary that she does not quote verbatim from at least some of the invective directed at Shostakovich and his co-defendants by the old Leftists who were about to take over the Composers' Union. (Anyone curious about this should consult Alexander Werth's *Musical Uproar in Moscow*, 1949.) Similarly, Fay relegates to a footnote Sabinina's testimony that the speech Shostakovich read at the end of the February Congress was handed to him by an official

as he was making his way to the platform (cf. Wilson and *The War Symphonies*). While her rationale for doing this is that she has a legitimate logical objection to this testimony (notwithstanding that it came from Shostakovich's own lips), it is strange that she should be content to report the composer's grotesque act of apparent public submission without offering a word of exegesis in her main text (pp. 161-2). Surely Sabinina's report of Shostakovich's own view of this critical moment in his career deserved to be reproduced in Fay's "circumstantial" narrative? Here it is:

"I got up on the tribune, and started to read out aloud this idiotic, disgusting nonsense concocted by some nobody. Yes, I humiliated myself, I read out what was taken to be 'my own' speech. I read like the most paltry wretch, a parasite, a puppet, a cut-out paper doll on a string!!" This last phrase he shrieked out like a frenzied maniac, and then kept repeating it. I sat there completely dazed. [Sabinina's testimony, Wilson op. cit. 294-5.]

It is scarcely surprising that, as Fay writes, a witness "recalled that after Shostakovich descended from the tribunal, everyone avoided him in the hallways, and he looked dispirited and dismayed". Why, though, does she present this episode so blandly? Such pallid elisions and omissions now begin to mount up. Turning to the "tragic coincidence" of Solomon Mikhoels' murder, Fay ignores the conclusive evidence that Shostakovich realised immediately that Mikhoels had been deliberately killed (*Shostakovich Reconsidered*, pp.700-708), recording only the composer's phrase "I envy him" remembered by Natalya Vovsi-Mikhoels. No mention is made of Vovsi-Mikhoels' specific rebuttal of Fay's infamous *New York Times* article about *From Jewish Folk Poetry*. Fay's reiteration of the thesis of that article proceeds as follows:

When Shostakovich turned to Jewish folk texts for his first major work in the aftermath of the resolution of 10 February 1948 and set them even as the final installment of Koval's diatribe on his music was rolling off the press, he was in all likelihood [sic] approaching the project in a constructive attempt to satisfy the "public" promises he had just made[...] Shostakovich was not a composer who willingly composed "for the drawer". He had a strong need to connect, to communicate with listeners, to hear his music performed. And in the summer of 1948 he was under intense pressure to redeem himself publicly.

The "public promises" Fay refers to are those described in Sabinina's report of the composer's own words: "idiotic, disgusting nonsense". (Is this why Sabinina is so ingloriously relegated to the notes?) As for the sort of composer Shostakovich was, does Fay's anodyne description accord with the man who wrote *Rayok*? Or with the man who "bristled" when Atovmyan asked him what he thought *Pravda* would make of the Fourth Symphony? Or with the man who "redeemed himself publicly" in 1937 by ignoring Kerzhentsev's advice to study folk music, instead producing the boldly anti-Socialist

Realist Fifth Symphony? Or with the man who scrapped the "heroic" original draft of the Ninth Symphony and replaced it with a satire? (The word "satire", be it noted, appears vanishingly rarely in Fay's narrative.)

When Fay takes as evidence for harmlessness Shostakovich's undeniable hopes of seeing *From Jewish Folk Poetry* performed as soon as possible, she does so by calmly ignoring my long defence of the probability that Shostakovich was then in state of risk-taking disregard for the consequences (*Shostakovich Reconsidered*, pp. 708-720). This is flatly dishonest writing. (That Shostakovich felt sufficiently strongly on "the Jewish question" to express himself about it, whatever the public context, is confirmed by his decision, during winter 1961, to set Yevtushenko's *Babi Yar* in the face of a storm of implicitly anti-Semitic protest about the poem in the Soviet media; indeed, so impulsive was his desire to set *Babi Yar* that he broke his habit of composing into full score, pursuing his line through the text as directly as possible with an initial vocal/piano score.) As for Fay's repeated selective quotation from Joachim Braun's article on this song-cycle -- omitting his central assertion that it is a work of dissent (*Shostakovich Reconsidered*, pp. 687-8, fn. 114) -- one can only call this mendacious. Here, her foundation claim to have penned a dependable "resource" collapses in a flagrant betrayal of her readers' trust.

Incredibly, she continues without batting an eyelid: "Despite increasingly menacing incidents of anti-Semitism that had occurred in the country since the end of the war" (events of which she obviously had no knowledge before she read my account of them) "by the end of the summer of 1948 Shostakovich, like the majority of his countrymen, could not yet have known about Stalin's monstrous plan for the eventual containment and eradication of Soviet Jewry". By staking the credibility of this statement on the specific issue of "Stalin's monstrous plan for the eventual containment and eradication of Soviet Jewry", Fay tries to sidestep her critics, ignoring the overwhelming evidence of official Soviet anti-Semitism from at least 1942 onwards (not "since the end of the war"!). By comparing Shostakovich to "the majority of his countrymen", she similarly ignores the composer's wide circle of Jewish friends, not to mention his closeness to Moisei Vainberg, Solomon Mikhoels' son-in-law. This, to be blunt, is a willful distortion of the historical record. How can Fay possibly believe that Shostakovich -- a man who, on 13th January 1948(!), observed of Mikhoels' murder that "this had started with the Jews but would end with the entire intelligentsia" -- nonetheless "had no compelling reason to believe there might be any undue risk involved in publicizing [*From Jewish Folk Poetry*] "? (Again the quote she elects to ignore comes from Joachim Braun, an authority she otherwise cites in her support.)

Fay suggests that Shostakovich (in Zoshchenko's quoted words, an "extremely intelligent" man) blundered on through 1948 without realising that he was treading a dangerous path. Her justification for this is the fact that Vainberg's *Sinfonietta* was "positively vetted" by the Composers' Union and "vaunted" at the end of 1948 by Tikhon Khrennikov as "shining proof of the benefit to be reaped by[...] turning to folk sources, and following the path of realism". Her naivety here verges on what Ashkenazy has deplored as Western "incompetence" in assessing things Soviet. Stalin always masked his internal policies by arranging public demonstrations which implied the opposite of what was actually happening. Examples? The *Pravda* editorials -- quoted by Fay in *The New York Times* (but, significantly, not in her book) -- which, by extolling the friendly and peaceful relationships between the "nationalities", disguised the truth of constant racial purges and deportations; the magnificent funeral Stalin made for Mikhoels, having personally ordered two of his top secret policemen to beat him to death; the ostentatious reception given to Golda Meir at a time when Stalin, notwithstanding his anti-Semitism, was toying with drawing Israel into his post-war foreign policy (again offered as evidence in *The New York Times*, but not in Fay's book); and so on and on. Arkady Vaksberg writes about this absolutely standard practice of public misdirection in his study *Stalin Against the Jews* (pp. 137-8). Moreover, in case Fay should have missed Vaksberg's book, I quoted him to this effect in *Shostakovich Reconsidered* (pp. 693-4, fn. 137).

Every expert on Soviet history knows that this sort of deception happened all the time in the USSR: promote a few prominent dissidents/Jews/Tatars (or whatever) to cover up the general persecution of them proceeding somewhere else out of public view. Following Mikhoels' murder and with the Jews of the big cities cringing in anticipation of a Soviet pogrom, the foreign press corps would naturally have been on the alert. What simpler and more standard way of sowing distracting confusion than by ordering the Composers' Union to give Vainberg's *Sinfonietta* a clean bill of health and deputing Khrennikov to warmly welcome a Jewish piece by Mikhoels' son-in-law? ("See? There's no anti-Semitism in the USSR!") Were there any other cases of "Jewish" works so "welcomed" in 1948? No. Were there any other "Jewish" works written at all? Only Shostakovich's *From Jewish Folk Poetry*. Once again, Fay's near-complete innocence of the workings of Soviet politics jeopardises her narrative in the most basic way. Her final stubborn reiteration of her *New York Times* thesis -- "Shostakovich's near-disastrous timing, the tragic irony of his attempt to redeem his recent promises by favouring the folklore of the 'wrong' ethnic group, must have become appallingly clear to him" -- can only be described as boneheaded. Does Fay seriously offer this as a balanced and objective record of "the circumstances"?

In order to cling to her indefensible conception of the situation surrounding *From Jewish Folk Poetry*, Fay is forced, in effect, to suppress the mass of evidence set out to the contrary in *Shostakovich Reconsidered*. By this single act of misjudgment, she has fundamentally compromised her stance in *Shostakovich: A Life*. A work "of record" thereby becomes a study flawed by such blatant misrepresentation that no respectable

scholar will ever be able to recommend it without qualification. Why did Fay do this to herself? Are her blinkers set so firmly on her head that she simply cannot conceive that she might have blundered? Is her refusal to be swayed by anything which does not coincide with her prejudice so unbending that she would rather risk the perceived integrity of the rest of her biography than modify her preconceptions? Whatever the answer, *Shostakovich: A Life* is holed below the waterline by its author's wild departure from balanced objectivity in respect of *From Jewish Folk Poetry*.

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Laurel E. Fay's *Shostakovich: A Life*

A review by Ian MacDonald

Part 4: 1948-1960

Shostakovich in public

While Fay indulges in no further local aberrations on the scale of her interpretation of *From Jewish Folk Poetry*, she sees to it that her underlying concept of Shostakovich as a Faithful Servant of the Soviet state, only fitfully sustained in the earlier part of her narrative, becomes more overt after 1948 -- gradually building towards a general summary of his position in Soviet culture so calamitously misrepresentative that it surpasses every other warped judgment in her book. She works this trick by manipulating two factors: (1) the relative profusion of public statements "by" Shostakovich during his last 27 years; (2) the fact that he joined the Communist Party in 1960, thereafter appearing regularly to function as its musical mouthpiece. In building her case, surreptitious as it is, she ignores the objections raised in *The New Shostakovich* about the reliability of the composer's alleged public utterances (just as she ignores everything else in my book, Allan Ho and Dmitry Feofanov's study, and, for the most part, Wilson's work).

Acknowledging that Shostakovich's friends are at one in reporting that he signed articles for Soviet publication without reading them and read out speeches (penned for him by functionaries in the Composers' Union) with eccentric emphases, "significant" pauses, and passages of gabbling in which he ran words together regardless of sense, Fay nevertheless relies more and more on bogus or misdirecting statements published over the composer's signature in *Pravda*, *Literaturnaya gazeta*, *Muzikalnaya zhizn*, *Sovetskaya kultura*, etc, etc -- concealing his personal remarks, together with those of a similar kind from people whom he knew and trusted, in the forest of footnotes at the back of her book. This is as wantonly misleading as Taruskin's account of the Soviet reception of Shostakovich's Fifth Symphony. At the very least one would expect Fay to introduce her "official" quotations with a word of caution; instead, Shostakovich is constantly reported as "saying" or "writing" this or that uncharacteristic or foolish thing, while the balancing observations of those acquainted with the real man are, for the most part, downplayed, relegated to the notes, or simply ignored. For example, Daniel Zhitomirsky's "claim" to have written one of Shostakovich's speeches is mentioned by Fay (pp. 200-1) but not a word is quoted from the article in which he says this -- an article containing a description of his experience of writing an official speech about Beethoven for Shostakovich to read in Berlin in 1952, along with some penetrating remarks about the composer's *yurodivy* performances on the speech-reading podium and the following categorical warning:

There are dozens of speeches and articles catalogued in *D. D. Shostakovich: Musicological and Bibliographical Guide* (Moscow, 1965) as having been published under his name[...] It was a secret to no one that these and such-like articles were written by professional journalists, and only signed by the supposed author. This was a regular, everyday technique employed for "speeches by famous people". Even in the preparation of his articles about music, the participation of the author was a mere formality, and sometimes it was altogether lacking. I can judge this from my own experience as one of Shostakovich's literary "collaborators". (Wilson, p. 328)

Elizabeth Wilson scrupulously assembles confirmatory statements about this well-known fact of life in Soviet intellectual circles (Litvinova, p. 183; Vishnevskaya, Glikman, Slonimsky, Denisov, Lyubimov, pp. 428-35). Fay barely touches on any of this, instead soldiering on with stilted citations from texts ascribed to Shostakovich, together with similar Socialist Realist claptrap from puppet critics whose job it was to turn out such stuff by the yard. In order to do this -- which she does extensively and invariably without any stated reservation -- she slips in a disclaimer on p. 173:

Though he was handpicked by Stalin as an official Soviet spokesman for the Cultural and Scientific Congress for World Peace in New York in 1949, we can be sure that the politically deficient Shostakovich was not entrusted with writing the speech delivered in his name there. That the speeches and published writings -- *not of Shostakovich alone but of prominent figures from all walks of life* -- that touched even remotely on matters of state policy or image were closely monitored and regulated by appropriate levels of the Party apparatus was accepted procedure [sic]. In an accommodation initially dictated by a keen instinct for survival, Shostakovich inured himself to the dutiful reading of the speeches and the signing of articles placed in front of him. *His distasteful predicament was by no means exceptional.* He expected others to pay as little heed to the numbing clichés of Soviet public discourse as he did himself. [My italics. -- I.M.]

But if Shostakovich expected others to pay little heed to the "numbing clichés of Soviet public discourse" in the published pronouncements to which his name was regularly attached, why does Fay persistently relay such material as if it genuinely emanated from his mouth or pen? This glaring contradiction lies at the very heart of her book. Worse, though, than mere methodological incoherence is the persistent undertone of slanted misrepresentation which accompanies this. Consider the phrase "an accommodation initially dictated by a keen instinct for survival". What is the "accommodation" to which Fay alludes? Apparently it is Shostakovich's supposedly willing acquiescence to having his name requisitioned for propaganda purposes in *Pravda* and other such "scriptural" periodicals. (This passage in Fay's book is indexed as "Acceptance of Party authorship of

speeches and writings".)

The innocent reader could be forgiven for thinking "What a spineless cynic Shostakovich was!" Yet the idea that he had any say in this matter -- let alone "accepted" it or came to a voluntary "accommodation" with the Soviet authorities on this score -- is pure fabrication on Fay's part. Shostakovich had been paying the Soviet Caesar in this way since he was a youth in the late 1920s. Like everyone else in his position in the USSR, he complied because not to have done so would have invoked *apparat* vengeance, either in the form of the arrest of a close relative or a sudden closing of outlets for work. Again, Fay's extraordinary (and, one must feel, deliberately maintained) ignorance of the realities of Soviet life serves to mislead the unwary (and, it seems, convince even the likes of the critic Michael Steinberg, whose plaudits adorn the sleeve of this devious book). She continues as follows:

While it would be foolish to accept at face value all the statements and writings ascribed to Shostakovich, it does not follow that he shared none of the sentiments or opinions expressed in this way. Similarly, if much of what was published over his signature was ghosted by others -- and there is ample evidence to confirm that sometimes Shostakovich did not even bother to read what was thrust under his nose -- it still does not follow that he abdicated responsibility for everything attributed to his pen. The matter is not simple.

The first sentence of this paragraph shows Fay's deceitful methodology at its subtlest. In any normal practice, the acknowledgement that a particular source -- in this case Shostakovich's official Soviet statements -- is so pervasively, indeed systematically, untrustworthy (enormously more undependable than the extensively confirmed anecdotes, facts, and style in *Testimony*) would produce a guilty-until-proven-innocent stance on the part of the presiding scholar in which nothing was accepted from the source in question unless there were very good reasons for believing otherwise. In Fay's hands, this stance becomes the purely logical proviso that "it does not follow that he shared none of the sentiments or opinions expressed in this way". Evidence to justify this extraordinary conclusion should have been immediately placed on record. None is given. (Later, we discover that the only evidence Fay can muster to support her innuendo is the issue of whether Shostakovich approved or disapproved of twelve-tone music -- a question which even she cannot avoid concluding is almost wholly a consequence of confusions arising from the fact that Composers' Union hacks routinely wrote anti-Schoenbergian propaganda under his name.) Ignoring Shostakovich's practice of signing official texts without reading them -- sometimes, if Rostropovich is to be believed, by inscribing his signature upside-down -- Fay contends that "it still does not follow that he abdicated responsibility for everything attributed to his pen". To this claim is appended a single note referring to the Stuckenschmidt affair of 1964:

In a lengthy tirade against avant-garde tendencies in modern Western music published over his name [in *Pravda*], Shostakovich was quoted: "To this day I can't distinguish, say, the music of Boulez from the music of Stockhausen, that of Henze from that of Stuckenschmidt." [...] Hans Stuckenschmidt was an eminent music critic, not a composer. He promptly set the record straight in a letter sent to, but not published in, *Pravda* [...] Judging by a number of reports, Shostakovich was chagrined by the embarrassing gaffe. In an interview published soon after, he went out of his way to redress the error, explaining that a line had been dropped during editing and the passage should have read: "To this day I can't distinguish, say, the music of Boulez from the music of Stockhausen, that of Henze from that music that corresponds to the theoretical conceptions of the music critic Stuckenschmidt."

Fay describes Shostakovich as being "chagrined by the embarrassing gaffe". Sergei Slonimsky describes the composer's face as "darkening" when he heard the *Pravda* piece read out at the Composers' Union, following which he walked off the stage (Wilson, p. 431). Whether this was the first he knew of this error is unknown. It seems unlikely in that one of his colleagues would surely have pointed this out to him as soon as the article appeared -- in which case, he may have been angry only at the enduring stupidity of those in the Composers' Union who had not themselves spotted the howler. In truth, the "embarrassment" was to *Pravda* and the *apparat* for giving the game away. No one, at home or abroad, could possibly have believed that Shostakovich had mistaken a critic for a composer; hence, the ghostwriting gambit was inadvertently revealed.

Meanwhile Stuckenschmidt elected to play it with a straight bat, observing in the West German press: "I did indeed write music in my youth, but never showed it to anybody. How did Mr Shostakovich discover it?" His polite letter of correction to *Pravda*, as Fay acknowledges, was never published -- unsurprisingly, considering the laughable nature of the circumstances. Zhitomirsky records the Stuckenschmidt story as one of those "funny things" (Ho and Feofanov, p. 431), while Shostakovich can scarcely have failed to see the joke, if only because of the comical way in which he came to sign the article (Wilson, p. 432). Fay, though, presents him as "chagrined" enough to wish to "redress" the error by means of "an interview published soon after". This alleged "interview" appeared in *Pravda* in place of Stuckenschmidt's letter, offering a correction which, while intended to cover the *apparat* for its blunder, only served to make things worse with its tortuous falsity: "...the music *which corresponds to the theoretical conceptions of the music critic Stuckenschmidt*". Does Fay believe that Shostakovich actually uttered these words of excuse to an attentive *Pravda* reporter? Does she realise Stuckenschmidt's name must have been included in the original *Pravda* article because the journalist who wrote it mixed up some clippings relating to the attack on Stuckenschmidt and other "Cold War" critics published in *Sovetskaya Muzyka* six months earlier? Is she fully aware that *Pravda* was not a normal newspaper such as we are used to reading in the West, but the chief

propaganda organ of the Soviet Communist Party? And is this really the only proof she can adduce to support her claim that "[while] there is ample evidence to confirm that sometimes Shostakovich did not even bother to read what was thrust under his nose, it still does not follow that he abdicated responsibility for everything attributed to his pen"? Undaunted, she continues:

As handwritten documents in his archives and recorded responses in interviews and press conferences attest, Shostakovich became fluent in the language of officialese. He was so fluent that he could spin off exquisite parodies in his letters. The archives contain drafts of talking points for official speeches in his own hand. Shostakovich willingly accepted some commissions to provide articles and reviews on topics -- usually musical -- of special interest to him. He routinely commissioned experienced and trusted colleagues to ghostwrite for him, outlining for them his guidelines, carefully screening the finished product, and duly passing along the fees thus earned. He was even capable of manipulating the media for his own shrewd purposes.

"Handwritten documents in his archives" is another subtly loaded phrase, intended to suggest that Shostakovich's fluency in the language of officialese was not just put on for interviews and press conferences, but habitually used by him in private, as if he "accepted" this distortion of his personal style as much as he "accommodated" the *apparat* by signing their articles and reading their speeches. But we know from his letters to Glikman and from the testimonies of Litvinova and Sabinina that this fluency in officialese was solely part of the composer's repertoire of parody. For his own amusement, he constantly slipped in and out of this mode, straight-faced in the style of Zoshchenko. Take, for instance, the passage in his letter to Glikman about his new bride Irina (Fay, p. 227): "Her father suffered from the personality cult and the infraction of revolutionary legality." In other words, Irina's father was a victim of Stalin's Terror, for which unmentionable fact the phrase "the personality cult and the infraction of revolutionary legality" was the standard Soviet euphemism. With the same deadpan irony, Shostakovich goes on to report that, as a result of forfeiting her parents, Irina "spent time in a *det. dom* and in a *spets. det. dom*", which, Fay is obliged to explain, were types of orphanage for children of "enemies of the people". The brutish abbreviations of Soviet officialdom, satirised by Orwell in *Nineteen Eighty-four*, were a grim standing joke to the Soviet intelligentsia. Shostakovich mercilessly includes both applicable abbreviations in this indubitably "handwritten" document. Does it show him "accepting" the language of officialese or parodying it?

As for the "commissions" which Shostakovich "willingly accepted", where is Fay's list of these, together with the supporting evidence a properly scrupulous scholarly approach would demand? Is the sentence "Shostakovich willingly accepted some commissions to provide articles and reviews on topics -- usually musical -- of special interest to him"

supposed to be linked to the sentence "he routinely commissioned experienced and trusted colleagues to ghostwrite for him, outlining for them his guidelines, carefully screening the finished product, and duly passing along the fees thus earned"? After all, to judge from Zhitomirsky's testimony, even a speech about Beethoven, a composer whom Shostakovich held in high esteem, was immediately farmed out to a colleague to write, implying that Shostakovich was as little inclined to waste time cobbling together ideological nonsense about composers he admired as he was disposed to read propaganda screeds for *Pravda* brought to his apartment for signing an hour after he had retired to bed (Wilson, p. 432). And what is Fay's authority for claiming that Shostakovich "carefully screened the finished product" of such ghost-writing? Zhitomirsky, quite to the contrary, specifies that "for the sake of appearances he leafed through my finished text" (Wilson, p. 329). As for her suggestion that Shostakovich "was even capable of manipulating the media for his own shrewd purposes", we discover that the evidence for this, if any, is hidden in a St Petersburg symposium to which she contributed in 1996. Since very few Western readers will have this source to hand, why is there no summary of the relevant material in it?

A careful examination of this key passage in *Shostakovich: A Life* shows it to be a case of smoke-and-mirrors. No clear statement is substantiated. Every other sort of statement is subtly slanted so as to render ambiguous Shostakovich's unequivocal detestation of the Soviet Communist Party's mendacity and manipulative verbiage. How can we trust an author so slyly intent on inserting her own interpretive agenda into what she pretends is a balanced account of "the circumstances"? Fay's narrative of 1948-75 abounds with such dishonesty, being built on a persistent use of precisely those untrustworthy official sources about which she elsewhere affects to be wary.

The 1950s

Drawing attention to the "political orthodoxy" of the films for which Shostakovich composed scores between 1947 and 1952, Fay (p. 171) quotes from an interview he is reported to have given to a Soviet film magazine in 1950 about his work on *The Meeting on the Elbe*: "Here, a circumstance that I have previously observed made itself strongly felt -- that for a composer the cinema is not only schooling for mastery but often a political seminar as well." Is the reader supposed to take this seriously? Fay gives no clue. As for the inflated phrase "schooling for mastery", we know that Shostakovich loathed most of his film work, which he found at best exhausting, at worst nauseating. (Further up the same page, for example, he writes -- to a friend -- that film work is unpleasant and that no one should do it unless in the event of "extreme poverty", which is precisely what he was experiencing during this period.) As for the "political seminar" of *The Meeting on the*

Elbe, this was something quite specific, inasmuch as it was one of the first films made in aid of Stalin's so-called "campaign for peace", a passing phase of the first years of the Cold War whereby the USSR presented itself as virtuously striving for universal brotherhood in the face of the perfidious scheming of America. (The film presents Washington as plotting to frustrate Moscow's attempts to introduce "true democracy" into post-war Germany.) Shostakovich, who listened often enough to the Russian Section of the BBC's World Service to know what was really going on, would certainly have found the political line taken in *The Meeting on the Elbe* "instructive", if nothing else. However, if Fay is trying to insinuate that the composer was earnestly learning his Soviet catechism -- which, for all one knows, she may be attempting by reporting (p. 173) that he had to be assigned "a private instructor in Marxism-Leninism" to remedy "the manifest deficiencies in his [political] education" -- one can only suggest that, once again, her lack of anything more than a superficial understanding of context has misled her.

Similarly, in recording that Shostakovich undertook the composition of *The Song of the Forests* "without even soliciting a contract", Fay appears to imply that there was some genuine enthusiasm on his part for this obviously "sacrificial" piece -- as opposed to a desperate casting-about for a project which would quickly make him some substantial money (or even a direct order from on high). She quotes a letter from Shostakovich to Elmira Nazirova: "I sat down at night and, within a few hours dashed off something 'haphazardly'; when I submitted what I had written, to my amazement and horror, they shook my hands and paid me." Fay rightly counsels caution here, but of the wrong kind. Clearly, the composer was embellishing the circumstances surrounding *The Song of the Forests* -- tuning the story up a little. Fay, though, suggests that his anecdote "may not accurately reflect his feelings while composing the oratorio", insinuating that he might actually have been sincere in this venture. The truth emerges a few pages on when she admits that he was then "on the verge of financial catastrophe". This sort of disconnected information pervades her book. By incompetence or by design?

Coming to the Tenth Symphony, Fay fails to divine that the intensely self-critical effort Shostakovich put into this work carried a deeper significance. In effect, this was his second "creative reply" to Soviet official criticism (that of 1948). Like his first "reply", the Fifth Symphony (written in 1937 in response to the events of 1936), the Tenth incorporated a quotation from a song-cycle on Pushkin composed shortly before the main work (Wilson, pp. 247, 263). Fay neither mentions this nor appears to comprehend that Shostakovich was consciously crafting a definitive symphonic statement for both his country and his career at a time of fraught transition. As for the Tenth's most prominent and provocative feature, the DSCH motif, she passes over it with bland incomprehension of its bold symbolism (individual awareness in a culture of middlebrow collectivism). Likewise, she innocently fails to identify the mischief in Shostakovich's spoof "self-criticism" for the lengths of the Symphony's movements: "He fretted that perhaps the

second movement might be too short and the proportions of the third unbalanced." One begins to wonder what such a literal mind imagines it is doing by purporting to comment on Shostakovich.

Indeed, Fay can be so limply tolerant of self-contradiction that it sometimes becomes difficult to tell whether she realises how inconsistent her narrative actually is. For example, reporting that Shostakovich "took quite ill and was scarcely able to make it out of the office" upon being told the details of Meyerhold's fate (p. 196), she goes on to describe his alacrity in joining the commission to preserve Meyerhold's legacy, sensibly juxtaposing this with the composer's contemporary quotation from one of Chekhov's letters: "It is the duty of writers not to accuse, not to prosecute, but to champion even the guilty once they have been condemned and are enduring punishment... *Great writers and artists ought to take part in politics only so far as they have to protect themselves from politics.* [My italics. -- I.M]. There are enough accusers, prosecutors, and gendarmes without them." Fay adds: "He was almost certainly articulating it as a position of principle." Agreed! Hallelujah. This is the gospel according to *Testimony*, and what the revisionist camp has been saying for the last ten years. But how does Fay reconcile this with her constant hints that the composer was politically conformist and always ready to serve the Soviet state? The suspicion that two or three different Laurel Fays were involved in writing this book is often hard to resist. As for what made Shostakovich throw up when informed of what had happened to Meyerhold, squeamish readers should now avert their eyes.

Meyerhold was savagely beaten by his torturers who broke his left arm and urinated in his mouth by way of encouraging him to sign a "truthful confession". During a respite, he wrote to Molotov from jail, describing his ordeal in the hope of clemency:

The investigators began to use force on me, a sick, 65-year-old man. I was made to lie face down and then beaten on the soles of my feet and my spine with a rubber strap. They sat me on a chair and beat my feet from above, with considerable force. For the next few days, when those parts of my legs were covered with extensive internal haemorrhaging, they again beat the red-blue-and-yellow bruises with the strap and the pain was so intense that it felt as if boiling hot water was being poured on these sensitive areas. I howled and wept from the pain. They beat my back with the same rubber strap and punched my face, swinging their fists from a great height. The intolerable physical and emotional pain caused my eyes to weep unending streams of tears. Lying face down on the floor, I discovered that I could wriggle, twist and squeal like a dog when its master whips it. One time my body was shaking so uncontrollably that the guard escorting me back from such an interrogation asked: "Have you got malaria?" When I lay down on

the cot and fell asleep, after 18 hours of interrogation, in order to go back in an hour's time for more, I was woken up by my own groaning and because I was jerking about like a patient in the last stages of typhoid fever. Constantly the interrogator repeated, threateningly, "If you won't write (invent, in other words?!) then we shall beat you again, leaving your head and your right arm untouched but reducing the rest to a hacked, bleeding and shapeless body." So I signed everything.

Meyerhold was shot in prison on 2nd February 1940, a week after Isaac Babel. One of many fine people personally known to Shostakovich who went to horrible deaths in the nightmare world of Stalin's secret police, Meyerhold may stand as an example of what the composer was reflecting on so bitterly in *Testimony*, a memoir which Fay is keen to ignore and which Richard Taruskin and Malcolm Brown derisively reject.

The Eleventh Symphony

Fay commences her account of "the circumstances" of the Eleventh Symphony with a liberal application of her *Pravda* Ploy: lots of virtuous-sounding quotations from Shostakovich about his sincere wish to honour the "unforgettable heroes" of the 1905 revolution as precursors of October ("the people who first paved the way to socialism"). She offers a useful account of the protracted period of the Symphony's composition without perceiving that such delays and rethinks invariably meant that Shostakovich was having difficulty justifying a given work to himself. Only after the Soviet-suppressed Hungarian Uprising of 1956 did he finally start composing the Symphony as we know it -- yet Fay, oblivious to such anomalies as the menacing minor-key coda to the finale, is content to describe the work as politically sincere: "A more monumental, accessible, or effective tribute in commemoration of the fortieth anniversary [of the October Revolution] could scarcely have been imagined."

The fact that this same October Revolution had brought the arrests and deaths of many of his friends and relations seems somehow to have been forgotten by Fay's Shostakovich. His dry dislike of the Soviet Communist Party, too, appears to have vanished, along with the "politically deficient" lack of interest in ideology which Fay rightly imputes to him on p. 173. As for the question of a "concealed 'Aesopian' subtext" (associating the events of 1905 with those of 1956 in standard "secret intelligentsia" style), Fay refers to this as "a debate that was engaged posthumously": "Available evidence does not corroborate [the] conclusion [that...] delivering a personal commentary on the events in Hungary was the motivating impulse behind the composition of the Eleventh Symphony." To this statement is attached a note referring to Lebedinsky's article in *Novy mir* in 1990, wherein he reports that the composer's son Maxim, on hearing the Symphony, whispered to his father during

the dress rehearsal, "Papa, what if they hang you for this?" The same footnote refers to Elizabeth Wilson's coverage (pp. 316-320), where we also find the testimony of Zoya Tomashevskaya:

The Hungarian Uprising was still very much in our minds. And here in this symphony one kept hearing "Freedom" sing out. Later I was told by the choreographer, Igor Belsky, who produced a wonderful ballet on the Eleventh Symphony, that, when he consulted Shostakovich, the composer said to him, as if in passing: "Don't forget that I wrote that symphony in the aftermath of the Hungarian Uprising."

Supposing Shostakovich to have been still alive whilst speaking to Belsky, Fay's claim that the question of the 1905/1956 subtext was "a debate that was engaged posthumously" can only be a case of personal prejudice masquerading as objective scholarship. Referring to Yuri Levitin's insulting reply to Lebedinsky -- but failing to mention Leo Mazel's rebuttal of Levitin in judicious support of Lebedinsky's claims about the Eleventh Symphony's hidden agenda (see *Shostakovich Reconsidered*, pp. 483-494) -- Fay cites Shostakovich's answer "when asked point-blank by his Soviet biographer [Sofya Khentova] in 1974 whether it was true that it was the Hungarian uprising that was rendered [sic]" in the Eleventh Symphony: "No, it is 1905, it is Russian history." Yet to expect Shostakovich to have said anything else to a Soviet biographer would be to strain credulity to breaking-point. As Hilmar Schmalenberg observes in respect of Shostakovich's declaration of Soviet orthodoxy to the East German *apparatchik* Hans Jung in March 1975 (see DSCH 12), to say anything else -- to Jung, to Khentova, or to anyone else the composer couldn't trust -- would have been to open a can of worms full of further compromising political questions:

Shostakovich's answers followed the "rules" of the time. To tell a stranger that he was not a communist [or that his 1905 symphony contained a subtext concerning the Soviet suppression of Hungarian freedom -- I.M.] would make no sense whatever, because in those days he would have had to expect the question, "what then?". With an answer like this he would have thrown Jung [or Khentova -- I.M.] into a black hole... Shostakovich had his private confidants, but in public the line had to be toed. Whether he would have given the same answers in the era of Gorbachev can be doubted with some likelihood.

Once again, Fay's supposedly objective and balanced "resource" turns out to be a biased misrepresentation of what she selectively offers as "available evidence". On the question of the Aesopian aspects of the Eleventh Symphony, the final nail in her coffin is driven home by none other than the curator of the Shostakovich archive in Russia, Manashir Yakubov (in his notes for the LSO's 1998 Shostakovich series):

Certain people consider the Eleventh to be a compromise, a clear concession by the composer to the demands of "Communist ideology, party allegiance and national sentiment", which Soviet propaganda had imposed on artists. Others, *from its very earliest performances onwards* [my italics -- I.M.], viewed the symphony as an allegorical reflection of contemporary bloody events in Hungary (1956), where the Soviet Union had acted as "policeman of Europe" and executioner of a democratic movement. The authorities either pretended not to notice (or genuinely did not notice) any deliberate reference to contemporary events in Shostakovich's narrative of a historical revolution, or any other "double meaning" for that matter. [p. 57]

Irina Antonovna has recently (*DSCH* 12, p. 72) confirmed that Shostakovich had the Hungarian Uprising "in mind" when he wrote the Eleventh Symphony -- a statement which reveals that Fay's unwillingness to interview anyone for her book included Manashir Yakubov's employer in the Shostakovich archive: the composer's third wife herself. Fay's "blind-eye" pseudo-discussion of the controversy concerning the Symphony is rounded off with an account of the official toast which was given to Shostakovich to read at Khrushchev's reception for the cream of the Soviet intelligentsia at the Kremlin in 1958: "Stressing the marvelous creative conditions enjoyed by Soviet musicians and the paternal, sensitive, and considerate guidance given them by Party and government, Shostakovich raised his glass 'to the Communist Party of the Soviet Union and its Leninist Central Committee, to our own Soviet government, to the great Soviet people'." Fay describes the reception as "a well-publicized pep rally", which suggests that she is at least aware of the ironies underlying her summary. Yet, in the context of her book's persistent recourse to the *Pravda* Ploy, her report of this speech (printed, surprisingly enough, in *Pravda* in February 1958) requires rather more than she supplies by way of contextualisation if it is not to be misinterpreted.

Moscow, Cheryomushki

The same lack of interpretive assistance to the reader obtains in Fay's otherwise informative account of *Moscow, Cheryomushki*, where Soviet-published statements indicating that Shostakovich was gladly and sincerely engaged in this drab project ought to have been subordinated to his confession to Glikman (Fay, p. 208) that the operetta was "boring, insignificant, silly... [a] disgrace" and to the explanatory fact that, for the composer, "this was a period of acute financial hardship" (*ibid*, p. 210). Here we are confronted for the umpteenth time by the overriding disappointment of *Shostakovich: A Life*: that it provides little, penetrating or otherwise, by way of evaluation of Shostakovich's music. In an unusual display of enthusiasm, Fay refers to the show's "wit, finely-honed satirical edge... and superb orchestration". If these qualities are hard to

reconcile with Shostakovich's real attitude to the project, Fay's glowing opinions at least give us something to judge by. Is her praise warranted?

This interminable five-act operetta starts with a prologue in which two bureaucrats enter, notice the orchestra, and peremptorily decree "No music!". Such stuff, it is implied, detracts from the task of improving social conditions by drawing attention to the lives of individuals. In terms of "finely-honed satirical edge", this is about as sharp as *Moscow, Cheryomushki* gets -- nor does the score, which Shostakovich knocked off during a three-month spell in a rest-home in autumn 1958, dig much deeper. The work, in short, is officially sanctioned satire designed to entertain whilst letting off a little of the Soviet audience's steam of dissatisfaction. Shostakovich got involved with the project partly because his health was too poor to allow anything more incisive, partly to buy time for the next thing he really wanted to write (his First Cello Concerto of 1959), partly as a favour for a friend (Grigori Stolyarov, chief conductor of the Moscow Operetta Theatre), and partly to see what he could make of the material, which was not a lot. That *Moscow, Cheryomushki* entirely lacks wit or dramatic tension arises primarily from the mediocrity of the libretto (by two hack humourists whom Shostakovich sardonically referred to as "my fellow creators"). The thoroughly lacklustre music can, however, only be blamed on the composer, who shows no sign of having seriously engaged his mind in this waltz-stuffed score, the main interest of which consists in the fact that it has his name attached to it.

Public and private

Fay's unremitting reluctance to distinguish, in terms of dependability, between Shostakovich's official pronouncements and his private views is again highlighted on her pages 214-215 with respect to his function as a mouthpiece for Soviet attacks on twelve-tone music. Again, Fay presents Shostakovich as "reporting" this or that, being "interviewed" by communist journalists, delivering speeches full of "strident rhetoric", and adding to his lexicon such perfectly-tuned examples of Soviet verbal banality as "this still-born art [dodecaphony] gains no recognition from the broad public, it attests to the ideological impasse, the crisis of bourgeois culture". Nearby, we read that Shostakovich privately admired music by such ideologically flawed composers as Boulez, Xenakis, and Stockhausen. We also discover (p. 215) that, in February 1960, Shostakovich "entertained himself by rereading a period novel of the 1920s and penning long missives of sardonic political commentary to friends". No footnote citations are attached to Fay's reference to the composer's sardonic political commentaries, let alone any quotations from these. Is this an adequate report of "the circumstances"? Readers will draw their conclusions from the fact that, on her next page, Fay quotes a May Day "salutation" attributed to the "politically sardonic" Shostakovich (and published, needless to say, in *Pravda*):

We are reaching communism. To hymn the fairest human society in history is a worthy and absorbing mission for composers... On May Day 1960 I already hear the music of communism. And, looking ahead, I want to summon all Soviet composers, my dear friends, to even more intense labour and new creative successes. Onwards, friends, to communism!

Fay follows this quotation by acknowledging that "in private, Shostakovich was much more cynical about the aspirations and promise of communism". Yet, if she concedes this to be so, why quote *anything* which *Pravda* attributed to Shostakovich, let alone this stream of assembly-line propaganda-babble? Why not, instead, bite the bullet and give us some of his "sardonic political commentary"? Is it because Fay, taking a leaf out of the overwrought book of Richard Taruskin, believes that one should not attempt to impose "closure" on the question of Shostakovich's outlook? Or is it because she simply wishes to leave herself room to maintain her prejudices?

A "loyal son"

Fay's account of "the circumstances" surrounding the Eighth Quartet reveals much about the way she conceives these issues. The background to this work is the composer's induction into the Soviet Communist Party during 1960-1. To Fay, this is "one of the most puzzling episodes of [Shostakovich's] biography". She explains why in the following passage:

When Shostakovich informed Galina Serebryakova (a friend of his youth recently returned from the camps) that he had joined the Party, she was astounded; she had assumed he was a Communist as far back as the 1920s. Khachaturyan, Oistrakh, Karayev, Kondrashin, and many other friends and artists he respected had long belonged to the Party. Indeed, it should be remembered that to all appearances Shostakovich was already a "loyal son" of the Communist Party when he joined. He had ceded unconditionally his signature, his voice, his time, and his physical presence to all manner of propaganda legitimising the Party. Especially since the Tenth Symphony, he had even devoted a disproportionately large portion of his music to the greater glory of Socialist Realism. He was a role model for the status quo, a malleable symbol of the fusion of civic responsibility with artistic genius, of popularity with professional respect. As an actual member of the Party he could give nothing more. But this episode -- with his distraught reaction, escape, and creative catharsis -- strongly suggests that the demons Shostakovich wrestled with were his own, that he had crossed his own line in the sand. He was neither the first nor the last to realize, too late, that the

path of accommodation with the Soviet system was one of no return. [p. 219]

This is the heart of Laurel Fay's conception of Shostakovich: what she thinks of him and how she understands his motivations. We have already seen that her central assertion -- here: that "he had ceded unconditionally his signature, his voice, his time, and his physical presence to all manner of propaganda legitimising the Party" -- is based on the naive misapprehension that Shostakovich had any choice in the matter. He did not -- and nor did anyone else in his position. Since everyone in the USSR was obliged to cooperate with the system or face the consequences, Fay's claim that "[Shostakovich] was neither the first nor the last to realize, too late, that the path of accommodation with the Soviet system was one of no return" can be seen, even by the layperson, for what it is: pretentious nonsense.

No one who survived Soviet rule for any length of time did so without complying with state requirements, but to surrender one's inner freedom was an entirely different matter. The pattern of secret dissent was well-established: do what was required of one, short of signing denunciations, and maintain integrity in all other aspects of one's life. This was how millions upon millions of Soviet citizens lived -- and how they survived intact, even during the worst excesses of the Terror. Fay's melodramatic belief that "the path of accommodation with the Soviet system was one of no return" would be greeted with amazement anywhere other than in the secluded field of Western musicology. It is evidently too much to expect her to have researched Soviet history, literature, or related studies -- but it is surely fair to expect her, as a musicologist, to have read Jasper Parrott's biography of Vladimir Ashkenazy, where the pianist's enforced "accommodations" with the KGB and his strategies for resisting their requirements are described in some detail. Ashkenazy escaped unharmed from Fay's alleged "path of no return". If she had troubled to read his book, she would have saved herself the embarrassment of this gaffe. (Did she derive this assumption from Richard Taruskin? He has certainly made comparable remarks.)

The Party card

Fay's vagueness about the realities of life under the Soviet system naturally extends to a lack of acquaintance with the "Party card" syndrome whereby certain positions in Soviet society could not easily be maintained without formal Party membership. As long as a simulation of orthodoxy was offered on demand, such pragmatic Party affiliations need have no connection with what the individual member believed in; "carriers of a Party card" were married out of convenience, not love. Fay writes that "Khachatryan, Oistrakh, Karayev, Kondrashin, and many other friends and artists [Shostakovich] respected had long belonged to the Party". Belonged? Yes. Believed in? Certainly not. As for

Shostakovich's willingness to tolerate Party membership among those he knew and worked with, his attitude, far from ideological, was moral: if the person was a decent human being, all was well. If he or she was decent and also happened sincerely to believe in the onward march of Marxism-Leninism (etc), Shostakovich was wry, but still tolerant. For example, on 30th April 1960, he wrote to Glikman of a new work by a mutual friend, performed by a respected, if politically incompatible, mutual acquaintance: "I was greatly impressed by the Violin Concerto by M. S. Vainberg which is wonderfully played by the violinist-communist L. B. Kogan. It's a wonderful work. And I mean it. And the violinist-communist plays it great." (The phrase "and I mean it" is added to stress the sincerity of "a wonderful work", which in Shostakovich's normal deadpan parlance would have meant the exact opposite, just as the phrase "a splendid fellow" was his standard code for "he's an informer".)

Like Leonid Kogan, the novelist and screen-writer Galina Serebryakova (1905-1980) was a real believing communist -- and, in her case, something of a hardliner. It is a measure of Fay's lack of acumen as a biographer that she devoted no time to primary research on Serebryakova's relationship with Shostakovich, which is, as yet, wrapped in the fog of conjecture. The impression given in Wilson's excerpt from Serebryakova's 1971 memoir (op. cit., pp. 96-7) is that her acquaintance with the Shostakovich family during the 1920s was slight; Solomon Volkov, however, claims that she was Shostakovich's "one-time lover" (*St Petersburg*, p. 335). Serebryakova was married in turn to two leading Old Bolsheviks: Leonid Serebryakov and Grigori Sokolnikov. Both men were arraigned in the second of the three big show-trials of the mid-1930s (that of the so-called "Anti-Soviet Trotskyist Centre" in January 1937), being shot as a result. Meanwhile, Serebryakova, as their "associate", was denounced as an enemy of the People, publicly pilloried (following the "rule of two") alongside her fellow novelist Boris Pilnyak, expelled from the Writers' Union, and sentenced to twenty years in the Gulag. Amazingly, she survived -- a testament, perhaps, to her hardiness and willpower, but also to the probability that, as an obstinately believing communist who had authored a trilogy of novels on the life of Karl Marx, she was spared the worst of the camps and may even have been classified as a "trustee" with the cushion of privileges attached to that status. Solzhenitsyn certainly believes her to have got off lightly (*The Gulag Archipelago*, I, p. 540). Serebryakova was released in the 1950s, emerging with her earnest ideological faith unsullied. (Such diehards were looked upon with silent contempt by the majority of *zeks*.) Writing her own "camp memoir", she declared Solzhenitsyn's comparatively bowdlerised *One Day in the Life of Ivan Denisovich* to be a counter-revolutionary "exaggeration" of life in the Gulag. During 1963, she joined Sholokhov in denouncing the liberal writer Ilya Ehrenburg and continued to adhere to the hardline throughout the 1960s. Why she had any pull with Shostakovich is a mystery, unless it was purely sexual. (He agreed, in 1965, to compose music for the film *A Year As Long As A Lifetime*, based on her Marx trilogy, but seems to have had no stomach for it and produced a poor score.)

Fay observes: "When Shostakovich informed Galina Serebryakova[...] that he had joined

the Party, she was astounded; she had assumed he was a Communist as far back as the 1920s." Since no one who knew Shostakovich well in the 1920s would have mistaken the "politically deficient" composer for a Party member, this further suggests that Serebryakova was acquainted with him only superficially at that time. Her later presumption almost certainly derived from a belief that so prominent a Soviet personage was unlikely to have formulated a Soviet career without the aid of a Party card. In other words: what is significant about Serebryakova's amazement is not that she was positively convinced of Shostakovich's orthodoxy (for no one who, unlike her, had been "in the world" -- i.e., not in the Gulag -- between the Terror and the Thaw would have believed that); rather, her surprise is a measure of how resolute Shostakovich had been in managing to avoid joining the Communist Party until the advanced age of 55. For, contrary to the impression Fay strives to convey, Shostakovich was a recognised figurehead of creative resistance in the Soviet arts -- which is why he was attacked so often by communist critics from the outset of his career and why those at the Leningrad premiere of the Eleventh Symphony who did not grasp its "subtext" were heard to grumble that the composer, whose music had meant so much to them under Stalin's dictatorship, had sold out (Wilson, p. 319). To claim, as Fay does, that Shostakovich was "a role model for the status quo" and "to all appearances already a 'loyal son' of the Communist Party when he joined" is the most egregious misrepresentation in her book.

"The greater glory of Socialist Realism"

What makes this -- Fay's culminating calumny -- so especially deplorable is that it is hidden within a section of "circumstantial" narrative rather than set out clearly and boldly as the author's own personal opinion about the composer (for instance, in an Afterword). Worse, it is given without any consideration of balancing factors, so that readers unequipped to cogitate on the workings of Soviet society are likely to believe what the author feeds them, no matter that it is based on little but wish-fulfillment. As it happens, Fay takes an obvious step too far in asserting that "since the Tenth Symphony, [Shostakovich] had even devoted a disproportionately large portion of his music to the greater glory of Socialist Realism". Of the sixteen works in the composer's opus-list between the Tenth Symphony and the Eighth Quartet, only four can be said to display a sufficient semblance of conformism to be counted as potentially puzzling to anyone in the USSR who followed Shostakovich's career: the 5 Dolmatovsky Songs, the two folksongs of Opus 104, and the music for the films *Song of the Great Rivers* and *The First Echelon*. Given that no films made within the Soviet bloc could be anything but dutifully obedient to the requirements of the censor, every film for which Shostakovich wrote music was inevitably conformist by definition. As we have seen, he did almost all of his film scores during times of loss of income from other outlets, such as the banning of his concert music in 1948. This accounts for *Song of the Great Rivers*, the last of the overtly propagandist films for which he was obliged to prostitute his talent in the years following the 1948 bans.

As for Socialist Realism, *The First Echelon* fails to meet Stalinist requirements in that, adopting the "Thaw" aesthetic of mid-1950s Soviet cinema, its political theme (Khrushchev's "Virgin Lands" drive to promote agriculture in Kazakhstan, Siberia, and the Urals) is merely a background to the depiction of "social problems" among its characters (casual sexuality, drinking, brawling). Barely more canonically Socialist Realist is the historical swashbuckler *The Gadfly*, while *Moscow, Cheryomushki* is a tepid "allowable satire" of the kind tolerated by the authorities in the magazine *Krokodil*. This leaves the Concertino, Second Piano Concerto, First Cello Concerto, Sixth and Seventh quartets, the reorchestration of *Khovanshchina*, Spanish Songs, song-cycle *Satires*, Festive Overture, and Eleventh Symphony. Unless one believes the Festive Overture to be an expression of sincere Communist fervour and cannot accept that the Eleventh Symphony is other than blunt exaltation of 1905, one must ask where -- apart from in Fay's imagination -- do we find the "disproportionately large portion of music [devoted] to the greater glory of Socialist Realism"? Nowhere.

The Eighth Quartet

In Fay's obtuse conception, the composer's near-fatal collision with the *apparatus* over the question of joining the Party "strongly suggests that the demons Shostakovich wrestled with were his own, that he had crossed his own line in the sand". We may certainly assume Shostakovich to have recognised a "line in the sand" -- this being his horror of joining a political Party which had jailed and/or killed hundreds of people known to him and which, on more than one occasion, had driven him to the edge of suicide (including two periods in which almost nobody outside his family spoke to him for months on end for fear of ending up face down on the floor of a cell in the Lubyanka being flogged on the legs and spine with rubber straps). Such a "line in the sand" is not difficult to sympathise with. Moreover, unless Fay means to indicate the breed of subhuman monsters who, with their bestial cruelty, reduced Meyerhold and thousands like him to wailing infants, no demons need be invoked.

Fay, whose methodology ensures that every page of her book is strewn with unreconciled contradictions, has the gall to play down the searing testimonies of Lebedinsky and Glikman regarding Shostakovich's hysterically shattered state of mind at this time as "contradictory". This "contradiction", we learn, consists of the fact that Glikman believed Shostakovich to have been pressured to join the Party by a member of the Central Committee, whereas Lebedinsky thought the pressure came from "low-level functionaries looking to feather their caps with such a trophy". And that is all. The rest -- the composer's flight from Moscow, his desperate drinking and tearful breakdowns, his suicide kit of sleeping-pills -- is, to Fay, not as important as the vexed issue of the *apparatus* rank of those

who drove him over his personal line.

There can be no doubt that joining the loathed Communist Party was a catastrophe for Shostakovich. His son Maxim recalls: "My father cried twice in his life: when his mother died and when he came home to say 'They've made me join the Party'. This was sobbing -- not just tears, but sobbing." Maxim adds: "There was simply no other way for him at that time." Fay, though, will have none of this. What, she asks, was the big deal of joining the Party when, allegedly, Shostakovich already looked as if he belonged to it? Surely he could have refused if he had sincerely desired not to? This line of argument is, in turn, attached to her regular recital of one of the most nauseating rigmaroles of Western received wisdom about post-1956 Soviet society: that it was vastly more relaxed than it had been under the dictatorship of Stalin and that no one in prominent positions needed to be afraid of speaking their own mind or going their own way.

The regimes of Khrushchev and Brezhnev may not have been built on slave-labour nor held sway by slaughtering millions of their subjects, but they were nonetheless enforced by the same intricate system of surveillance and censorship predicated on the victimisation of those they saw as counter-revolutionaries. Penalties for breach of conformity included loss of income, expulsion from union membership, vilification in the Soviet press, summary imprisonment (processed through kangaroo courts), and -- in many respects dreaded by post-Stalin dissidents more than a straightforward term of hard labour in the Gulag -- incarceration in a Soviet psychiatric ward, there to be driven to the verge of madness and personality-loss by the use of crude hallucinatory drugs, sensory deprivation, and confinement in physically deforming strait-jackets. The younger generation of dissidents, less conditioned to expect maltreatment at the hands of the authorities, rarely took such possibilities seriously. Knowing the risks, people of Shostakovich's generation were far more cautious. Shostakovich himself, with his many private losses and intense experience of terror and "unpersoned" isolation, would have been especially careful.

Apparently possessing no conception of what actually went on behind the facade of Soviet power, Fay is happy to report Shostakovich's lack of "willpower to resist his fate" and "infernal cowardice" (p. 218) without offering any "balancing" perspective. Why not? Again it is unclear whether her historical ignorance is wholly genuine or partly feigned in order to allow her to misrepresent Shostakovich. When she tells us that what happened in 1960 is "one of the most puzzling episodes of his biography", one cannot help agreeing that it is certainly puzzling in Fay's biography, if nowhere else. This in turn raises the question: does she make it appear to be so deliberately?

Sovietising Shostakovich

In truth, there is nothing "puzzling" about the circumstances attending the Eighth Quartet or Shostakovich's induction into the Communist Party. After 1956, the Cold War entered a new phase in which rivalry between the USSR and the USA became displaced into areas less direct than nuclear confrontation, chief among these being the space-race and the field of culture. The Soviets needed to rationalise things on the "arts front" (especially after the Pasternak affair of 1958, which badly damaged their prestige abroad); hence, Shostakovich -- questioned at every opportunity by foreign journalists concerning his opinion of the 1948 conference and his attitude to the Party's "guidance" -- needed to be "defused" as a figure of cultural controversy by formally bringing him into the Soviet fold. Thus, following the successful premiere of the Eleventh Symphony in 1957, the *apparat* set about integrating Shostakovich into its propaganda operation. The chairmanship of the Tchaikovsky Competition, the Lenin Prize, the removal of the Formalist stigma applied to him by Zhdanov -- these were gestures calculated to demonstrate to the West that Shostakovich was restored to state approval. All that remained was to show that the composer, in his turn, approved of the state. Thus, at the Kremlin reception for the intelligentsia in February 1958, Shostakovich was required to toast "the Communist Party and its Leninist Central Committee, the Soviet Government, and the Soviet People". The decree on the resolution of 1948 followed, as effect follows cause, three months later. Shortly afterwards, Shostakovich's name appeared under a piece in *Pravda* (13th June 1958) offering fulsome appreciation of the recent decree and claiming that he had been "deeply moved by the manifestations of the Communist Party's care and attention for Soviet music and Soviet composers". (In his standard history of Soviet music, Boris Schwarz admits that he finds the tone of the composer's *Pravda* statement "somewhat curious... as if he had never been personally involved".)

The scheme to purvey Shostakovich as an obedient conformist continued in 1959 when he was sent to America with a delegation of Soviet composers headed by his arch-enemy Khrennikov. Described in *Musical America* as "highly nervous, a chain-smoker with darting eyes and fidgeting hands, ill at ease most of the time", he was asked by reporters whether he still believed that the USA was a nation of "war-mongers". In no position to deny the spurious Waldorf Astoria speech of 1949 in which this sentiment had been expressed, he embarrassedly explained that he had always been friendly to the USA and that his remarks ought not to be taken to refer to the American people as a whole. "Cautious and noncommittal", he later declined to answer questions about the *Lady Macbeth* affair on the grounds that he was "too tired". Though some witnesses were struck by the strangely mechanical unanimity of the six Soviet composers on show, the damage had been done: in the eyes of the outside world Shostakovich was confirmed as an orthodox Communist. The logical next step was to make this an incontrovertible fact. Thanks to Fay's inefficacy as a primary researcher, we still don't know precisely how and by whom the pressure was applied, although it is clear that, on returning to Russia,

Shostakovich was informed that the Soviet government wished to reappoint him First Secretary of the RSFSR Composers' Union, but that this would require him joining the Communist Party.

Like Manashir Yakubov, Fay reports that Shostakovich told Irina darkly that he was "blackmailed" as part of this *apparat* operation. Fay, though, brushes the possibility aside, preferring to believe that he acquiesced out of "chronic fear" rather than that the KGB (for whom blackmail was an absolutely standard part of their repertoire) had played any part in forcing the composer's hand. Until the secret police archives on Shostakovich come to light, we will have to reserve judgment. Obvious enough targets for blackmail existed in the form of his children, then setting forth on their careers and hence vulnerable to "spoiling" orders from above. Possibly Margarita Kainova, who seems likely to have been a KGB plant, informed on him. (Again, Fay lets us down by failing to find out anything new about her.) Whatever the truth, Shostakovich had no way out and gave in. On 7th September 1960, a week before the ratification of his candidate membership, he "contributed" another article to *Pravda*, hailing Party ideologist Mikhail Suslov's minimal redefinition of Socialist Realism and attacking Schoenbergian serialism:

We do not conceal that we reject the right to fruitless formal experimentation, to the advocacy in our art of pessimism, scepticism, and man-hating ideas, all of which are products of the individualism on the rampage in the contemporary bourgeois world.

The first of a series of similarly philistine articles "by" Shostakovich in *Pravda* over the next decade, this was received in Russia as a major policy statement, setting the seal on Shostakovich's new orthodox image both at home and abroad. This time the damage was serious, even those sympathetic to his predicament finding his total acquiescence to the demands of the regime mystifying. Commenting on the *Pravda* piece, Boris Schwarz wrote, disapprovingly: "Shostakovich, whose usual prose style is angular and artless, may not have written this pretentious drivel, but he signed it and thus identified himself with its propaganda content." Yet refusal to cooperate would have driven the composer back into the wilderness and rebounded on his family and friends. Committed to producing an art of honesty in a culture of lies, he had long ago made the decision that what people thought of him was less important than ensuring they had the chance of being emotionally confronted by his music.

Part of the bargain for signing on the Party's dotted line was the unbanning, after fifteen years, of the Eighth Symphony, while soon the Fourth, too, would be finally allowed to see the light of day. Furthermore, he could debunk the fake Shostakovich who regularly sounded off on the Party's behalf in *Pravda* by continuing to write music equally as dissident. Thus, a fortnight after the announcement of his candidate membership of the

Party, the Eighth Quartet was premiered in Leningrad, disguised as a piece about "fascism", but in fact reassuring those with ears to hear that, far from acting out of his own free will, Shostakovich was, as usual, being pushed about by the authorities. Those who have read *The New Shostakovich* may recognise the last few paragraphs of this review as almost direct quotations from pages 223-4. Fay had my alternative exegesis "available" to her while she was writing her account of these matters. She ignored it, preferring to paint Shostakovich as a cowardly conformist.

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Laurel E. Fay's *Shostakovich: A Life*

A review by Ian MacDonald

Part 5: 1960-1975

Shostakovich and Lenin

On p. 221 of her book, Fay quotes "Shostakovich" from *Sovetskaya kultura* for 6th June 1959: an announcement which, she says, "picked up a thread he had abandoned eighteen years earlier at the outbreak of war", having first broached the subject in 1938. This abandoned thread pertained to Vladimir Ilyich Ulyanov (Lenin), the unpleasant political agitator of genius whose usurpation of power in Russia after the popular revolution of February 1917 precipitated, directly or indirectly, a civilian loss of life within a single country under a single political system exceeded only by Mao Tse-tung's Chinese revolution. Here is what "the great Soviet composer" had to say:

What form my idea will take, whether it will be an oratorio, a cantata, a symphony, or a symphonic poem, I don't want to predict. One thing is clear: the effort to embody the mighty image of the greatest man of our most complex epoch will demand the exertion of all my creative resources. I would really like to complete it in time for the ninetieth anniversary of Vladimir Ilyich's birthday.

How did such an "announcement" come about? Shostakovich had returned from his American trip three months earlier and was about to retire into his summer composing season. The musical *apparat* was, as usual, collecting "creative plans" from its leading composers in order to regale the public and the foreign press with them. In all likelihood someone from the Composers' Union rang Shostakovich to ascertain his plans and perhaps to suggest the Lenin anniversary. Shostakovich probably conferred with Isaak Glikman. The resulting jottings were then collated by a *Sovetskaya kultura* journalist, written up in the currently acceptable style, and ascribed to the composer himself.

Did Shostakovich actually utter the sentence "the effort to embody the mighty image of the greatest man of our most complex epoch will demand the exertion of all my creative resources"? If he didn't, his ghost-writer would have said it for him. If the composer *did* say it, then -- to judge by his dislike of the Soviet Communist Party and, by logical extension, its founder -- he must have been speaking, in Glikman's words, "with a nuance of irony". Of course, as a spinner of "exquisite parodies" of Soviet officialese (Fay, pp. 173-4) and a writer of alleged "long missives of sardonic political commentary to his

friends" (ibid, p. 215), Shostakovich could easily have simulated the authentic turgidity of this sentence in the event that the hack who actually wrote his announcement for him had been unable to remember the correct phraseology.

Had Shostakovich sincerely meant what he was reported as saying to *Sovetskaya kultura* about a major work on Lenin on 6th June 1959, he would have to have got down to work on this score immediately, since the anniversary in question was then only about ten months away and his autumn timetable was extensively booked with journeys to Warsaw, the United States, and Mexico. However, the announcement in *Sovetskaya kultura* contained a proviso: he would be writing a cello concerto first. Accordingly, he spent the summer composing his First Cello Concerto, which thereupon became his concert work for the 1959-60 winter season, along with all the prefatory procedures of auditions and rehearsals. If Shostakovich had genuinely intended to compose his promised Lenin piece in time for the anniversary on 22nd April 1960, he would have begun composing it, at the latest, in December. He did nothing. Fay reports him three months later as "bored and lonely" -- temporarily hospitalised for treatment to his right hand. Did this prevent him writing the Lenin piece? Perhaps; although, curiously enough, he *was* able to write something else in this interlude: his Seventh String Quartet. If composing this Quartet ruled out any possibility of writing the Lenin piece in time for the April anniversary, there was still time to get it ready for the 1960-1 winter season. It is fair to suppose that a Soviet composer genuinely eager to address the mighty image of the greatest man of our most complex epoch would have got to work on the promised epic as soon as he was out of hospital. Shostakovich, though, spent the late spring and early summer of 1960 composing the subversive song-cycle *Satires* before going to East Germany as part of his work on his score for the film *Five Days, Five Nights*.

There, in Dresden, he "wrote" his Eighth Quartet in three days. Fay follows tradition in referring to this feat as one of "white heat", which would be justifiable if the old legend of the Eighth Quartet -- that it was inspired by the sight of the bomb-ruined city -- were tenable. However, as I have shown (*Shostakovich Reconsidered*, pp. 587-9), this is not the case. If Shostakovich had been following his usual compositional methods, he would have been thinking about the Quartet for some time before he arrived in Dresden, simply taking advantage of three days at the ministerial guest-house at Göhrisch to write the music down. Does this mean he had forgotten about his promised Lenin anniversary piece? Apparently not. Somewhere between *Satires* and the Eighth Quartet -- June 1960, about two months late for the event -- he began sketching this work, his Twelfth Symphony, although he does not seem to have got far with it before dropping it for his trip to East Germany and the composition of the Eighth Quartet, the film score for *Five Days, Five Nights*, and the installation piece *Novorossiisk Chimes*. Nor, to judge from what is known about these sketches, does he appear to have done much serious thinking about the Twelfth Symphony before then -- which is peculiar, since he'd had the entire preceding six

months to do so.

Even more peculiar is the fact that Shostakovich's desultory first draft of his Lenin symphony contained what Elizabeth Wilson describes as "a substantial chunk with a parodying waltz based on material from the fourth song, 'Misunderstanding', [from] *Satires*" (op. cit., p. 344). What does a "parodying waltz" have to do with an epic symphony about Lenin? In particular, why a "substantial chunk" using the song "Misunderstanding"? This dryly ribald piece contains a fake Parisian salon waltz to an erotic lyric, but it is unclear how this could sit in a Lenin symphony, even a frankly satirical one. According to Wilson, the music coincides with the line "He did not understand the new poetry": a one-note vocal line over the barest one-finger piano figure. Since the intention was clearly satirical, a better choice might have been the third song of the cycle, "Descendants" -- yet its cynicism about the future would have been shockingly blatant in the context of a work on the founder of Soviet Communism (an ideology based on incessant assurances that the future was bright). Wilson cites as her source for this information Volume 2 of Khentova's biography. Yakubov, though, in his notes on the Twelfth Symphony for the 1998 LSO series of Shostakovich concerts, makes no mention of these sketches.

And Fay? Yet again displaying her puzzlingly uninquisitive reluctance to research beyond published books, the back numbers of Soviet arts magazines, and the grubby news-sheet *Pravda*, she is content to cite (p. 223) the identical passage in Khentova's biography (a "minefield of misinformation", as she calls it on p. 3). This is baffling. After fifteen years of seemingly open access to Soviet sources, Fay has failed to look into one of the most provocative claims about any work by Shostakovich (a claim published fifteen years ago). Evidently she did not ask Khentova for further details, presumably because she is not on speaking terms with her; but how about a call to Manashir Yakubov, curator of the Shostakovich archive in Russia? Sadly there is scarcely any original interview material in *Shostakovich: A Life*. Yakubov was not called. Thus, the question of the satirical quotation from *Satires* in the first draft of the "Lenin symphony" goes not so much uninvestigated as, ostensibly, unnoticed.

"A satire of Lenin"

This would be bewildering enough on its own -- yet there is also the matter of Lev Lebedinsky's claim that Shostakovich had originally meant the Twelfth Symphony to be "a satire of Lenin" and had brushed off Lebedinsky's advice not to risk this by saying "He who has ears will hear" (Wilson, pp. 345-7). Fay makes a legitimate case against

Lebedinsky's assertion that Shostakovich rewrote the Symphony at the last minute in a panic, having realised that his satire was too obvious. However, this leads her to the logical conclusion that such a rewrite might have happened at an earlier stage, "between the summer of 1960 and the following summer, when he completed [the work]" (p. 223) -- which leads us straight back to the satirical sketches, with their "parodying waltz", reported by Khentova. Certainly a symphony about Lenin which contained an extended quotation from *Satires* would have answered the description of a work containing "an obvious caricature" (Wilson, p. 346). Had such a work reached its final form, Shostakovich would have had very good reason to suspect that he had overstepped the mark, precisely as Lebedinsky claims he did.

In fact, the sketches of summer 1960 were but the first of three apparently separate drafts of the Twelfth Symphony. On 29th October 1960, after becoming a full member of the Communist Party, Shostakovich made another announcement, this time on radio, about his "progress" on his Lenin-dedicated Twelfth Symphony, describing the ideas behind its four movements, two of which, he told listeners, were finished. What is the relationship, if any, between the sketches of June and the half-finished Symphony of October? Fay tells us nothing. Soon after his October announcement, Shostakovich broke a leg and was hospitalised, composing no more music for nearly six months. Finally, two years after his June 1959 announcement, he began his Lenin piece as we now know it: the Twelfth Symphony -- a unique third version of this work.

If Shostakovich was filled with creative ardour at the prospect of a major piece on Lenin, he showed about as little initial enthusiasm for it as he had for the Eleventh Symphony, the "heroic" first version of the Ninth Symphony, or indeed the other "Lenin Symphony" he spent three years not writing during the late 1930s. Leaving aside for a moment what this implies about his attitude towards Lenin, what does Shostakovich's slow-to-nonexistent progress on the Twelfth Symphony from June 1959 to June 1961 suggest about his "announcement" in *Sovetskaya kultura*? There, he is presented as earnestly declaring, "I would really like to complete it in time for the ninetieth anniversary of Vladimir Ilyich's birthday." It beggars belief that, aware of his schedule for the remainder of 1959, Shostakovich did not realise immediately that, if he went ahead with his First Cello Concerto in July, the Lenin piece would stand almost no chance of being ready for the anniversary in April 1960. In other words, he palmed off *Sovetskaya kultura* with a deliberately false undertaking. Does Fay recognise this? No. Intent on describing Shostakovich's desultory progress on the Twelfth Symphony during the year summer 1960 to summer 1961, she fails to notice the total dearth of work on it during the year summer 1959 to summer 1960.

The purpose of this detailed trek through the chronology of work on the Twelfth Symphony is threefold: (1) to stress that what Shostakovich was presented as saying in

Soviet periodicals had no dependable connection with what he really intended or thought; (2) to demonstrate how far from an adequately researched or contextualised narrative Fay's is; and (3) to indicate the extent to which Shostakovich was bored by, or actively disgusted with, Soviet ceremonial occasions, including those relating to the eponymous patron of "St Leninburg" (his name for Leningrad during the 1920s).

The last of these three factors is relevant insofar as Fay seems convinced that, while Shostakovich disapproved of Stalin, he cannot have taken Lenin's name in vain. Thus, prefacing her demolition of the claim that Shostakovich had rewritten his Symphony at the last moment, Fay reports Lebedinsky's claim, "incredible as it sounds", that Shostakovich "originally meant his Twelfth Symphony to be a satire of Lenin and could not be persuaded of the foolhardiness of the venture". Does the phrase "incredible as it sounds" refer to "the foolhardiness of the venture" or to Fay's incredulity that Shostakovich might have wished to satirise Lenin? It must be said at once that such incredulity is shared by the composer's third wife Irina and echoed by Manashir Yakubov who reports, in his LSO/ Barbican booklet (p. 64), that Irina "recalls" that her husband "thought highly of Lenin". Speaking to Elizabeth Wilson (p. 345), Irina has suggested that, in his Twelfth Symphony, "the composer wished to describe a vision of the ideal ruler inspired by Pushkin's verses addressed to Nicholas I ("In Hope of All the Good and Glory" [1826])". Wilson adds: "In this case, the triumphant major apotheosis of the Finale can perhaps be interpreted as the victory of a much hoped-for utopia." By way of exegesis, Yakubov comments:

For the vast majority of the population, Lenin remained an idealised mythical figure. Shostakovich quite probably shared these illusions in some respects. However, the image of the "Leader of the Revolution" promoted by official propaganda in every form and genre of art was a poor source of creative inspiration. The project kept being postponed. It is clear that Shostakovich no longer wished to compose a symphony about Lenin.

Contradicting Irina's assertion that her husband held a high opinion of Lenin and wished to apotheosise him as a model for the ideal ruler, the chronology of the composer's work on the Twelfth Symphony supports Yakubov's conclusion that Shostakovich showed no obvious sign of being sincerely fired by such a creative ambition. In fact, Yakubov's acknowledgment that, by the third draft of the Twelfth Symphony, "it was clear that Shostakovich no longer wished to compose a symphony about Lenin" omits a key part of the story. In 1989, I wrote as follows in *The New Shostakovich*:

The most important event in Russia during the spring of 1938 was the last of the show-trials, that of the so-called "Right-Trotskyite Centre", the chief accused being the most eminent surviving Bolshevik of Lenin's generation, Nikolai Bukharin. As an apparently conscientious Communist and an open patron of independence in the arts (at various times he had helped Pasternak, Akhmatova, Mandelstam, Bulgakov, and Meyerhold), Bukharin

was something of a beacon of integrity in the eyes of the contemporary Russian *intelligenty* and they followed his trial with horrified fascination. His famous confession at the trial (to a ludicrous catalogue of crimes that included an attempt on Lenin's life in 1918) was the climax of Stalin's willful assault on commonsense, the most brazen instance of "two plus two makes five" the Russian people were ever required to swallow. The atmosphere in the country immediately after it was breathless with fear.

At this point, Shostakovich let it be known that he was about to start on a song-symphony -- a massive choral-orchestral work "inspired by" Mayakovsky's poem *Vladimir Ilyich Lenin* and dedicated to the Father of the Revolution himself. With the possible exception of Bukharin's confession, a more perfect avowal of conformism would have been difficult to conceive. The authorities were suitably gratified and bulletins on the progress of the Lenin symphony were regularly solicited from Shostakovich during the next three years. Always this great work was "going well" or "nearly finished", its composer "hard at work" on it. Yet Stalin's 60th birthday came and went in 1939: no sign of the Lenin symphony. 1940 arrived and the 70th anniversary of Lenin's birth went by: still no sign. Puzzled journalists came to him in December 1940 and asked how the masterpiece was coming along. "Nearly finished," Shostakovich told them. "It should be ready next year." That Shostakovich was having problems with the Lenin symphony was obvious from the fact that he kept producing pieces of music which had nothing to do with it: a string quartet, a second Suite for Dance Band, numerous film scores, another symphony (his Sixth), a piano quintet, and a reorchestration of Mussorgsky's massive opera *Boris Godunov*. Word had it that he kept getting stuck and having to go and write something else. Finally, when the war arrived, the Lenin symphony had to be shelved and, when eventual victory brought forward other pressing projects, the composer regretfully admitted that the legendary magnum opus had, perforce, been abandoned.

The official version of this chapter of accidents now dates Shostakovich's laying aside of the hoped-for Bolshevik chef d'oeuvre to early April 1939 -- two years before he last told journalists it was "nearly ready" and just after completing the apparently far more urgent business of writing a comic operetta entitled *The Silly Little Mouse*. In fact, he had stopped work on the Lenin symphony even earlier than that -- at the end of May 1938, six weeks after first announcing it. The incident puzzles Soviet commentators. Shostakovich had supplied a detailed outline of his plan, claiming that he was immersed in a "profound study" of "the poetry and literature, folklore, legends, and songs about Lenin". In the end, he produced absolutely nothing. Was it all some kind of joke?

Anyone familiar with the composer's character and tastes would have smelt a rat from the start. The idea of Shostakovich writing a song-symphony after savaging the genre in 1935 and practically discrediting it with his own Fifth in 1937 is, to put it mildly, somewhat quaint. That he should select a hackneyed ode by Mayakovsky, whose person and post-Revolutionary verse he frankly disliked, is even stranger -- particularly since his friend Shebalin had already used the poem in his own song-symphony, *Lenin*, of 1931. Furthermore, Shostakovich had assured reporters that the idea for a symphony about Lenin had first come to him in 1924, a project that had filled him with excitement and burned in his mind ever since. If this was, in fact, the case, why had he taken so long to get around to it?

In the light of *From Karl Marx to Our Own Days*, the non-existent choral symphony of 1931 behind which Shostakovich hid from the Proletkult his work on *Lady Macbeth*, it becomes virtually certain that the Lenin symphony was a similar hostage to fortune sent out in the hope of persuading the Soviet authorities to leave him alone for a year or two. Like *Karl Marx*, forgotten as soon as the Proletkult had gone, the Lenin symphony found its final excuse for non-existence in the Nazi invasion. All the verisimilitude Shostakovich had fed to the reporters was exactly that and no more. A song-symphony with a dash of folk-nationalism was something they would understand -- all the other composers were churning them out. A piece about Lenin was about as safe as it was possible to be -- no one could attack you for that. A choral setting of Mayakovsky was smart because Stalin had just made him the national poet, decreeing indifference to his verse to be a crime. (Shebalin need not worry, since the thing would never be written.) Even the Revolutionary songs Shostakovich claimed to be studying as source material for the symphony were really to do with something else -- his current crop of film score commissions: *Volochayevsk Days*, *Friends*, and *The Great Citizen*.

Fay passes over the "Lenin symphony" of 1938-41 (p. 115) as lightly as she passes over *From Karl Marx to Our Own Days* (not indexed, p. 71), apparently unconcerned by the fact that, while the composer "spoke" or "was interviewed" quite frequently about both works -- giving every impression that they mattered to him -- in private, he was getting on with a quantity of quite unrelated pieces. These two symphonies were, it seems, merely musical Potemkin villages, erected as edifying facades behind which Shostakovich could do what he wanted rather than what the regime expected of him. Hence, Yakubov's fair conclusion that, by summer 1961, "Shostakovich no longer wished to compose a symphony about Lenin" can legitimately be back-dated to summer 1938, if not considerably earlier (perhaps, indeed, to as early as 1924).

Attitudes to Lenin

Although Shostakovich's musical lack of interest in Lenin can be demonstrated to date from at least twenty years prior to his Twelfth Symphony, the possibility that he actively disliked Lenin remains difficult for many, both in the West and in Russia, to conceive. In the West, such sentiment has for some years been linked with the standard left-liberal position on the USSR: that the society Lenin created (and which Stalin, supposedly, perverted) was as advertised in Soviet propaganda: "humane", "democratic", and "progressive"; or, if not, then excusable as sincerely meaning to be. This naively tolerant verdict -- affirming faith in the principles of communism by heroising or exculpating Lenin -- continues to plague Western studies of Soviet music, art, and cinema (albeit less so as time advances and the academic specialties more frequently and efficiently exchange information). Being text-based, Western students of Soviet history and literature have never been as idealistically deluded about Lenin or Soviet Communism as their cousins in the visual and auditory arts. (For example, the quite damning material on Lenin presented by Richard Pipes in *The Unknown Lenin: From the Secret Archive* was familiar to specialists in Soviet history for well over a decade prior to the book's eventual publication in 1996.)

So far as Russians are concerned, attitudes towards Lenin differ with the strata of the generations from 1917 onwards. Nowadays in Russia, only diehard communists still believe in Lenin (usually still believing in Stalin, too); most of the rest wish to forget him, while the young are generally derisive. Formerly the chief conduit of the Lenin cult, the Soviet education system has gone and children are no longer brought up to picture him as a human god. Those of Irina Shostakovich's generation experienced a very different world; indeed, as a child raised in a state orphanage, she would have had the sanctified image of Lenin drilled into her mind, morning, noon, and night. There is therefore the possibility that her husband, realising this, avoided the subject with her in as noncommittal a way as he could. Without further elucidation from Irina, her claim that Shostakovich "thought highly of Lenin" must be treated with caution. From a generation relentlessly brainwashed into believing that Lenin was a saint, she may merely have unconsciously assumed that Shostakovich, despite his silence or evasiveness on the subject, felt as she did. Unless she can present convincing evidence of her husband's faith in Lenin, the weight of evidence suggests otherwise.

Yet even though -- as we know from his son Maxim among others -- Shostakovich detested and feared the communist *apparat*, it would not be reliable, in the absence of specific evidence, to assume that he loathed Lenin too. This is why his attitude to his Lenin symphonies is so significant. In the case of the first of these, he went for three years pretending to be writing an epic song-symphony about Lenin, producing, in the end, precisely nothing. In the case of the Twelfth Symphony, he did not begin the final version

of it until two years after "announcing" it -- and, in this third draft (apart from the second movement), the promised focus on Lenin was replaced by a general impression of the events of 1917. In *Testimony*, Shostakovich is quoted as saying of the Symphony that "the material put up resistance", adding (as though to underline that the "material" in question was the character of Lenin himself) "you see how hard it is to draw the image of leaders and teachers with music". His irony suggests that the difficulty of drawing such images consisted not in the ineffability of "leaders and teachers" themselves, but in conveying the truth beyond propaganda.

Serious or satirical?

If, as Khentova and Lebedinsky have stated, the first draft of the Twelfth Symphony includes satirical material, the contention that Shostakovich took a wry attitude to Lenin is plainly established; in which case, the credibility of Lebedinsky's remarkable story of the hasty revision to the Symphony (Wilson, pp. 346-7) is strengthened, as Fay appears to realise. As for Irina's suggestion that her husband wished to convey a vision of an ideal ruler in this work, it is difficult to reconcile this with his expressed attitudes to communism, let alone to find any evidence of it in the Symphony itself. Elizabeth Wilson's suggestion that "the triumphant major apotheosis of the Finale can perhaps be interpreted as the victory of a much hoped-for utopia" betrays a sadly insensitive response to a finale so clearly satirical in its bombastic overstatement. (Only the finale of Gavriil Popov's Sixth Symphony goes, equally deliberately, so far over the top.) As for Wilson's willingness to believe that a man so scarred by Soviet utopianism could harbour any utopian hopes in 1959-61, one can only venture that her Fay-inflicted wariness of *Testimony* has here led an otherwise astute critic astray. (The case for believing the Twelfth Symphony to contain a satirical sub-text -- suggested in *The New Shostakovich* [pp. 225-7] -- has been reinforced by the suggestion of Japanese musicologist Fumiko Hitotsuyanagi that the work contains a "Stalin" code ["The New Face of the Twelfth Symphony: hidden depths in an unfairly neglected work", *Muzykal'naiia Akademiia* No 4, 1997; published, in an English version by Veronique Zaytzeff and Frederick Morrison, in *DSCH* 13, Summer 2000].

Edison Denisov records (Wilson, p. 302) that Shostakovich was wont to complain of his former pupil Georgi Sviridov: "I don't understand Yura. If I wrote *The Song of the Forests* that was because I was forced to. But who has forced him to write *The Pathétique Oratorio*?" Also known as the "Lenin Oratorio", Sviridov's work was the big Soviet hit of 1959, the year in which *Sovetskaya kultura* reported Shostakovich's promise to write a piece on Lenin. Based on Mayakovsky's poems about the Civil War of 1918-21, the *Pathetic Oratorio* employs a seven-movement lay-out which corresponds to that of Shostakovich's *The Song of the Forests*; indeed, as the slow sixth movement of

Shostakovich's oratorio forms its notional heart, so likewise does the slow sixth movement of Sviridov's work -- a sombre meditation entitled "Dialogue with Comrade Lenin". It was for this above all that its composer received the Lenin Prize of 1959. Yet, insofar as the "rules" of that time allowed, Sviridov's "Dialogue" is implicitly critical, its solemnity barely disguising a deeper ambiguity towards the man whose political intolerance and harsh enforcement of Red Terror in 1918 precipitated the Civil War itself. It is puzzling that Shostakovich failed to detect this connotation; perhaps he gave up listening after the *Pathetic Oratorio's* noisily conformist earlier stages. More significant is that he so scornfully rejected Sviridov's piece -- for, if he believed the "Dialogue" to have been in earnest, he was implicitly dismissing the *Pathetic Oratorio* for the very fact of glorifying Lenin.

"Leaders and teachers"

Eleven years old at the time of the October revolution, Shostakovich completed his general education before Lenin died in 1924. As such, he escaped the brainwashing effects of the Lenin cult as they later came to be inflicted on several generations of Soviet children. More importantly, he lived within the ambit of the Russian higher education system between 1919 and 1928; and the universities and conservatoires, being the heart of Russian liberal intelligence, were also the heart of intelligentsia resistance to Bolshevism. While socialist and populist sympathies were strong in academia (particularly among students), a suspicion of authority -- and in particular of autocracy -- kept Soviet higher education in a state of sceptical discontent during the 1920s. Academic pay-scales, student grants, and working conditions were awful between 1917 and 1932. Proletarianisation saw unqualified young workers and peasants drafted into universities and technical schools over the heads of young bourgeois who had studied since their childhoods. General disillusionment set in, creating a student culture of poverty and apathy: the *Yeseninshchina*, named after the characteristic attitude of the young people's favourite poet of the time, Sergei Yesenin. Escapism and suicide flourished, enlivened by bouts of protest in the form of demonstrations or letter-campaigns to the Komsomol. Vladimir Brovkin, in *Russia After Lenin*, describes the student culture of the 1920s as one of poverty, decadence, and dissent:

In 1927 get-togethers [*skhodki*] and spontaneous meetings became a matter of daily occurrence at numerous institutes and universities. Leaflets were posted and campaigning conducted under the slogans: "For the free development of youth! For democracy! For free elections!"... The GPU [secret police] surveys for 1927 and 1928 show an increase in the critical attitudes of professors and students, especially in the big cities: "During the elections of the Leningrad soviet, anti-Soviet activities took place among

teachers, students, and professors [who went from] school to school, trying to persuade [people] not to vote for the Communist Party candidates. At open election meetings, they spoke out against the Communists, saying that the teachers of the USSR have been deprived of political rights." (GPU report, February 1928.) In virtually every city in Russia and Ukraine the teaching faculties of schools and universities argued that Communist Party candidates should not be forced on the electorate; that the freedom to campaign should be guaranteed; that political rights be granted to all citizens of Soviet Russia; and that schools and universities should retain their traditional academic freedoms. [Brovkin, op. cit., pp. 130-1.]

Permeated by ironic melancholy (including half a dozen references to suicide), Shostakovich's letters to Tanya Glivenko of 1923-27 faithfully reflect this background. The world of politics goes almost unmentioned (see *Shostakovich Reconsidered*, pp. 530-544), while Shostakovich's sole favourable allusion to Lenin is balanced by sardonic allusions to his sainthood and a pointed disagreement with his view of film as the most "useful" of the arts (Shostakovich preferring the "useless" ones: music and ballet). Raised in an apolitical milieu, the young composer had no reason to idolise Lenin; on the contrary, he played his "Funeral March for the Victims of the Revolution" at a memorial service for those machine-gunned by Lenin's Bolshevik militia during the dispersal of the Constituent Assembly in January 1918. (Fay also refers to what seems to have been another funeral march written by Shostakovich in memory of two leaders of the Constitutional-Democratic (Kadet) Party, murdered by pro-Bolshevik sailors in April 1918. As for the legend that he saw Lenin at the Finland Station in April 1917, she quite rightly rejects this as "almost certainly apocryphal".)

The Bolshevik assault on the Russian bourgeois during the Red Terror/Civil War period is unlikely to have persuaded the Shostakovich family of Lenin's benignity. In 1924, Shostakovich's aunt Nadia tried to persuade his mother Sofiya to send him to America; Sofiya in turn attempted to get her son out of the USSR in autumn 1928 (*Shostakovich Reconsidered*, p. 184, fn. 250). As for Shostakovich himself, he is sure to have enjoyed the sense of liberation generally felt after the fall of Tsarism and, in 1922-24, probably accepted the Bolsheviks' propaganda shorthand for this: "October". Reflecting his lack of interest in politics, however, his acquaintance with Bolshevik "scripture" remained scant. Moreover, once he had entered the world of Russian higher education, he would have become aware of the scepticism of the teaching staff towards their Bolshevik masters. "For these people," observes Roy Medvedev in *Let History Judge*, "Lenin was no idol." Writing to Tanya Glivenko (from "St Leninburg") on 3rd June 1924, Shostakovich reported that a purge of radical students at the Conservatoire had "got rid of" his best friend. Indeed, his choice of friends and contemporary heroes during this period was uniformly non-Bolshevik. (Prominent among his circle was Mikhail Kvadri, the dedicatee

of the First Symphony, who was arrested and "allegedly shot" in 1929. Apart from telling us that Kvadri introduced Shostakovich to Tukhachevsky, Fay supplies no more data about this seemingly key figure in the composer's early life than she offers about the "internal political intrigues" that came close to barring Shostakovich from his graduate course in 1924.)

Quite apart from the special conditions obtaining in Soviet higher education, there was no deep-rooted popular culture of Lenin deification during the 1920s. Shostakovich's dislike of the renaming of St Petersburg/Petrograd was common in Russia. The religious peasantry hated the atheist Lenin and continued to do so after collectivisation. Less disposed towards such basic opposition, the workers remained cynical about their Bolshevik "bosses", not excluding Lenin himself (addressed as "Baldy" in contemporary satirical rhymes). After a few years of Stalinism, Lenin was seen in retrospect as preferable to his successors, and, as time wore on, he came to be idealised as having supposedly presided over a golden age of freedom and plenty. In the first twenty years of Soviet rule, however, debunking jokes about him were as common as those about Stalin and Kirov (Fitzpatrick, *Everyday Stalinism*, pp. 184-5; Davies, *Popular Opinion in Stalin's Russia*, pp. 168-182). The young Shostakovich even had his own Lenin joke, baffling admirers by telling them: "I love the music of Ilyich." Since "Ilyich" was the name by which Lenin was popularly referred to, the composer's victims would express puzzlement; whereupon, affecting surprise, he would explain "I am talking about the music of Petr Ilyich Tchaikovsky" (Malko, *A Certain Art*, p.190). The affected surprise was a necessary protective measure. Not to have adopted this would have left no room to plead a genuine misunderstanding in the event of a cold response. Context was crucial. In fact, context often provided the joke, as in the case of the Lenin-cult slogan "Lenin is dead but his spirit (or deeds) live on" which could be used subversively without alteration -- for instance, on the wall of a factory urinal (Davies, op. cit., p. 179; cf. *Shostakovich Reconsidered*, p. 701).

There is no reason to assume that Shostakovich ever held a high opinion of Lenin. As for his work, his two protractedly aborted Lenin symphonies suggest that he was either immune to the saintly Lenin of Soviet propaganda or positively antagonistic both to this false image and the irascibly autocratic man behind it. Fay's incredulity that Shostakovich might have wished to poke covert fun at Lenin in the Twelfth Symphony once again reveals how little she understands the background, while the fact that she seems never to have asked to look at the satirical first draft of the work (now, according to Lebedinsky, in the safekeeping of Irina) betokens either ineptitude or an active avoidance of anything contrary to her preconceptions about who Shostakovich was and what he really thought.

Loyalty

A wish to cling onto the idea that Shostakovich was dutifully in thrall to the Lenin-worship of the average latterday Soviet citizen seems to drive Fay's presentation of the circumstances attending the little-known Lenin-glorifying choral cycle *Loyalty*:

Another milestone that passed while Shostakovich was being treated in Kurgan was the celebration of the one hundredth anniversary of Lenin's birth on 21 April 1970. It was not, however, a milestone overlooked by the composer. As early as December 1968, he had appealed to his colleagues to compose stirring musical tributes for the occasion; he was already thinking about his own contribution for the upcoming jubilee. In April 1969, he declared he was beginning work on an oratorio to commemorate the event. The work he eventually produced was *Loyalty*, eight ballads for male chorus, Op. 136, on texts by Dolmatovsky. Exactly when he began composing it is unknown. Dolmatovsky recalled that, having been asked by the composer to reflect on what Lenin meant to them, they met several times in the quiet of Shostakovich's Moscow apartment, after which the poet distilled the essence of their conversations into verse[...] Shostakovich dedicated his choral ballads, which elevate Lenin above God, Confucius, Buddha, and Allah as an object of devotion, to Gustav Ernesaks, founding director of the State Academic Male Chorus of Estonia[...] Although there was some presumption that the new work should be unveiled at the Lenin jubilee concert, Shostakovich was unwilling to rush the preparation. Ernesaks set the premiere for the end of the year; the composer traveled to Tallinn to assist in the rehearsals and attend the first performance on 5 December 1970. In conjunction with the Moscow premiere of *Loyalty*, on 25 February 1971, Shostakovich was interviewed for television: "It seems to me that Dolmatovsky's words, on which my ballads are based, contain serious, very heartfelt lyrical reflections about Lenin, about the Motherland, about the Party. This is not the first time I have treated this theme... And I think it will not be my last work about Vladimir Ilyich. In the future I will most certainly strive to embody the image of this great man." [Fay, pp. 266-7.]

As with her superficial account of the chronology of the Twelfth Symphony, Fay, in discussing *Loyalty*, fails to notice Shostakovich's typical prevarication whenever cornered into writing anything about Lenin. On 4th December 1968, *Literaturnaya gazeta* published a statement "by" Shostakovich in which, says Fay, "he appealed to his colleagues to compose stirring musical tributes for the occasion; he was already thinking about his own contribution for the upcoming jubilee". For someone who had twice failed to portray Lenin, as promised, in a suitably grandiose work, this would be risible --

supposing that he actually said it. Yet, given standard *apparat* procedures, Shostakovich's "announcement" would have been half-elicited from, half-imposed on him. This time the *apparat*, perhaps learning from past mistakes, obtained Shostakovich's undertaking a full sixteen months ahead of the due date, leaving the whole of 1969 for him to complete his Lenin jubilee "contribution" on time. (He may have had an additional inducement: Fay reports that Shostakovich complained, early in 1968, of "one of his intermittent precipitous drops in income".)

In the event, the usual dawdling occurred. Instead of getting on with the Lenin piece, Shostakovich settled down with some texts about death and imprisonment, and wrote his Fourteenth Symphony (which, becoming his concert-season work for 1969, took up most of his free time for the rest of the year). Soon after this, he amused himself by reorchestrating Boris Tishchenko's First Cello Concerto. On 25th April, two months after finishing the Symphony, he "declared" (in *Pravda*) that he was beginning an oratorio to celebrate Lenin's centenary, then less than a year away. Whether he thereupon began this work and abandoned it is unknown. In any case, he had only a month in which to do so, since the rest of his summer was taken up with a leisurely holiday in Dilizhan, Armenia, and the resorts around Lake Baikal in Soviet Central Asia. During this sojourn, Shostakovich had plenty of time to think about his Lenin oratorio. Instead, he began his Thirteenth Quartet. Back in Moscow in late September, he joined the rehearsals for his Fourteenth Symphony before entering hospital for more tests. If he wished to deliver the promised oratorio in time for the centenary jubilee in April 1970, he would now have to hurry, writing through the winter of 1969-70 so as to finish the work by February 1970 at the latest.

According to the date given in the *Collected Works*, this is what Shostakovich did, stopping work on the Thirteenth Quartet (which he eventually finished in August 1970) and completing his jubilee "contribution" -- no longer an oratorio but a cycle of eight songs for male-voice choir -- on 13th February at Repino, before leaving for Dr Ilizarov's clinic in Kurgan. But if *Loyalty*, as the cycle was called, was finished in February, why wasn't it performed at the Lenin jubilee in April? After all, there was no orchestra to convene and there remained nine weeks for rehearsals. Fay writes: "Although there was some presumption that the new work should be unveiled at the Lenin jubilee concert, Shostakovich was unwilling to rush the preparation." To say that there was "some presumption" that the cycle would be ready for the centenary is putting it mildly. Had not Shostakovich (allegedly) "appealed to his colleagues to compose stirring musical tributes for the occasion" in 1968? Had he not, a year before the jubilee, "declared" that he was "beginning work on an oratorio to commemorate the event"? What does Fay mean by saying that Shostakovich was "unwilling to rush the preparation" (and where is her citation for this)? Surely the *apparat* would have been hopping mad that he had let them down on a Lenin piece yet again? Are there no memoranda in the Composers' Union

archive to this effect?

Turning to the Notes, we discover something fishy: Fay observes (p. 342, n. 8) that the date and place of completion of *Loyalty*, as given in the *Collected Works*, are incorrect, Shostakovich having left Repino for Moscow and Kurgan a week earlier. This suggests that the cycle was backdated by the composer. If so, why did he do it? And when did he really finish it? According to the librettist, Yevgeny Dolmatovsky, Shostakovich wrote to him in April 1970 from Kurgan to say that *Loyalty* was finally complete. Fay does not give the date in April, but it is clear that this was far too late for the Lenin centenary (April 22nd). Dolmatovsky's testimony tells us why the cycle wasn't performed at the celebrations: Shostakovich had again missed the due date. -- This might also explain why *Loyalty* was backdated: to pretend that he had not, in fact, been late (even if he had). Certainly he cannot merely have been tardy in informing Dolmatovsky, who could hardly have failed to notice that the cycle had not been included in the jubilee schedule. -- But, if this is what happened, why does Fay spin us a yarn about the composer being "unwilling to rush the preparation"? Is she fumbling for an explanation for why he was late, yet again, with a Lenin piece? This is an interesting question, after all -- and not one for which we would expect the author of an objective "resource" to conjure a solution out of thin air.

Besides, further questions are raised by Shostakovich's lateness with *Loyalty*. What made him choose the Estonian Academic Male Voice Choir to premiere the work? Estonian choirs are renowned, but Lenin was Russian and the man who moved the capital of Russia back to Moscow. Surely a Russian choir was available to do the premiere in Moscow? Instead, the premiere took place in Tallinn on 5th December 1970, the Moscow premiere following (ten months late!) on 25th February 1971. Tallinn?? Why didn't the *apparat* step in and insist that Shostakovich's song-cycle be given in Moscow in November at the celebration of the 53rd anniversary of the revolution? Or were they, perhaps, angry that the promised oratorio was not only late but proved to consist of a paltry twenty-minute cycle of choruses for male choir (no soloists, no orchestra)? Had they, in fact, blocked a Moscow premiere as punishment? And did Shostakovich find himself casting about for somewhere else to premiere the work?

Fay informs us that the cycle's evidently surprised dedicatee, Tallinn choirmaster Gustav Ernesaks (and not, we note, V. I. Lenin), "had learned that Shostakovich was writing a major work [sic] for men's chorus from the newspaper and was flattered by the composer's unexpected attention". According to Fay, "Ernesaks set the premiere for the end of the year". Again, what is her source? "The composer," she continues, "traveled to Tallinn to assist in the rehearsals and attend the first performance on 5 December 1970." When did he go to Tallinn? (Presumably it was after he composed the score for Kozintsev's film of *King Lear* and finished the Thirteenth Quartet.) Is there no eye-witness record of Shostakovich's winter journey to Estonia? While Shostakovich was there, did he

perchance hear any Scandinavian music, such as the Sixth Symphony of Carl Nielsen or something early by Aulis Sallinen, whose sparsely sardonic sound-worlds have something in common with his Fifteenth Symphony of 1971? All that Fay tells us is that on the day of the belated Moscow premiere, Shostakovich appeared on television to say that Dolmatovsky's words contained "serious, very heartfelt lyrical reflections about Lenin" and to claim, on dubious grounds, that this was not the first time that he had "treated this theme".

Dolmatovsky

In keeping with her disinclination to do primary research or conduct interviews in pursuit of information not already stored in books or newspaper libraries, Fay tells us nothing new about the enigmatic figure of Yevgeny Dolmatovsky. The son of a jurist, he was born in Moscow in 1915 and, as Komsomol member, worked, during 1933-34, on the construction of the marble-lined, chandelier-hung, mosaic-ceilinged Moscow metro (subway), about which he wrote verses in classic Socialist Realist style. For this accomplishment, he was fostered as the regime's official bard, writing innumerable popular and patriotic songs conceived in a spirit of "civic optimism". Under Stalin, he was guaranteed publication, accruing wealth and lasting influence. (He wangled Shostakovich's 1970 visit to Dr Ilizarov, a famed practitioner to whom patients came from all over the world.) Dolmatovsky's verses exude a child-like pictorial candour which parallels the idealised "realism" of the panoramas of such state-approved painters as Aleksandr Gerasimov, Fyodor Antonov, and Aleksandr Deineka. As such, he was immensely popular among ordinary middlebrow Soviet citizens -- and despised by the intelligentsia, who hated Socialist Realist painting for the same reason: its absurdly bathetic falsity. Why, then, did Shostakovich compose so many dull scores to Dolmatovsky's deeply dull verses? Some of the composer's friends (e.g., Kondrashin) were baffled. Another, Flora Litvinova, records in a diary entry for 1956 that she asked Shostakovich about his songs on Dolmatovsky's texts (presumably the Five Romances, Opus 98, written in 1954 and premiered in 1956):

I said that I didn't think much of them (in reality I didn't like them one little bit), and the words were terrible. "Why did you write music to those texts?" I asked. Shostakovich replied, "Yes, the songs are bad, very bad. They are simply extremely bad." And I piped up again, "But why did you write them?" He answered, "One day I'll write my autobiography and there I will explain everything, and why I had to compose all this."

It is unclear whether the phrase "had to compose" means that Shostakovich was told to collaborate with Dolmatovsky -- just as he was "given an assignment" in 1964 to compose

an opera on Sholokhov's *The Quiet Don* -- or whether the story of their chance meeting in a railway carriage is true and Shostakovich collaborated with Dolmatovsky because he saw that their partnership would guarantee money whenever he needed it. What is obvious is that his 1971 television reference to the poet's "serious, very heartfelt lyrical reflections about Lenin" must have been tongue-in-cheek, if only for aesthetic reasons. On the other hand, Shostakovich may have had a soft spot for Dolmatovsky (who was Jewish, according to Arkady Vaksberg [*Stalin Against The Jews*, p. 262]). Bad as they are, the poet's less ceremonial verses give the impression of a naively decent man of genuine feeling. And Dolmatovsky had a "background". He was that rarest sort of Soviet war hero: captured by the Nazis, he escaped, and lived to tell the tale. (Most men or women in his position were shot by SMERSH, Stalin's military counter-intelligence bureau, on the routine suspicion that they were spies.) Even more poignant, his father was one of Stalin's political prisoners -- a fact which must be borne in mind in connection with the poet's robotic obedience to every state commission that landed on his desk. A member of the Communist Party from 1941, Yevgeny Dolmatovsky may have been, like Galina Serebryakova, one of the "believers" whom Shostakovich wryly tolerated -- and perhaps the title of the 1970 song-cycle *Loyalty* reflects something more personal than loyalty to V. I. Lenin.

Contrary to Fay's impression, Shostakovich's attitude to Lenin as revealed in the curious story behind the Lenin centenary composition in 1969-71 is far from exalted. Several times set aside by the composer so that he could write music which genuinely meant something to him, *Loyalty* was "relaunched" as an oratorio and delivered -- late as usual -- in the form of a choral cycle of indiscernible inspiration. Certainly the Soviet authorities seem to have been unimpressed: Shostakovich's Glinka Prize for *Loyalty* was not bestowed until 1974. (Needless to say, Fay tells us nothing about this delay.) As for Dolmatovsky's recollection that he was "asked by the composer to reflect on what Lenin meant to them", this suggests that Shostakovich -- presenting himself to the poet under one of the personae he seems to have adopted with those to whom he could not speak frankly -- subtly prodded him into coming up with verses about a dictator in whom the composer himself either had no interest or secretly disliked. On this particular issue, we have little to go on, since, as Fay admits, "Shostakovich was comparatively tight-lipped during the composition of *Loyalty*" (as opposed, for example, to the Fourteenth Symphony, about which he wrote often to Glikman while composing it).

As for the real Shostakovich -- the one hiding inscrutably behind the bland facade of *Loyalty* -- we need only recall Vladimir Zak's account of Shostakovich's appearance at the Fifth Congress of Soviet Composers, held in the Kremlin a year after the song-cycle's Moscow premiere. Reading the inaugural address from a platform below a gigantic bust of Lenin, Shostakovich gave a classic *yurodivy* performance:

The text had been cooked-up in the depths of the Communist Party and contained a flattering passage directed at L. I. Brezhnev. And Leonid Ilyich himself was all set to listen. But what on earth was taking place?...

Shostakovich comes to podium, picks up the typed sheets of paper, and ostentatiously (as if in a slow-motion movie scene) gives them a 180-degree turn. Then, he looks at them for a long time and reverses them again. Silence. Seconds seem to be years. In the Presidium, everyone is perplexed: "Why is Shostakovich 'fooling around'?" But he is in no hurry. Once again, "with a flourish", he turns the pages upside down. Once again!! This "silent scene" took place in a deathlike hush, somehow reminding one of the scenes in Gogol's *Inspector General*: the functionaries, rooted to the ground, stood motionless...

But anybody who still had a conscience rejoiced and clearly understood: it was to them that Shostakovich was sending "Aesopian signals", clearly hinting at the fact that he, the composer, had absolutely no relation to what had been written. And, indeed, this "preliminary tuning" also determined our interpretation of Shostakovich's speech, for we, the listeners, were now capable of catching the notes of a well-hidden irony in his voice. In essence, Shostakovich had somehow become a real inspector-general -- a commentator, who obviously disagreed with the written "document".

Laurel Fay's presentation of Shostakovich's work on the Twelfth Symphony and the song-cycle *Loyalty* relies on official Soviet publications (chief among these being the propaganda newspaper *Pravda*) to give the impression that the composer sincerely wished, in these scores, to glorify Lenin. I submit that a balanced analysis of his work vis-à-vis Lenin suggests the opposite. In addition to quoting extensively from such fundamentally tainted official sources -- on the manifestly ridiculous basis that they are more, rather than vastly less, reliable than *Testimony* -- Fay quotes relatively rarely from the depositions of Shostakovich's friends and acquaintances, ignoring many key statements (such as Litvinova's report concerning the composer's view of Dolmatovsky's verses of 1956). Moreover, her narrative is littered with elisions, omissions, misleading juxtapositions, and persistent failures to pursue ostensible contradictions or otherwise puzzling facts. Rather than comment sequentially on Fay's coverage of the period 1960-75 in Shostakovich's life, I have chosen to look closely at one aspect of it in order to illustrate the evasive shallowness of her book. Readers will thus be primed to perceive for themselves the same methodology at work in Fay's treatment of the many other events and compositions of this period.

Ostrovsky

Before turning to a summary of the findings in this review, I would like to add one further example of the misrepresentative methodology referred to above. Towards the end of Fay's chapter on the years 1966-9 -- blandly entitled "Jubilees" in sublime indifference to the period's significance as the end of the Thaw and with no chronological reference to the central fact of the Soviet suppression of the Prague Spring liberation movement in Czechoslovakia -- she presents Shostakovich as quoting the words of the hero of Nikolai Ostrovsky's Five-Year Plan novel *How The Steel Was Tempered* (1934) in summary of his "underlying motivation" for the Fourteenth Symphony:

Man's dearest possession is life. It is given to him but once, and he must live it so as to feel no torturing regrets for wasted years, never know the burning shame of a mean and petty past; so live that, dying, he might say: all my life, all my strength were given to the finest cause in all the world -- the fight for the liberation of mankind.

Fay makes no comment, ironic or otherwise -- which is odd since, on the face of it, this passage has nothing whatever to do with the Fourteenth Symphony. Ostrovsky's novel (described by Shostakovich in *Testimony* as "horrible") was one of the prize exhibits of Socialist Realism and the passage in question became part of Soviet "scripture": a popular Credo learned by heart by all schoolchildren. Except for the closing words about "the finest cause in all the world -- the fight for the liberation of mankind", it could be construed as a purely moral declaration -- which is how Mark Lubotsky interpreted it when Shostakovich apparently repeated the statement in a speech before the closed premiere of the Fourteenth Symphony: "The essence of the passage was that one should die with a clear conscience, 'so that one need not be ashamed of oneself'." (Wilson, p. 418.) Manashir Yakubov reports something more provocative:

Shostakovich -- in a rare personal departure -- offered a few words of introduction. "You probably wonder why all of a sudden I've become so interested in such a ghastly and frightening topic?" said the sixty-year-old composer. "It's not because I'm already getting on in years, nor because, as the artillery men would say, 'the shells are exploding all around and friends are dying...'" The audience was listening to him with bated breath, and Shostakovich then sprang his surprise. He began to recite the passage that every Soviet schoolchild knows, the one they were made to learn by heart in literature lessons, as if it were great poetry -- the words from the propaganda novel *How The Steel Was Tempered* by Nikolai Ostrovsky: "Man has only one life, and must live it so that he does not recall with pain and regret the aimless lost years, and does not blush with shame over his

mean and trivial past, so that when he dies he can say, 'All my life has been devoted to the struggle for the liberation of mankind.'" However, although Shostakovich began this passage using its original words, he left out its closing reference to the liberation of mankind, and said instead: "One must live life in all its aspects honestly, nobly, properly and in such a way as never to commit any shameless deeds." The important thing was not to die honestly, but to live honestly. [LSO booklet, pp. 69-70].

As Yakubov notes, Shostakovich was talking about "the moral basis of existence", just as he did to Nikolai Karetnikov, Edison Denisov, and Boris Tishchenko around this time (Wilson, pp. 308-9, 433; Fay, p. 229). To raise the subject of morality in the USSR was explosive, for communism was based on the destruction of "bourgeois morality" which it had replaced with allegiance to the Revolution and unwavering duty to the Party, whatever the Party-line dictated. Thus, to speak of "morals" was, by implication, anti-Soviet: the subject was a flash-point. Yakubov continues thus:

Shostakovich's words at the rehearsal caused such a tremendous shock among the party functionaries present in the hall that during the performance of the symphony that followed, Apostolov, an executive of the Soviet Communist Party's Central Committee and a former persecutor of Shostakovich, collapsed and died from a heart attack.

Why did Shostakovich repeat the Ostrovsky passage at the closed premiere of the Symphony only to depoliticise it in this way? Did he, in fact, repeat it? The original statement quoted by Fay derives, like so many of her quotations, from *Pravda*. In other words, it is very possible that Shostakovich never referred to Ostrovsky's "horrible" novel or its hackneyed Credo before doing so at the closed premiere; that, instead, the editors at *Pravda* decided that a work on the taboo subject of death had to be given a properly edifying context in a Soviet newspaper, and decided to add the Ostrovsky passage without asking the composer. -- In which case, his reference to it before the concert would have been meant as an antidote to "his" otherwise baffling announcement about the "underlying motivation" for the Fourteenth Symphony in *Pravda* five months earlier.

Laurel Fay's failure to account in any way for the Ostrovsky quotation in *Pravda* is typical of her methodology. Whether it arises from genuine confusion on her part or from a surreptitious wish to present Shostakovich as a figure of cardboard cut-out political orthodoxy is difficult to tell. A fair guess would be: a mixture of both.

Review [Part 6](#). Back to [Shostakovichiana](#).

Laurel E. Fay's *Shostakovich: A Life*

A review by Ian MacDonald

Part 6: Summary

"There is not," declares Laurel Fay in her Introduction, "a single even remotely reliable resource in Russian, English, or any other language for the basic facts about Shostakovich's life and works." The previous parts of this in-depth review have endeavoured to demonstrate that the "basic facts" about Shostakovich cannot be "laid out", as Fay puts it, without interpretation; indeed that each separate claim that a given fact is "basic" or not is in itself interpretive, rendering every act of selection potentially controversial. Illustrations of this principle in action occur on almost every page of her book and several dozen of these have been analysed at length.

Fay's claim to have produced "a resource" which "lay[s] out the circumstances of Shostakovich's life in as balanced and objective a manner as possible" is sustainable in neither theory nor practice. Worse, her "objective" resource embraces hidden judgmental biases, prejudicial distortions of chronology, misleading quotations, and many tendentious assessments. Some of the latter (e.g., her coverage of *From Jewish Folk Poetry* and the Eighth Quartet) entail suppression of material contrary to her view, thereby compounding covert interpretation with outright misrepresentation.

I will return to these points later in this Summary. Before that, I would like to draw the reader's attention back to Fay's statement at the head of this section; specifically, to its peremptory absolutism, sweeping aside everything written about Shostakovich prior to her book as "not even remotely reliable". -- Everything, that is, but her own essay "Shostakovich versus Volkov: Whose *Testimony*?" published in 1980. If logic alone did not already suggest such a conclusion, we have it from the author herself. Interviewed by Martin Kettle in *The Guardian* (Friday Review, 7th January 2000), Fay summarised the *Testimony* controversy as follows: "The basic point is the same now as it was in 1980. We haven't been given adequate evidence that this is authentic."

"Adequate" evidence

Without knowing her criteria, it is hard to deduce how Fay distinguishes between adequate and inadequate evidence in the matter of the authenticity of *Testimony*. So far, it seems, no adequate evidence has emerged; although, clearly, some evidence, at least, *has*

emerged: inadequate evidence. How stringent are Fay's standards? It is, after all, perfectly possible that she might accept nothing less than a video-tape of Shostakovich confirming that he dictated his memoirs to Solomon Volkov. But, of course, video-tape, too, can be altered nowadays -- and even an unedited, face-to-face verbal confirmation from Shostakovich would arguably fail to constitute adequate evidence for the authenticity of *Testimony* insofar as he never saw the book itself and all sorts of things might have happened to it between him signing some pages from it in Moscow during 1971-4 and its appearance in English in New York in 1979.

Judged by such standards, there can *never* be adequate evidence in this matter. If Fay takes such a purely logical view, her reference to "adequate evidence" is either loose thinking or a form of deception. If, though, her criteria are tied to principles less exacting than pure logic -- suggested by her statement to Kettle that Shostakovich's life and work is "not a black-and-white subject" -- then she is working, like the rest of us, within the domain of probability. If so, her criteria must apply to the real world. Specifically: they must entail a set of assumptions about things said and done within the sphere of Soviet Communism, in Russia thereafter, and among Russians abroad throughout this period (1917 to the present day). This review has analysed Fay's criteria, and underlying assumptions, through their manifestations in her narrative, with its selective use of facts and quotations, its undeclared interpretations, and its reliance on a body of primary material (Soviet-published articles, interviews, and books) which is fundamentally tainted to a degree far in excess of *Testimony* itself.

Three considerations arise from this: (1) the question of the dependability of Soviet-published material; (2) the fact that, whether "adequate" or not, evidence relating to the authenticity of *Testimony* most certainly *has* emerged since 1980 and in substantial quantity; (3) the fact that not all of this evidence bears on the restricted issue of the authenticity of *Testimony*, instead serving to corroborate the quite independent contention that the official image of Shostakovich purveyed in Soviet-published material is spurious.

A false methodology

Turning to the first of these considerations, I have commented (in the first section of Part 4 of this review) on Fay's way of dealing with the issue of the dependability of Soviet-published material (pp. 173-4). In this special instance, her rationale is argued on purely logical grounds: "While it would be foolish to accept at face value all the statements and writings ascribed to Shostakovich, it does not follow that he shared none of the sentiments or opinions expressed in this way." In any normal scholarly enterprise, such a suggestion would require an argument proving not only that such exceptions exist, but that they exist in sufficient quantity to justify citing the material in question (i.e., the statements ascribed

to Shostakovich in Soviet publications). Far from offering such a case-based argument, Fay simply moves on. That this section of her book occurs two-thirds through a text which depends so massively on citations from so dubious a source is extraordinary enough in itself. That she fails to justify her logical excuse for relying on this shoddy material is egregiously unscholarly.

By comparison, Elizabeth Wilson in *Shostakovich: A Life Remembered* is for the most part careful to distinguish between the personal *Testimony* of those who knew the composer and the official material purveyed about him, or in his name, through official Soviet sources. While she leaves her readers to make their own assessments about the worth, or truth, of this or that statement (based on publication dates and correlation with other statements [see my [review](#) of her book for examples]), she is irreproachably candid in her linking narrative as to how she views the context in which Shostakovich (along with his relatives, friends, and colleagues) lived. For the purposes of the present argument, I would refer readers to her section "'Yurodivy' or cynic?" (op. cit., pp. 428-430), with its balanced assessment of Shostakovich's motives and predicament, its adduction of his supposed signing of a letter demanding the release of the Greek composer Mikis Theodorakis, and its illustrative testimonies from Galina Vishnevskaya, Sergei Slonimsky, Edison Denisov, and Yuri Lyubimov.

Fay must have read this section of Wilson's text (apparently one of the "not even remotely reliable" rivals to her own book). She has presumably, too, come across the similar attestations of Daniel Zhitomirsky, Isaak Glikman, Venyamin Basner, Flora Litvinova, Maxim Shostakovich, and many others. However, this chorus of caution, sometimes amounting to outright contempt, concerning Soviet-published materials seems to have counted for nothing with her. In her concern to turn back the clock twenty years in Shostakovich studies, she has instead resurrected the sort of grossly compromised material published by Progress in 1981 under the title *Shostakovich: About Himself and His Times* as part of the KGB campaign to discredit *Testimony*. Among the titles included in Fay's Select Bibliography is Galina Vishnevskaya's autobiography. Speaking to Martin Kettle, Fay cites Vishnevskaya as saying that the Shostakovich of *Testimony* is not the man she knew. Fay fails, however, to mention Vishnevskaya's reference (op. cit., pp. 399-400) to the aforesaid KGB compilation of Soviet-published material *About Himself and His Times* ("Shostakovich Speaks"):

How the authorities hastened to cover up the traces of the gradual murder of that great man! But they deluded themselves if they thought that by presenting Shostakovich in their package, by palming a Party card off on him, they had made him the very image of a loyal communist. Those [Soviet-published] statements, *which run counter to his art and life*, constitute nothing more than a damning document -- a searing *Testimony* to the communist regime's perversion and suppression of the individual... In his symphonies, those wordless monologues, there is protest and tragedy,

pain and humiliation. If music can be called anti-communist, I think Shostakovich's music should be called by that name. [My italics -- I. M.]

This omission constitutes blatant misrepresentation. Moreover, even if Fay had been unable, on her own account, to deduce that the Soviet-published material relating to Shostakovich, far from reliable, was "a searing testimony to the communist regime's perversion and suppression of the individual", she would have found this spelled out for her in the Prelude to my book *The New Shostakovich*, written a year before the Communist house of cards collapsed across Eastern Europe during autumn 1989:

What of the many articles and speeches attributed to Shostakovich in the USSR? Are they all bogus? Is there anything at all in them we can trust?

The first rule for anyone wishing to gauge statements emanating from a totalitarian society is to remember that almost nothing spontaneous happens under totalitarianism. Everything -- from squads of flagwaving infants at airports to collectively-signed expressions of righteous indignation in the national press -- is planned. Shostakovich's announcements for Soviet consumption need to be understood as products of this obsessively overseen system. What is required from Soviet artists in the way of statements to the media is not so much free opinions on whatever pops into their heads as "correct" rehearsal of the official line on whichever subject happens to be under review. Since the official line may alter from week to week -- so that no artist can be relied on to know what, at a given time, is the "correct" thing to say -- controls on the public voicing of even the most narrowly aesthetic views will always be tight. In other words, anything attributed by Soviet sources to Shostakovich must be presumed to be in reality the work of an officially-sponsored journalist who may or may not have gone to the trouble of interviewing him before concocting it.

The fact that Shostakovich's name was regularly requisitioned for propaganda purposes seems to have been widely known in Soviet music circles. Maxim Shostakovich has more than once confirmed this, while Galina Vishnevskaya records it as common knowledge that Shostakovich signed letters of protest without looking at them, read prepared statements to the press without a pretense of sincerity, and generally allowed his reputation to be used by the state in any way it liked[...] To the average Western democrat, the composer's attitude in "allowing" this misuse of his name and reputation may appear to be alarmingly cynical and cowardly but, like so much that seems enigmatic about him, the mystery owes less to Shostakovich than it does to Soviet Russia itself as seen, through a perpetual fog of disinformation, from outside. Indeed, Western failure to arrive at anything remotely approaching an understanding of Shostakovich's

music has less to do with the Machiavellian deviousness of its composer than with the political naivety of Western music critics.

A subject in themselves, the peculiarities of intellectual life in Communist Russia and Eastern Europe have never been analysed more penetratingly than by the Polish poet Czeslaw Milosz in his study *The Captive Mind*. On the question of the signing of articles and reading of speeches with which one privately disagrees, Milosz speaks of "Ketman", a form of pretense resorted to by anyone who, whilst harbouring thoughts of his own, wishes nevertheless to remain alive and, relatively speaking, unimprisoned. According to the poet, Ketman, an Iranian word, stood for the practice of Sufi mystics under orthodox Islam of at once hiding their heresy and mocking the establishment by professing orthodoxy in the most pedantically elaborate detail (and, where it was safe to do so, carrying their show of solemn conformism to the point of absurdity). In Milosz's view, Westerners, by ignoring the ever-present element of Ketman in Communist life, persistently stop at the latter's moribund appearance, missing its vital undercurrents:

"Whoever would take the measure of intellectual life in the countries of Central or Eastern Europe from the monotonous articles appearing in the press or the stereotyped speeches pronounced there, would be making a grave error. Just as theologians in periods of strict orthodoxy expressed their views in the rigorous language of the Church, so the writers of the people's democracies make use of an accepted special style, terminology, and linguistic ritual. What is important is not what someone said but what he wanted to say, disguising his thought by removing a comma, inserting an 'and', establishing this rather than another sequence in the problems discussed."

As for why this game is necessary, that, says Milosz, is a long story -- and one which its protagonists find somewhat exasperating to explain to a layman (particularly when, as is usually the case, the said layman has arrived on a high horse):

"Unless one has lived there one cannot know how many titanic battles are being fought, how the heroes of Ketman are falling, what this warfare is being waged over... A Pole, Czech or Hungarian practiced in the art of dissimulation smiles when he learns that someone in the emigration has called him a traitor (or a swine) at the very moment when this traitor (or swine) is engaged in a match of philosophical chess on whose outcome the fate of fifteen laboratories or twenty *ateliers* depends. They do not know

how one pays --those abroad do not know. They do not know what one buys, and at what price."

As a senior cog in the Soviet musical machine, Shostakovich cannot have helped being constantly involved in games of the kind outlined by Czeslaw Milosz and seems often to have traded his autograph in return for dispensations to those in his care (witnesses to his concern for colleagues and pupils are plentiful in Soviet biographies). Passages of *Ketman* occur in *Testimony* and it is clear enough from his music that he was capable of simulating conformity with as much deadpan irony as the next citizen. But what is unusual about Shostakovich is that, especially in his later years, he mostly didn't bother -- and it is precisely in this publicly expressed indifference that it becomes possible to understand why Solomon Volkov calls the composer a *yurodivy*.

As a private act, signing a letter of "protest" (i.e., condemnation) without reading it is a gesture of cynicism or despair. Doing the same thing in public --for everyone knew that this was what Shostakovich did -- is, on the other hand, profoundly subversive, in that it not only implies contempt for the powers that be, but also satirises their totalitarian bureaucracy (i.e., "this is what we do: sign away our consciences, our memories, our souls, to keep the machine running"). Though to a Westerner this analysis of the composer's motives may smack of special pleading, Russians, well schooled in the subtleties of self-expression under authoritarian conditions, would instantly recognise the *yurodivy* technique of "taking the blame" (mimicking the foolish or reprehensible behaviour of others) described, for example, by Solzhenitsyn as being part of the repertoire of the extraordinary convict Petya Kishkin.

The roots of Shostakovich's *yurodstvo*, if that is what it was, lay in both the extreme experiences to which he was frequently exposed and their routine misrepresentation in both Russia and the West. For example, twice in his life -- in 1936 and 1948 -- he was publicly pilloried and temporarily "unpersoned" for alleged musical crimes against the People which only the credulous or half-witted in his country ever took seriously. At these times, foreign misunderstanding of what was going on merely compounded his isolation. The many bitter diatribes against Western opinion in *Testimony* (apart from scuttling charges that the book is anti-Soviet propaganda) owe much to the readiness of Western musicologists not only to accept Soviet accounts of these ugly debacles, but also to go along with the official view that they had somehow done him good as a man and an artist. These ordeals, humiliating and frightening in a way entirely obscure to people used to the concept of being able to answer back, marked the composer for

life. In Vishnevskaya's words, he "reacted in an agonising, physical way, as if his skin were searing from the brand that had been put on him". During these episodes, Shostakovich experienced total ostracism, lost both face and livelihood, and confronted the real prospect of imprisonment or even execution. Not surprisingly, he came to the conclusion that, since he had no alternative but to live in Russia and no mission in life beyond that of addressing his fellow citizens through his music, his only course was to avoid direct conflict with the authorities, however much the resulting damage to his good name should hurt him.

That Shostakovich was genuinely terrified at certain times in his life is almost certainly true and, in any case, hardly a matter for shame or rebuke. At these times, almost the entire population of Russia was in the same condition[...] The truth is that, at certain periods in Soviet history, not to have abandoned one's principles would have amounted to a request to be done away with by the secret police. In 1937, millions of Russian were being shot or packed off to concentration camps for offenses which[...] amounted to little more than a slight hesitation to cheer when told to. Shostakovich's behaviour in the face of all this was no different from anyone else's. Even the bold Solzhenitsyn (who referred to the composer as "that shackled genius... that pitiful wreck" and disapproved of his refusal to advertise his dissidence) was himself daunted enough to have kept his own head well down during the earlier part of the post-Stalin "thaw".

As did hundreds of others in positions comparable to his, Shostakovich allowed articles and speeches, the content of which he despised, to be dignified with his name in order to survive. Most of what appears in a collection of these like *About Himself and His Times* is, therefore, at best unreliable and at worst flatly mendacious. Some isolated clues can be disentangled from this material (chiefly from those passages disfigured, from the Soviet point of view, by remnants of the composer's personal style), but as any kind of guide to the thoughts of Shostakovich or the meaning of his music, it is useless.

Since Fay has dismissed *The New Shostakovich* as "a moronic tract", it is reasonable to presume that she has read it, just as it is reasonable to presume that she has read Elizabeth Wilson's book. But if she is thus aware of the arguments and testimonies against treating Soviet-published material as reliable in the absence of confirmation from more reliable sources, why has she not acknowledged this, let alone stated her case for using such material? It seems that she ignores whatever does not suit her.

This "blind eye" methodology has the further advantage, so far as Fay is concerned, of allowing her to imply that nothing of significance has appeared in the last twenty years

with regard to the issue of who Shostakovich was. Whether this is the stance of a respectable scholar is doubtful, although another supposedly respectable scholar, Richard Taruskin, displays no qualms in applauding her procedural vagaries. "At last," he declares on the dust-jacket of her book, "readers interested in Shostakovich have a reliable source to consult for the facts of his life, meticulously set against the background of his, alas, all-too-interesting times. Laurel Fay has erected a platform upon which truly informed interpretation and debate concerning Shostakovich's works and legacy can now take place." As a commentator who deems *Lady Macbeth of Mtsensk* to be an apologia for Stalin's genocide in the Ukraine, whose account of the Soviet reception of the Fifth Symphony is (as Fay's narrative confirms) not so much misleading as fraudulent, and who claims he was being "ironic" by describing Shostakovich as "perhaps Soviet Russia's most loyal musical son", Taruskin is a less than dependable authority. In reality, Fay's reliance on intrinsically corrupt Soviet sources has merely ensured that the majority of planks in her "platform" are rotten.

The "blind eye" method

Through her foundational recourse to the bowdlerised, falsified, and ghost-written ethos of *About Himself and His Times*, Fay resurrects the embalmed Shostakovich of Soviet myth. Perhaps one day she will defend this methodology, although on the basis of her response to criticism of her interpretation of *From Jewish Folk Poetry* (reiterate with minimal alterations, otherwise ignoring all counter-arguments) we would be wise not to expect too much -- or, should such a defence appear, to find it not in the West but in Russia, where she has recently taken to publishing her pieces.

This leads us to our second consideration: the fact that, "adequate" or not, evidence relating to *Testimony's* authenticity *has* emerged since 1980 -- and in substantial quantity. Martin Kettle reports Fay as claiming that she can counter the arguments made by Allan Ho and Dmitry Feofanov in *Shostakovich Reconsidered* and will do so shortly in a volume on Shostakovich to be published in St Petersburg, in Russian. This tactic, preventing 99% of Western readers from reading her riposte at first hand, is consistent with her disinclination to translate the transliterated titles of books and articles in her Notes, thereby preventing most of her non-Russian readership from seeing what she is quoting from. Since Fay tells Kettle that "these people" (those who don't share her views) "aren't interested in Shostakovich at all", there may be, in her mind, no compelling need to address anyone on this subject beyond her own circle.

Until her Petersburg riposte appears, Fay's philosophy of "ignore and reiterate" must be presumed to apply to Allan Ho and Dmitry Feofanov's detailed exposition on the evidence relating to the authenticity of *Testimony*. After all, she has had time at least to explain her

criteria for adequacy vis-à-vis *Testimony* (which appears in her book when she wishes to criticise it, but is otherwise ignored). As for her attitude to Ho and Feofanov, it is remarkable that so basic a challenge to a writer's conception of her subject is dismissed by her with so offhand an authorial wave of the hand: "The attempt[...] to 'authenticate' *Testimony* by means of third-party endorsements and circumstantial evidence raises as many new questions as it purports to answer." Fay's disdain for "third-party endorsements" (those who knew Shostakovich) and "circumstantial evidence" (evidence) should be set beside the memorable fact that, in all, she quotes *Pravda* and *Izvestiya* forty times -- never with a word of caution.

The issue of the authenticity of *Testimony* is a special area of Shostakovich studies. Here, the case for the prosecution is made mainly by Laurel Fay, that for the defence by Allan Ho and Dmitry Feofanov, with a cast of witnesses from Russia and Eastern Europe as to the book's factual and stylistic credibility (the majority of the latter, in a ratio of around 10:1, appearing for the defence). Since Fay makes no case against Ho and Feofanov in her book, simply preferring *Pravda* to *Testimony* as her paradigm, there is no need to pursue these issues in this review. As it happens, far from the sole basis of revisionism, *Testimony* is merely one of several sources of information by which, through cross-comparison, we may reconstruct a self-consistent picture of Shostakovich distinct from the embalmed official image so sedulously presented in Soviet-published material, Soviet-managed events, and Western anti-revisionism.

The most salient of these additional sources of information are: the general Soviet background (including material relating to the USSR's political and social history, the other Soviet arts, and Russian and Soviet popular culture); classical music in general, as used by Shostakovich as a ready source of Aesopian expression through quotation, misquotation, juxtaposition, parody, and pastiche; Shostakovich's music itself, with its array of internal "signs" (e.g., DSCH); and the "small 't' testimony" of those in the Soviet bloc who, in various ways, knew Shostakovich and have given their memories or impressions of him either by writing or through interviews. This diverse body of evidence -- whereby musical and other artistic facts may be correlated across works and genres, and in which the experiences of hundreds of citizens of the Soviet imperium, high or low, are brought into relationship, direct or indirect, with Shostakovich's life and work -- constitutes our third consideration: material which amounts to corroboration that the official Soviet image of the composer is spurious.

Fay's reference to material relating to the USSR's political and social history is scant. At certain junctures (such as the "Patriotic War"), she cannot avoid referring to this context; more often she all but ignores it (e.g., the Cultural Revolution) and lists no sources on these subjects in her Bibliography. In the main, she restricts the narrative of Shostakovich's life and career to a recital of "facts" and "circumstances" effectively

circumscribed by the narrow limits of the world of Soviet music and musicology. As a result, her references to the other Soviet arts (literature, drama, dance, architecture, painting, cinema) are negligible. The interrelationship of the Russian arts, innate in normal circumstances and artificially intensified by political repression during three major periods of Soviet history (1928-32, 1936-9, 1946-9), accordingly recedes in her narrative (rather than, through cross-comparison, conferring mutual illumination).

And the music?

Anyone reading *Shostakovich: A Life* in the expectation of musical insights will be bewildered to find almost no authorial opinions on the composer's works, which trundle by like cardboard boxes on a conveyor-belt, accompanied only by selections from Soviet commentary and the occasional private memoir. Thus, rather than an authorial view on the cryptic Sixth Symphony, we get the following (pp. 115-6): "A [Leningrad] critic quickly hailed the work, confirming that since his previous symphony Shostakovich had made further progress in freeing himself from formalistic tendencies, and pronounced it to have been written in a clear language accessible to every listener of symphony concerts. He predicted a bright future for the work."

If, in itself, this passage is vacuous, it nevertheless conveys something about the dreary state of affairs in contemporary Soviet music and thus has a legitimate claim, however wan and woeful, to be included on the historical record for the benefit of future commentators. This, though, suggests that Fay's aim would have been more appropriately served by a simple compendium of raw Soviet documents relating to Shostakovich, supplemented by a list of dated facts and statements, with citations, arranged chronologically. Such a volume would have been neither much longer than the book she has written nor noticeably more lacklustre. (It would also have been easier to refer to, as those trying to locate Hans Stuckenschmidt or *From Karl Marx to Our Own Days* will discover.) On the other hand, this compendium would have looked even more like a revamp of *About Himself and His Times*. Only if Fay had included commentary of a more personal kind from Shostakovich's intimates would such an impression have been dispelled (although this would have infringed on the memoir material deployed in Elizabeth Wilson's book, which Fay distrusts).

The dullness of *Shostakovich: A Life* -- serving as a preventive against too wide a dissemination of its author's surreptitious agenda (and her not-so-surreptitious history-bending in respect of *From Jewish Folk Poetry*), results partly from trying to make a continuous narrative out of what, logically, ought to have been a synoptic collection of documents. Once set on her narrative, Fay could not afford to be too interesting in case her "resource" started to resemble a conventional biography in which the author's

subjectivity is as candidly in play as the material she or he deals with. She wants her subjectivity -- her inescapable interpretation of "circumstances", which she could only have avoided by means of a documentary compendium -- to seem objective. To this end, she voluntarily guts her own book of almost anything resembling style or character, for the most part eschewing adverbs and adjectives.

Perhaps one day Fay will publish a companion volume to *Shostakovich: A Life* in which she makes her own readings of the music clear. That these interpretations will be worth waiting for, however, appears unlikely on the basis of the few descriptive passages she has allowed into her present volume. For example, Shostakovich's Suite for two pianos, Opus 6, is described as "a memorial of affecting dignity and solemnity" (p. 21), as if all emotion had been excluded by its composer before he wrote it; whereas, the piece is actually a Rachmaninovian outpouring of a tragic intensity extraordinary for a 15-year-old. In a similar vein, the Cello Sonata -- a work of manifest unease which I summarised in *The New Shostakovich* as "strained, sardonic, and distinctly bitter" -- is reported as "a work of classical dimensions that scarcely hints at the turmoil in his personal life" (p. 80). From the point of view of classical rhetorical construction, this paragraph would be better were there more such instances to report; or even one more. It is a measure of the paradoxical lifelessness of *Shostakovich: A Life* that it contains no other comparable descriptive passages -- unless we include its author's statement that, musically, the Thirteenth Symphony "defied no stylistic taboos and was hardly controversial", an opinion seemingly based on the assumption that only technical daring could have offended the expectations of Socialist Realism after Stalin. In reality, the post-Stalin "New Class" aesthetic was built on the usual kitsch, consonant, major-key optimism -- a style arguably satirised in the perfect cadences which end all four movements of the Sixth Quartet and which can be heard in the saccharine waltz-theme for two flutes in the Thirteenth Symphony's finale. In terms of this middlebrow aesthetic, almost nothing in the rest of the Thirteenth Symphony -- from the blunt violence of the central section of "Babi Yar", via the jeering bitonalities of "Humour", to the nightmareishly disturbing orchestration of "Fears" -- can be said to skirt aesthetic taboos or avoid controversy. On the contrary, this is a furious work -- out-and-out "in your face" dissidence in every word and note from a pair of artists working in full-scale collaboration. To pretend otherwise in a study of Shostakovich is to insult the reader's intelligence.

An unreliable "resource"

An account of Shostakovich's career which gives no descriptions of his major works, instead offering resumés of what was said about them in Soviet arenas and publications,

is, if nothing else, undeniably academic in scope and style. However, since we already have in English around two-thirds of the Soviet material which Fay uses in lieu of an imaginative response, even the academic point of her self-contradictory and occasionally frankly devious muddle of a book remains moot.

To have functioned as a documentary "resource", every statement -- indeed, every sentence -- in *Shostakovich: A Life* should have been footnoted to at least one piece of primary material, while any suspicion of authorial "interpretation" should have been signalled as such. Neither qualification is fulfilled; indeed, there are instances where statements not only fail to be attached to primary sources but turn out to be authorial guesses (e.g., Fay's observations on the mysteriously delayed premiere of the song-cycle *Loyalty*). Some of these uncited assertions are mindboggling. Take, for example, the casual reference at the bottom of page 215 to "long missives of sardonic political commentary to friends" penned during February 1960. What is the nature of this commentary? After all, Shostakovich's attitudes to politics are a central bone of contention. Which friends? He wrote three, not especially long, letters to Isaak Glikman at this time. These contain some jibes at Socialist Realism; the remark "Of course, 'modesty is the foremost virtue of the Bolshevik', as we saw in the case of Comrade Stalin"; and an approving allusion to Sergei Semyonov's *Natalia Tarpova*, the (obscure) "period novel of the 1920s" mentioned by Fay, which, Shostakovich dryly observes, was attacked for the crimes of focusing on the non-Party *intelligenty* and for placing "physiology" (personal love) above "Party loyalty" (Shostakovich's inverted commas). Such sarcastic comments are sufficiently significant in terms of forming a full picture of Shostakovich's outlook that we are within our rights to ask why Fay does not quote, let alone cite, them -- especially as this passage in her book is rich with main-text verbatim quotations from the fake Shostakovich of *Pravda*. But who are the other epistolary "friends" to whom Fay vaguely refers -- and why is the composer's "sardonic political commentary" to them neither quoted nor cited? Her failure to produce, at the very least, bibliographical references is extraordinary.

Had Fay been genuinely interested in producing a "balanced and objective resource", she would have offset her incessant quotations from Soviet newspapers, journals, and speeches with equal-time quotations from sources like Shostakovich's letters to Glikman or Sollertinsky (cf. the similarly uncited and unquoted reference to other "sardonic" political commentary on p. 63). Such sources, it seems, are too personal to be allowed -- much like the sort of "third-party" material assembled by Elizabeth Wilson in *Shostakovich: A Life Remembered*. Of this large category of witness, Fay, before repairing to the library to consult *Pravda*, observes: "Reminiscences can be self-serving, vengeful, and distorted by faulty memory, selective amnesia, wishful thinking, and exaggeration." Almost every failing with which she prejudicially slurs other people's testimonies about Shostakovich can be said to apply to her own book.

The way Shostakovich *really* spoke

Shostakovich's letters to Isaak Glikman abound with the sort of "sardonic political commentary" which Fay declines even to cite in the examples given above. Giving *Letters to a Friend* as first in a list of letter-collections "of exceptional significance", she cites this source 114 times (referring to pages in the Russian edition rather than to the dates of the letters cited). However, almost all of these citations refer to facts rather than to the expressive aspects of Shostakovich's style. A man who, Glikman recalls, "always spoke with a nuance of irony", Shostakovich sowed these missives with endless sarcasm, often of a nature so fleeting and secretive that an inattentive reader can easily miss it. For example, on 29th July 1949, he tells Glikman that he is writing an oratorio "on the forests" to words by Dolmatovsky, "a poet of talent". The sarcasm (which Glikman feels obliged to point out in his commentary) is, much like Shostakovich's public ironies, light enough to be interpreted seriously; only context -- the fact that it appears in a private letter to friend accustomed to his style -- makes it inarguable. The composer's use of standard phrases from official Soviet discourse could be comparably fugitive. In a letter of 21st December 1949, he tells Glikman of continuing symptoms of illness: "Pardon this gross naturalism: I sweat constantly." The effect depends on knowing that the phrase "gross naturalism" was a formula used in Socialist Realism to deplore anything it considered sordid; which is to say: too unedifyingly redolent of the real world (such as the sex scene in *Lady Macbeth*).

But the Glikman letters also contain passages far more obvious and sustained. In our brief [article](#) on this, Dmitry Feofanov and I give ten such examples, beginning with the remarkable letter mocking the Politburo which Shostakovich wrote from Odessa on 29th December 1957 (a letter even Richard Taruskin has been obliged to concede as satirical). Fay quotes only two of these passages (not including the Odessa letter), observing the "characteristic touch of irony" in one (p. 140), but missing the same touch in the other (p. 138). This raises the rather fundamental question of her sensitivity to irony. In the case of the passage quoted on page 140, Glikman helps his readers by stressing Shostakovich's deadpan appropriation of the *Pravda* cliché "the sun of the Stalinist constitution" -- i.e., Fay has it spelled out for her. In the case of the passage quoted on page 138, Glikman offers no such assistance -- and Fay misses it. Conceivably the reason why she uses *Letters to a Friend* (*Pis'ma k drugu*) almost exclusively as a factual rather than as an expressive source, is because she cannot detect its subtle current of anti-Communist satire. Or perhaps she does detect this -- after all, the Odessa letter is impossible to ignore (even though she manages to omit it) -- in which case, the slant in her use of the Glikman letters is more premeditated.

An ear for satire

Shostakovich's satirical impulse is barely touched on by Fay, perhaps because she is unequipped to identify it, perhaps because she prefers not to recognise it. Thus, the composer's youthful penchant for Russian satirists like Ilf and Petrov and Saltykov-Shchedrin (mentioned several times by Wilson's witnesses) goes unmentioned in *Shostakovich: A Life*; nor does Fay deal with the provocative mismatch between, on the one hand, his verbatim knowledge of vast tracts of Russian literature and "large vocabulary" (Wilson, p. 15) and, on the other, his later pathetic claims of inarticulacy and stammeringly repetitious style of speech. Volkov's suggestion that the latter was a mask of *yurodstvo* (which may or may not have gradually stuck to Shostakovich's face, rather than remaining a device he could put on or take off at will) is ignored by her. She likewise completely misses the possibility of satire in works by Shostakovich which don't, as it were, have the ingredient "satire" listed on the can. Indeed the satirical aspect of his art is scarcely touched on until, commenting on *Rayok* on page 165, she observes, quite out of the blue: "Shostakovich was an entertainer. Satire was his natural expressive outlet." Apart from disregarding the equally important tragic component of his music, this curious announcement seems to have the undeclared purpose of trying to persuade the reader that *Rayok* was little more than an amusing act of revenge against some clodhopping *apparatchiki* -- rather than a safety-valve for discharging its composer's scatological revulsion against the entire Soviet system.

Fay's use of Soviet sources comes into sharper contrast when we see what she omits in the way of balancing memoir material. Since she makes only a passing allusion to the Cultural Revolution, there is no cause for her to quote Isaak Schwartz's account of his father's fate at that time, let alone to refer to Shostakovich's role in looking after Schwartz's career or to remind us of the realities of Soviet cultural politics in 1948 as they affected Schwartz and Shostakovich together (Wilson, pp. 219-21). Nor, speaking of 1948, are we directed to, let alone given anything to read from, Marina Sabinina's account of the Moscow faculty reaction to contemporary condemnation of Shostakovich and Prokofiev -- an extraordinary glimpse of the seething resentment felt by non-Party *intelligenty* against Soviet cultural dictatorship (Wilson, pp. 222-4). As for Rostislav Dubinsky's comparably vehement [*Stormy Applause: making music in a worker's state*](#) (1989), it is listed in the Bibliography but nothing from it is cited, despite its status as a prime source for Shostakovich's stand on Soviet anti-Semitism.

Referring to Shostakovich's quotation of the Odessa street-song "Bubliki, Kupitye Bublik" during New Year at Zhukovka in 1966, Fay hazards that he was "in the grip of youthful nostalgia". Four months later, the tune turned up, grotesquely distorted, in the second movement of the Second Cello Concerto, being sinisterly recapitulated in the finale. In a letter to Glikman of April 1966, Shostakovich pleaded ignorance of why he had used the song. Khentova, though, points out that he knew it from "the hungry years of

his youth" when his mother sang it while selling bread rolls to feed her children on Nikolayevsky Street ("Shostakovich and Rostropovich", *DSCH Newsletter*, XVIII, May 1991, p. 21). New Year 1966 was seven weeks after the tenth anniversary of the death of Shostakovich's mother. For him, the original context of the song accounts for the black irony with which it is treated in the Concerto. Clearly "youthful nostalgia" is too bland an interpretation to be appropriate. Why does Fay not give the full story? Similarly, she accepts (p. 240) Shostakovich's statement that his orchestration of two choruses by RAPM composer Alexander Davidenko in 1963 was inspired by a "revived sense of nostalgia for the revolutionary romanticism of his youth when he had heard them performed in 1959" (citing Khentova, *In the World of Shostakovich*, 1996). Fay's belief that Shostakovich was genuinely imbued by "revolutionary romanticism" in his youth explains her willingness to accept this. But surely she is aware of her own note 64 on page 301 recording that Shostakovich chastised Shebalin in 1931 for appeasing RAPM? And what of note 392 on page 221 of *Shostakovich Reconsidered* where Shostakovich tells Shebalin that "[The] Bolt is shit, but compared to Davidenko it is Beethoven"? Why no mention of the fact that the tune parodied by the flute in the Vakhtangov's *Hamlet* (1932) was Davidenko's "They Wanted To Beat Us" (mentioned contemptuously in *Testimony*)? Is what Fay has given us adequate scholarship? Surely this calls for research? Apparently not.

Dull or devious?

Although Fay's colleague Royal S. Brown has praised the dramatic vividness of her style -- "Fay's writing makes one sense more the presence of a witness than a scholar" (*Fanfare*, May/June 2000) -- most critics have found her book deadly dull (e.g., Harlow Robinson in *The New York Times*: "No one can accuse Laurel E. Fay of having an imagination, fertile or otherwise"; Paul Driver in *The Sunday Times*: "An animated worklist -- I cannot recall a biography that seeks so little inwardness with its subject"). This is partly a result of her misplaced -- indeed fundamentally incoherent and at times dishonest -- intent to present a neutral "source". The rest seems to be a matter of simple lack of sensibility.

Fay's Chapter 6 (Crisis: 1936-7) may be, relatively speaking, the closest thing to a truly balanced narrative in *Shostakovich: A Life* -- perhaps because here she finds herself, at last, forced to confront contextual reality in the raw. Nevertheless the effect on her perspective is subliminal and she makes no attempt, with description or eye-witness accounts, to convey the intensity of the background against which Shostakovich was then working. On page 100, she quotes a description of the Leningrad premiere of the Fifth Symphony from the diary of Lyubov Shaporina (as published in *Intimacy and Terror: Soviet Diaries of the 1930s*, edited by Véronique Garros for The New Press in 1995). Apart from Robert Conquest's *Stalin: Breaker of Nations*, this is the only non-musical source Fay cites. (Neither appears in her Bibliography.) The excerpt she gives is fair

enough, albeit that it breaks off before this illuminating sentence: "I ran into [Shostakovich's colleague, the composer Gavriil] Popov. [He said,] 'You know, I've turned into a coward, I'm a coward. I'm afraid of everything, I even burned your letters'." Popov's fear was representative of the general dread disseminated during the Terror, a time when all the rules of normal behaviour were either suspended or inverted. Only a month earlier, Shaporina had confided the following to her diary:

The nausea rises to my throat when I hear how calmly people can say it: He was shot, someone else was shot, shot, shot. The word is always in the air, it resonates through the air. People pronounce the words completely calmly, as though they are saying, "He went to the theater". I think that the real meaning of the word doesn't reach our consciousness -- all we hear is the sound. We don't have a mental image of those people actually dying under the bullets[...] What I can't understand is the cruelty of exiling the wives of people who are arrested. A physicist [Vsevolod Frederiks] is exiled to Vladimir, to a concentration camp, and his wife, Marusya Shostakovich [the composer's elder sister], to Alma-Ata[...] From there they [the wives] are sent out to "the regions", i.e., into the bare desert. [op. cit., p. 352]

Shaporina's diary, with its prevailing tone of traditional intelligentsia resistance to dictatorship and frequent references to brushes with the NKVD, is highly relevant to understanding Shostakovich's life at this time, not least because her own husband was himself an eminent composer: Yuri Shaporin, an enthusiast of *Lady Macbeth*. In normal circumstances, such testimony would be meat and drink to a biographer; not, though for Fay, who is intent on draining all such "third-party" subjectivity out of her narrative, the better to include largely empty selections from Soviet periodicals. Likewise inexplicably missing (even as a citation) from Fay's survey of the evidence regarding the banning/withdrawing of the Fourth Symphony is Venyamin Basner's statement to Elizabeth Wilson (p. 123) concerning Shostakovich's then state of mind:

It is difficult to imagine with what fear and trembling we lived through the Stalinist reign of terror. Dmitri Dmitriyevich was in some ways broken by this terror. The events of 1936 and, in particular, the 1948 Decree took a heavy toll on him. One should therefore discount the articles and statements that Dmitri Dmitriyevich "signed"; we knew that they were meaningless to him, but served as a public shield. His many courageous actions were taken in private. But Shostakovich did also show great courage, particularly during 1936. He would never have cancelled the performance of the Fourth Symphony if it had not been for the heavy-handed hints that were dropped by "the bosses". He had no choice in the matter. After all it wasn't only Dmitri Dmitriyevich that was threatened; it was insinuated that all the performers would live to regret the day if the performance of the symphony went ahead.

Could it be that Fay not only declines to quote this passage but leaves it out of her citations regarding the Fourth Symphony because its references to Shostakovich's by-no-means-exceptional fear -- and certainly exceptional courage -- would have chimed discordantly with her unsympathetic remarks on his moral fibre during his old age? Was Basner's reference to "the bosses" too overt an expression of the intelligentsia's scorn for the Soviet authorities? Or was he disqualified because of his dismissal of the "signed" articles and statements upon which Fay bases so much of her narrative? There is good reason to believe the latter explanation. After all, she neither quotes nor cites Galina Vishnevskaya's comparable remarks about the Fifth Symphony:

Before the Fifth Symphony was allowed to be performed, it was heard by the Party *aktiv* in Leningrad. A few dozen nincompoops together to judge a genius: to make objections, to lecture him, and in general to teach him how to write music. He had to save his newborn from their talons. But how? He tried to deceive them in the most rudimentary way, and succeeded! All he had to do was use other words to describe the huge complex of human passions and suffering that is so apparent in his music -- he described his music to the Party as joyous and optimistic -- and the entire pack dashed off, satisfied. [*Galina*, p. 212]

Quoting this in *Shostakovich Reconsidered* (p. 166), Ho and Feofanov cross-refer to Inna Barsova's observation that Shostakovich would "defend the truth of [his] music with untruthful words about it". Clearly such comments -- puncturing the credibility of everything the composer was presented by the Soviet state as saying or "writing" -- call into question the entire basis of Fay's methodology. Her disinclination to dwell on such scepticism would be defensible had she written a book which frankly set out her personal point of view, but *Shostakovich: A Life* is advanced as a "balanced and objective resource". If she had legitimate reasons to omit such testimony, she should have offered explanations, case by case, in a properly argued foreword (instead of the brief litany of preference and prejudice which constitutes her Introduction). Perhaps she will plead limitations of space. Yet, if she has room to refer to the "chilling new significance" acquired by *From Jewish Folk Poetry* in January 1953 (as a result of the "Doctors' Plot"), why does she neglect to take this opportunity to mention Abraam Gozenpud's claim that Shostakovich tried to get the song-cycle sanctioned for public performance via a Composers' Union audition two months before Stalin's death?:

Shostakovich first showed his cycle *From Jewish Folk Poetry* at the Moscow Union of Composers early in 1953, just after the news bulletin in the press had appeared denouncing the Doctors. This provoked immediate reaction from many well-known and famous persons demanding punishment of the "murderers in white coats" (who were mostly Jews). Therefore, the performance of this cycle at that time was an act of great

civic courage. Shostakovich had to overcome much resistance from the officials responsible for the arts eventually to get permission for a public performance. [Wilson, op. cit., p. 238]

Gozenpud, a friend of Shostakovich's colleague Vissarion Shebalin, was introduced to Shostakovich in 1934 by another close friend, Ivan Sollertinsky. How "close" to Shostakovich could a witness be? Yet he is entirely absent from Fay's book, as is any reference to the Composers' Union audition of *From Jewish Folk Poetry* in January 1953. (Abraam Gozenpud appears in Larry Weinstein's film [The War Symphonies](#).)

Ignoring the witnesses

We have seen that Fay's rejection of any link between the Eleventh Symphony and the Hungarian Uprising of 1956 depends on squarely ignoring testimony to the contrary. In DSCH 12, the composer's third wife Irina adds her voice to what, for Fay, is the opposition on this issue; yet she also disregards relevant material from another source which she cites elsewhere. In her diary for 27th October 1956 (Wilson, p. 269), Flora Litvinova records that Shostakovich quickly asked for the latest BBC news: "What's happening in Budapest? And Poland? The empire is falling apart at the seams. It always happens -- the fist must be tightly clenched -- it's enough for it to relax just a little for the empire to crack. And only Stalin was capable of that." Does this not bear on the issue of Shostakovich's intentions in the Eleventh Symphony? Similarly, it appears that, four years before he was finally "blackmailed" into joining the Communist Party (Fay, p. 218), Shostakovich was already having his arm twisted to this end. Litvinova's same diary entry for 27th October 1956 continues: "Knowing his views, I could not bear to hear that he intended to join the Party... We had been told how pressure had been exerted on him from certain quarters, but we did not know if this was so for sure, and we hardly dared to ask him outright." Litvinova goes on to recount the Picasso anecdote (Wilson, pp. 271-2), leading to Shostakovich's outburst "No, communism is impossible". Despite the relevance of these utterances to her consideration of Shostakovich's supposedly "puzzling" enrollment into the Communist Party, Fay quotes only this final phrase.

Again and again, "third-party" testimony is either ignored, not quoted in verbatim extracts, or admitted only as citations in Fay's Notes. Yevgeny Mravinsky's revealing remarks on the Fifth and Ninth symphonies (preserved by Yakov Milkis; cf. Wilson, p. 315), remain unrevealed by Fay. Grigori Kozintsev's essential "Reflections on the Thirteenth Symphony" (Wilson, pp. 372-4) is not even cited. (This is excerpted from Volume II of Kozintsev's *Complete Works*, published in 1982; Fay's Bibliography lists only a short article by him from a 1990 issue of *Sovetskaya Muzika*.) Fyodor Druzhinin's comparably insightful -- and often scathing -- observations in his piece written for Elizabeth Wilson's

book are ignored, possibly because Fay feels that they are unreliable due to elapsed time (see note 91 on p. 346), though there is no obvious reason for her to assume this. The fascinating series of "short stories" which Marina Sabinina likewise wrote for Wilson go barely acknowledged, let alone quoted, and do not appear under the author's entry in Fay's Bibliography. (In particular, one notes the absence of reference to Sabinina's story of Shostakovich's mockery of careerist musicologists, given by Wilson on her pages 225-6.) Nikolai Karetnikov's similar "novellas", two of which were translated by Rosamund Bartlett for *Tempo* in 1990 (No. 173), are cited but not listed in the Bibliography; nor, it seems, has Fay's research extended to learning anything more about the approximately 100 other such sardonic vignettes of Soviet musical life which Karetnikov had written by his death in 1994.

In the same way, very little from Daniel Zhitomirsky's articles in *Daugava* (1990) or *Muzikal'naya Akademiya* (1993) is cited, even though what he has to say about the Eighth and Ninth symphonies and Shostakovich's practice of subcontracting articles is of more than peripheral interest. None of the three documents involving Kyrill Kondrashin reproduced in *Shostakovich Reconsidered* (pp. 507-520) is even listed in Fay's Bibliography, let alone quoted, despite the fact that one of these texts offers a detailed account of the trials attending the premiere of the Thirteenth Symphony. The same goes for Maxim Shostakovich's interviews since defecting, all of which are germane to the *Testimony* issue and none of which is listed. One, though, is quoted in note 14 on page 327: an article by Chris Pasles in the *Los Angeles Times* in which Maxim comments on the statement in *Testimony* about the scherzo in the Tenth Symphony: "Father never said it was a portrait of Stalin." The motive for quoting this (and none of Maxim's many openly favourable statements about *Testimony* and Solomon Volkov) is clear enough. For the sake of balance, though, we might have expected a quotation from, or reference to, a DSCH interview with Kurt Sanderling:

[Maxim] would know less than the others. To him, [Shostakovich] said the least, for a very simple reason. You see, the education of children under a dictatorship is a very complicated affair. On the one hand, you have to teach them to be critical of what is happening, politically speaking, and on the other hand you have to make them understand that one has to be careful when discussing such matters. And I think that he told him a lot less than he told, for example, his friends, because quite simply he didn't want to put him in any danger. [*DSCH Journal* No. 6 (Winter 1996)]

Neither Sanderling, a conductor who worked with Mravinsky and Kondrashin, nor his conductor son Thomas (who contributes to Elizabeth Wilson's book), appear in Fay's Index, while *DSCH Journal* is listed only generically in her Bibliography, none of its individual articles being mentioned. From the strictly musicological point of view, Fay's

Bibliography is one of the more serviceable parts of her book, especially for Russian-language publications. She omits Frans C. Lemaire's *La musique du XXe siècle en Russie* (Fayard, 1994) and gives an incorrect date for Hilmar Schmalenberg's *Schostakowitsch in Deutschland* (1998, rather than 1988), but, apart from the other omissions listed earlier, her list will be useful to future researchers. The only puzzle is why, since she lists separately the articles from the 1997 all-Shostakovich issue of *Muzikal'naya Akademiya*, she fails to list the introductory piece by Mark Aranovsky, "[The Dissident](#)". Or perhaps this is not so puzzling. Fay, after all, has no truck with the revisionist view of Shostakovich as a long-term "secret dissident". Speaking to Martin Kettle in *The Guardian*, she referred to the proponents of this view (which, to date, includes around fifty Russians who knew Shostakovich) in scornful terms: "They want to read his music as encoded dissidence. I don't[...] I don't automatically assume that his 'Soviet' music is ironic. I allow that he might have been serious."

Naturally, Shostakovich was serious about a great many things in his music; indeed, it would be bizarre to suggest that he was not also serious in most of his ironies. Fay's distinction between "serious" and "ironic" is extraordinarily unsophisticated -- yet we must bear in mind that this is a commentator who fails to detect the satire in the Ninth Symphony and (apparently) in large tracts of Shostakovich's letters to Isaak Glikman. Possibly Fay's own "seriousness" prevents her from accurately hearing most of Shostakovich's music, wherein tragic-satiric ambiguity is virtually incessant. Such solemnity might dispose her to ignore those aspects of Shostakovich's character of which she does not approve, such as his brilliant gift for mimicry, attested to by Marina Sabinina (Wilson, p. 225), Krzysztof Meyer (ibid, p. 463) and Flora Litvinova (ibid, p. 166). Needless to say, none of these passages is referred to in *Shostakovich: A Life* -- which rather calls into question the title of the book. Perhaps more accurate would have been *Shostakovich: A Dead Assemblage of "Facts" and "Circumstances" Unreliably Deployed, Punctuated by Significant Omissions, and Padded with Material Spuriously Attributed to the Composer by Unscrupulous Soviet Propagandists*. For if a book is subtitled "A Life", indicating biographical aspirations of some kind, we are within our rights to expect to acquire from its pages a living impression of its subject, rather than a sort of cardboard cut-out which mysteriously swings this way and that according to which category of source is being cited. A biography demands witnesses: people who knew the subject and, with their memories, can bring him or her alive.

Irony not admitted

For example, Fay, relating the "atmosphere of uncertainty following Khrushchev's ouster [sic] from power in mid-December 1964", adds that "Shostakovich's reported reaction to this news was the rhetorical question: 'Now we will most certainly enjoy an even better

life?" Her citation is to Sergei Slonimsky as given by Wilson (p. 381):

It was an autumn day in 1964. In the morning it was broadcast on the radio that Nikita Sergeyeovich Khrushchev had been dismissed from all his posts and duties. Later on that day I met Shostakovich on Sofiya Perovskaya Street, where his sister lived, almost next door to my home. His lips were pursed in a barely discernible ironic smile. "Well, Sergei Mikhailovich, now we will most certainly enjoy an even better life?" I chuckled out loud, and Dmitri Dmitriyevich's smile broke into a broad grin, virtually baring his teeth.

Which conveys more of the living Shostakovich: Slonimsky's "barely discernible ironic smile" breaking into "a broad grin, virtually baring his teeth" -- or Fay's blank "rhetorical question"? Her footnote convolutedly alludes to "the composer's almost identical response to the same question posed by someone else" (?), but fails to assist the reader by explaining that Shostakovich was referring to Stalin's infamous slogan of the 1930s, "Life has become better, life has become happier" -- or that this was one of his most frequent "serious ironies", as, for example, his pupil Karen Khachaturian records on page 185 of Elizabeth Wilson's book. Iosif Stalin, however, is a remotely enigmatic presence in Fay's book, while Karen Khachaturian does not even make it into her Index. Does she genuinely imagine that her précis tells us as much about her subject as Slonimsky's anecdote? Was she trying to avoid verbatim quotation so as not to incur permission fees? They can, after all, mount up. Or was she attempting to conceal the real -- satirical, ironic, bitingly disaffected -- Shostakovich from our view?

Although nearly everyone who encountered Shostakovich was impressed by both his singular intelligence and his "barely discernible" irony, Fay quotes nobody to this effect, seemingly going out of her way not to recognise these qualities in her subject. Thus, while she cites Robert Craft's account of the meeting between Shostakovich and Stravinsky in 1962, she does not refer to, let alone quote, Craft's incisive portrait of Shostakovich (Wilson, p. 376). On the contrary, she seizes every chance to play on the composer's "contradictions", "cowardice", and alleged intellectual blunders (such as "favoring the folklore of the 'wrong' ethnic group" in *From Jewish Folk Poetry*). Her readers could be forgiven for coming to the conclusion that this author does not like Shostakovich very much. Indeed, he does come across as unpleasant at certain points, if only by omission of compensatory factors. Hence, mention is made of his work for the NKVD Song and Dance Ensemble (pp. 134, 140), but no word is reported of Yuri Lyubimov's explanation for the composer's proximity to the antics of this company of thugs (Wilson, pp. 181-2). Why? Perhaps because doing so might lead Fay's readers to another story which Lyubimov relates (and which she also omits):

People close to him told me that he used to carry a briefcase with a change of underwear and a toothbrush in constant expectation of arrest. Many

people did that. It is also recounted how he waited for his arrest at night out on the landing by the lift, so that at least his family wouldn't be disturbed if they came to get him. Many people went into hiding and survived, but Shostakovich never got over the trauma of those days. [Wilson, op. cit., p. 183.]

To refer to this anecdote would, in turn, bring the reader to Lyubimov's analysis of Shostakovich's mind -- far from that of the unfathomable trimmer Fay envisages:

For all his nervousness and defencelessness, Shostakovich was a caustic man. His table talk was full of sarcasm. He liked his drink and, when in his cups, revealed his wit and irony. His mind was similar to Zoshchenko's. It's not for nothing that he counted Zoshchenko, Sollertinsky and Erdman amongst his friends. His letters were written with "English humour", but in the style of "a Soviet communal apartment" [probably a reference to Zoshchenko's story *Nervous People* -- I.M.]. Later on his nervousness assumed the character of panic, a kind of conditioned reflex. He used to say: "I'd sign anything even if they hand it to me upside down. All I want is to be left alone." I think he was only pretending he didn't care. He knew what it implied when he signed such letters and deep down he suffered. Perhaps he was afraid for his family, especially for his son whom he dearly loved. He was always ready to admit his "mistakes" ("Yes, yes, yes, I've been wrong. Of course, I'll write an operetta which the People will easily understand."), but I think that this was done cynically and in cold blood. Akhmatova took the same line when talking to foreigners [and] was able to keep going after a fashion. Shostakovich, however, was a man with exposed nerves and a keen perception. The fact that he was more vulnerable and receptive than other people was no doubt an important feature of his genius. [Wilson, op. cit., p. 183.]

We need rehearse no more "small 't' testimony" from Elizabeth Wilson's book to remind us how formidably consistent is the cumulative picture of Shostakovich conveyed in it. With its verbatim interview and memoir material, *Shostakovich: A Life Remembered* offers us an incomparably more three-dimensional image of its hero than the paraphrases, citations, and quotations from Soviet sources given in *Shostakovich: A Life*. Moreover, Wilson's linking narrative essentially follows the revisionist line set out in *The New Shostakovich* and confirmed in *Shostakovich Reconsidered*. (It's also worth noting that, in a Radio 3 discussion of *Shostakovich Reconsidered*, Anthony Briggs referred to *Testimony* as "written right in the mode of the great Russian satirists of the 20th century: Zoshchenko, and Ilf and Petrov".)

Blurring the picture

The coherent consistency of *Shostakovich: A Life Remembered* flies in the face of anti-revisionist and pseudo-centric suggestions that the composer is an insoluble enigma whose words and actions must always remain beyond final interpretation, or that the nature of the Soviet context makes it innately impossible to judge with any certainty anything or anyone involved with it. *Shostakovich: A Life*, on the other hand, blurs the picture by trying to rewind our knowledge of this subject back to the days of *About Himself and His Times*, before all the post-1990 memoir and interview material began to pour out of Russia. Of such testimony from friends and acquaintances of Shostakovich, Fay has frankly admitted that she doesn't want "to become compromised by having them tell me their stories and then being obliged somehow to retell them" (AMS national meeting, 1995). Has a biographer ever made a stranger statement? What would be "compromised" by considering what she calls "third-party" statements or by doing some original interviews of her own? The answer is simple: her own preconceptions -- were these to be thereby revealed as unjustified or inappropriate. Yet this biographer will not have her preconceptions confounded -- to the extent of ignoring everything and everyone that contradicts them. Hence (at the same AMS national meeting) she dismissed *Testimony* as "the deathbed memoirs of a sick and embittered old man which poses only a very slight impediment, really nothing more than a nuisance". Are the people she disagrees with -- the ones who "aren't really interested in Shostakovich" -- also nuisances and impediments to the ideas she formed twenty years ago and will not now relinquish?

What are Fay's "ideas", her preconceptions? At least some of them appear to be left-wing in cast. In order to answer charges of right-wing prejudice, the present writer has, on more than one occasion, placed his left-of-centre social democratic leanings on record. Although we know nothing of Fay's politics, it is reasonable to assume that she is, at least, not a Republican; or, at any rate, was not of that persuasion when she was given access to the Soviet archives, since her political background would certainly have been vetted for any "hostile" tendencies. There are one or two telltale signs of a pro-communist attitude in *Shostakovich: A Life*. For example, there is the straightfaced reference on page 97 to "the laxness of the security service in exposing the Trotskyite-Zinovyevite conspiracy" -- a passage which might have been copied out of a Stalinist history book (or perhaps a contemporary edition of *Pravda*). Even more curious is Fay's description (p. 62) of the Polka from *The Golden Age* as "a satirical vignette of Western bourgeois prattle about disarmament and world peace". The phrase "Western bourgeois prattle" comes directly from the Communist Party lexicon. In 1928-32, Stalin, newly engaged in his policy of Socialism in One Country, was intent on building up the USSR's military might. Having used a non-existent war-scare in 1927 to oust his internationalist rivals (Trotsky, Zinoviev), he focused his European policy on a grass-roots "peace conspiracy" organised by Soviet agents abroad, whilst at home cultivating anti-Western suspicion and fostering popular cynicism towards "bourgeois" (government-level) peace initiatives at the Geneva

Conference. (As soon as Hitler's accession made it prudent to do so, Stalin reversed his policy and joined the League of Nations in 1934.) The Polka in *The Golden Age* authentically reflects this state-cultivated cynicism. However, "bourgeois prattle" is scarcely the sort of phrase one would anticipate from a soberly detached academic.

Fay's concept of Shostakovich as a Faithful Servant of the state, while seemingly somewhat dented by post-1990 testimony to the contrary, nonetheless survives both implicitly and explicitly in her narrative -- receding during her effective admissions that Shostakovich's "offstage" behaviour and opinions are of a kind which (to put it mildly) fails to accord with such a theory, but returning elsewhere in the form of deviously weighted assessments and uncritical recourse to Soviet documentation. On the question of its subject's orientation towards the Soviet Communist regime, *Shostakovich: A Life* is so muddled and contradictory that readers can be forgiven for wondering where the author stands. In one paragraph, Shostakovich behaves like a secret dissident, in the next he appears as a dutiful conformist (the difference consisting in the sources cited: in the former, the "small 't' testimony" of his friends, in the latter the embalmed image offered in official Soviet sources). What is clear is that Fay has little sympathy for Shostakovich's predicament and seeks to paint him in an unfavourable light whenever this can be brought off. One is left wondering if, by any chance, the cause of this is his failure to live up to her political expectations?

A dim view of Shostakovich

Fay's account (pp. 204-5) of the manoeuvres in 1958 regarding the 1948 Resolution on "Formalism in Music" refers to Sabinina's memoir (Wilson, pp. 293-5), but with a curious laconicism: "Shostakovich told [Sabinina] that he had been approached by a high official exploring the possibility of 'correcting' the 1948 resolution (she vividly describes the composer's incensed response to the very notion)." A minor ambiguity arises here in that Fay fails to make clear that Shostakovich wanted the Resolution revoked rather than corrected. More pointedly, by merely citing Wilson, she avoids having to refer to Sabinina's shocking account of Shostakovich "shrieking" about his humiliation at being forced to read a piece of "disgusting, idiotic nonsense concocted by some nobody" at the Composers' Union in 1948. Instead, Fay draws our attention to his public response to the debate on the Resolution on 11th June 1958, which she describes as "stiff and strangely impersonal". Since almost all of his speeches, being written by *apparatchiki*, were impersonal, the point of this aside is obscure. Referring to Vishnevskaya's account of Shostakovich's reaction to the subsequent Resolution on "Correcting Mistakes Made in Evaluating the Work of Leading Composers", Fay describes him as "imperiously" summoning Vishnevskaya and Rostropovich to his apartment to celebrate with drinks. Here is the passage in Vishnevskaya's book:

Dmitri Dmitriyevich called us at home. "Galya, Slava! Come right away! Right away!" We rushed to his place on Kutuzovsky Prospekt. He was incredibly overwrought and ran about the apartment. We had scarcely managed to take off our coats as he ushered us into the dining room. "You read it?" we asked. "I read it. Oh yes, I read it... I've been waiting and waiting for you so we can have a drink. I want to drink, to drink!" He poured vodka into the tumblers, and all but shouted, "Well, Slava and Galya, let's drink to the great historical decree 'On Abrogating the Great Historical Decree'." [*Galina*, p. 244]

Clearly Shostakovich was beside himself at the news, virtually out of control with discharging tension and urgently in need of close friends to be with him. Why then does Fay describe his invitation to Vishnevskaya and Rostropovich as "imperious"? Is she unaware that the word is pejorative -- or is this merely a dig against a man she basically dislikes? This impression grows with her account of the events following Rostropovich's letter (Vishnevskaya, *Galina*, pp. 488-91) about Solzhenitsyn in 1970:

In a letter reporting the reaction of prominent musicians to Rostropovich's deed, an official of the Ministry of Culture advised the Central Committee that, in conversation, Shostakovich had denounced Rostropovich's act in no uncertain terms, taking particular exception to the latter's invocation of his own name and the criticism his music had been subjected to in years past. His words were quoted: "We must do everything possible to save Slava, he is our pride, our country made his name and his world fame." Shostakovich even volunteered to go to West Germany, where Rostropovich was then on tour, to talk to him, but quickly retracted the offer on account of his ill health. His views were deemed to be in complete accord with the "correct, Party position" on the matter. [p. 269]

In quoting this document (given in Alla Bogdanova's *Muzika i vlast': poststalinskiy period* [*Music and Power in the Post-Stalinist Period*], 1995), Fay adds a footnote:

To the same official, Shostakovich also implicated Vishnevskaya for having attempted to drag him, at one time, into the scandal over "hitches" with the performance of the *Satires* on texts of Chyorny. Precisely which "hitches" are not identified. In her memoirs, Vishnevskaya accentuates the seditious aspect of the *Satires*, claiming that Shostakovich worried initially that the authorities would not permit the work to be performed and that, following the premiere, a planned television transmission of the cycle did not take place because Vishnevskaya and Rostropovich refused to sanction cuts in the cycle. [p. 342, no. 20]

As we have seen, Shostakovich composed *Satires* at a time (Spring 1960) when he ought really to have been writing the Twelfth Symphony for the 90th anniversary of Lenin's birth that April (or, if not, then for the October celebrations later in the year). This was the period in which he was being "blackmailed" to join the Party. He seems then to have been in a variable mood, swinging between self-assertion (*Satires*) and self-destruction (his next work was his "musical suicide note": the Eighth Quartet). (Cf *Shostakovich Reconsidered*, pp. 710-720.) Having finished the cycle, he appears to have decided that the dissent in parts of it was too obvious to be allowable. In other words (perhaps as a means of releasing inner tension brought on by his reluctance to start on his Lenin piece), he may have given himself licence to express his feelings in *Satires* to a degree that overstepped the mark (much like the first draft of the Twelfth Symphony, begun thereafter using material from the cycle). Vishnevskaya describes getting around this by suggesting the title *Pictures of the Past* in order to imply -- as with *Lady Macbeth* -- that the song-cycle referred to what Soviet phraseology referred to as "the nightmare world of Tsarist Russia". According to Vishnevskaya, those in the audience at the premiere of *Satires* (22nd February 1961) greeted it with expectant tension followed by such vociferous applause that the work had to be repeated twice.

In claiming that Vishnevskaya "accentuates the seditious aspect of the *Satires*", Fay insinuates that this aspect might otherwise be difficult to detect. This is false. When it came to performing the cycle on Moscow television -- presumably the *apparat* hadn't vetted what must have sounded, from its title, like a harmless enough work -- the producer read the text of "Our Posterity" ("Descendants"), panicked, and asked Vishnevskaya and Rostropovich if the song could be cut. They bluffed that this was impossible. The producer "ran off", didn't come back and, after a while, they put on their coats and went home. Thereafter, *Satires* remained unpublished till 1964 and unperformed till the 1970s. This comic non-event amounts to the aforesaid "scandal over 'hitches' with the performance" of the work. If Shostakovich was annoyed with Vishnevskaya for having attempted to "drag" him into this "scandal", he showed no sign of it at the time. On the contrary, having finally flogged himself into writing an "allowable" version of the Twelfth Symphony, he turned to Mussorgsky's *Songs and Dances of Death*, despatching his orchestration straight to its dedicatee: Vishnevskaya.

Friends and foes

If dedications are anything to go by, Vishnevskaya and Rostropovich were dearer to Shostakovich than anyone after his first wife Nina. She received four dedications: *Six Romances on Japanese Poems*, *Lady Macbeth of Mtsensk*, "O Wert Thou in the Cauld Blast" (the second of the *Six Romances on Verses by British Poets*), and the Seventh Quartet. Vishnevskaya received three: *Satires*, *Songs and Dances of Death*, and the Blok

cycle of 1967. Rostropovich also received three: the two cello concertos and the reorchestration of Schuman's Cello Concerto. Shostakovich remained in close contact with Rostropovich and Vishnevskaya until their forced departure from the USSR in 1974, living next door to them at Zhukovka and swapping hospitality at every opportunity. When the couple left the country (officially on a two-year concert tour of the West), he supposedly wept, asking them "In whose hands are you leaving me to die?" What, then, are we to make of Shostakovich's ostensible betrayal of his friends in 1970? Was he really the duplicitous coward Fay appears to think he was?

What Fay quotes is a letter to the Central Committee from an official of the Ministry of Culture reporting the "reaction" of prominent musicians to Rostropovich's letter. The name of the official is not given. Conceivably, it is irrelevant. Rostropovich's letter -- posted to *Pravda*, *Izvestiya*, *Liternaturnaya gazeta*, and *Sovetskaya kultura* (none of which accepted it) -- is extremely outspoken: the most explicit criticism of the repression of Soviet artists made in the USSR until this date. As such, it was a sharp blow to Soviet prestige when it leaked to the West and was published by *The New York Times* and by *The Times* in London. As a result of Rostropovich's "anti-Soviet" letter, a Moscow studio film on Vishnevskaya was cancelled, her name and Rostropovich's were removed from concert posters and record credits, and the KGB began a frightening campaign of harassment, just as she had warned her husband. If anyone is in doubt as to how extreme the couple's predicament became or how much fear there was abroad at that time (even among mid-level *apparatchiki*), they should read Vishnevskaya's account of what followed (*Galina*, pp. 394ff). In this taut context, the Ministry of Culture *apparatchik* who reported to the Central Committee would have been left in no doubt that he was expected to obtain material for a denunciation.

Soviet reality

Based on typical KGB transcripts published in the West, it is possible to make a fair deduction of what happened when the *apparatchik* visited Shostakovich late in 1970. Because Rostropovich, ignoring his wife's entreaties that he destroy his letter, had posted it impulsively en route to the airport for a tour of West Germany, it is highly unlikely that Shostakovich had read it until his visitor handed it to him. His discomfort at finding his own confrontations with the Soviet state described therein at greater length than those of the letter's subject, Solzhenitsyn, must have been considerable. Certainly, had Rostropovich shown him the letter before posting it, Shostakovich would have asked him to leave him out of it, or at least tone the whole thing down. He therefore doubtless reacted with alarm. The *apparatchik's* first question would have been: "Did you sanction this?" Shostakovich -- facing a situation which had caused Vishnevskaya to blanch and try by every means she could think of to talk her husband out of it -- had only one choice:

plead that he hadn't given permission for these controversial references to his career and would not have done so if asked.

The *apparatchik*, probably well known to him, may then have resorted to cunning rather than threat, shaking his head over the deep trouble Rostropovich was now in. Already stricken with anxiety, Shostakovich would have replied, partly to his visitor, partly to Irina, "We must do everything possible to save Slava, he is our pride", and other words in this vein (no doubt including "and, besides, a dear friend"). The more orthodox phrase "our country made his name and his world fame" would have been added by the *apparatchik* in his report to the Central Committee, following the usual form. As for his impromptu offer to go to West Germany and talk to Rostropovich, this merely attests to the warmth which Shostakovich, then far too ill to travel, felt towards his friend. The fact that his views were deemed to be "in complete accord with the 'correct, Party position' on the matter" need have been nothing more than coincidental, and in all probability constituted a gloss added by the *apparatchik*, who knew he was expected to come up with such stuff or suffer a reprimand for failure.

As for "implicating" Vishnevskaya, this must represent a desperate attempt by the *apparatchik* to find something to smear her with too, since this was surely part of his mandated mission. There is no sign whatever that Shostakovich bore any animosity towards her over the question of the television broadcast of *Satires*; on the contrary, he stayed close friends with her and kept writing and dedicating music to her. Only if official "requirements" had been in deadly earnest would such a rank lie about her have been wrung out of Shostakovich. Almost certainly the *apparatchik* made this up, knowing that, if obliged to go back to Shostakovich and get it in writing, he could either try to frighten the composer into complying or, if that didn't work, report to his masters that Shostakovich now denied ever having said it. But he didn't have to go back to obtain a signed statement. He didn't even have to take a prepared letter of denunciation to Shostakovich and get him to sign that. No denunciation appeared. Instead, Rostropovich and Vishnevskaya simply began to find their work outlets and privileges dwindling in inverse proportion to the increase in overt surveillance by the KGB. Evidently "the bosses" decided that the answer in this case was revenge by stealth, rather than adding to an international controversy over the USSR's reaction to Solzhenitsyn's award of the Nobel Prize and Rostropovich's rash letter about this.

And this is the inevitable nadir of Fay's indefensible methodology. To offer the letter of an anonymous *apparatchik* as evidence of Shostakovich's pusillanimity -- without an attempt at exegesis or a simple exposition of obvious extenuating circumstances such as is set out here -- is grotesquely irresponsible pseudo-scholarship. She may defend herself by claiming that she is simply providing an objective record of "the circumstances of Shostakovich's life" -- but, as has been shown over and over again in this review, such a

claim is hopelessly hollow. Western readers, by and large, are virgins when it comes to intercourse with "Soviet reality": they need experienced guidance in distinguishing the harmless from the predatory. Fay's habit of strewing her pages with unchaperoned quotations from innately unwholesome Soviet sources makes the reader's progress all the more perilous. Ten pages before her passage on the *apparatchik's* letter, she tells us that Shostakovich "continued to lecture[...] on the dangers of 'avant-gardism', identified as an anti-humanistic, anti-realistic direction promoted by a narrow clique of Western musicians". The citation is to *Pravda*, 14th May 1968. Perhaps Fay sincerely believes that Shostakovich was capable of thundering out such recitals of clunking Soviet invective. If she does, it is her duty as a biographer to make some minimal attempt to reconcile this with the extensive evidence *in his own hand* that he also constantly derided such official verbiage. To stand aside will not do -- and, in any case, to describe Shostakovich as "lecturing" on "anti-humanistic, anti-realistic cliques" can hardly be called standing aside. And precisely the same applies to her slanted presentation of Shostakovich's relationship with Vishnevskaya and Rostropovich. To offer the *apparatchik's* letter without authorial comment and then to report Shostakovich weeping at his friends' departure from the USSR in 1974 (p. 279) is to bequeath readers a prejudicial botch.

Shostakovich as anti-hero

By contrast with her blatantly biased coverage of the "Rostropovich letter" affair, Fay seems, at first glance, to be fair in her account of events surrounding Shostakovich's signing of a letter against the physicist Andrey Sakharov in *Pravda*, 3rd September 1973. Portentously entitled "He Disgraces the Calling of a Citizen", this notorious missive was presented as emanating from "twelve musicians", among whom, apart from Shostakovich, were his former students Georgiy Sviridov and Kara Karayev, his friend Aram Khachaturian and Khachaturian's former student Andrey Eshpai, Rodion Shchedrin, and the inevitable Dmitri Kabalevsky -- which is to say: every leading composer of the time was rounded up to sign. Shostakovich, however, was the important one so far as the Soviet audience was concerned, being the country's senior musical figure. Ignoring the fact that his colleagues had knuckled under just as ignominiously, many *intelligently* considered Shostakovich's failure to make a stand either inexplicable or self-evidently despicable. Fay notes that Irina Antonovna has called into question whether her husband physically signed the letter; apart from that, she accurately reports the tenor of *intelligently* sentiment about Shostakovich's "denunciation" of Sakharov. However, her summing-up is unbalanced; indeed, it is so fatally insensitive as to undermine her right to represent herself as a biographer:

A few months after the Sakharov incident, Shostakovich directed Tishchenko to reread Chekhov's "Ward No. 6" in order to get a clear sense

of his self-image: "When I read in that story about Andrey Yefimovich Ragin, it seems to me I am reading memoirs about myself. This especially concerns the description of the receiving of patients, or when he signs 'blatantly falsified accounts', or when he 'thinks'... and to a great deal else." Shostakovich's identification with Chekhov's Dr Ragin, an anti-hero, a non-resister to evil by constitution and conviction was far from flattering.

Fay's final sentence calls into doubt whether she has actually read Chekhov's story; if she had, one must assume that she would have spotted the misprint(?) "receiving" in her translation of Shostakovich's letter. What Ragin does is *deceive* his patients, not "receive" them (his deception consisting of benignly pretending that any doctor could adequately treat forty patients in one day). But what is quite astounding is that any biographer of Shostakovich could read "Ward No. 6" and accept, without query, that he could have considered himself akin to the facile bourgeois quietist Dr Ragin.

The complacent Dr Ragin

Symbolic on several levels, Chekhov's tale contrasts Ragin, a passively introspective small-town doctor with a high-minded philosophy of tepid indifference, against the paranoid Ivan Dmitrich, an inmate of his hospital's mental ward (No. 6). Dmitrich informs Ragin that his lofty allusions to Marcus Aurelius mask a sheltered lack of experience: "No one has laid a finger on you all your life, no one has scared you nor beaten you." Ragin complacently responds: "The wise man, or simply the reflecting, thoughtful man, is distinguished precisely by his contempt for suffering; he is always contented and surprised at nothing." Dmitrich snaps back: "Then I am an idiot, since I suffer and am discontented and surprised at the baseness of mankind." It is fair to ask which, if either, of these characters resembles the Shostakovich of *Testimony* -- or, indeed, the Shostakovich of the letters to Glikman and so much of the "small 't' testimony" of Wilson's book. The Shostakovich revealed in these sources is all too aware of "the baseness of mankind" and, while cynical about it in one part of him, nonetheless still "surprised" about it in another, enduringly idealistic, part. As for being scared and coerced by force, Shostakovich had more in common with Dmitrich than Ragin.

The qualities in himself which Shostakovich felt resembled those of Dr Ragin are clear (and, again, confirmed in the sources mentioned above): his prevarication, his solitary brooding on mortality, his guilty inability to refuse any request or demand:

Andrey Yefimitch loved intelligence and honesty intensely, but he had no strength of will nor belief in his right to organize an intelligent and honest life about him. He was absolutely unable to give orders, to forbid things,

and to insist. It seemed as though he had taken a vow never to raise his voice and never to make use of the imperative. It was difficult for him to say "Fetch" or "Bring"; when he wanted his meals he would cough hesitatingly and say to the cook, "How about tea?..." or "How about dinner?..." [...] When Andrey Yefimitch was deceived or flattered, or accounts he knew to be cooked were brought him to sign, he would turn as red as a crab and feel guilty, but yet he would sign the accounts. When the patients complained to him of being hungry or of the roughness of the nurses, he would be confused and mutter guiltily: "Very well, very well, I will go into it later... Most likely there is some misunderstanding..." [translated by Constance Garnett]

The rest of Ragin's qualities -- his bland lack of empathy with the suffering of others, his cultured but shallow reflections on existence, his etiolated conscience, his absence of irony -- bear no resemblance whatever to Shostakovich as we know him from his music alone, let alone from the sources aforementioned. As to Fay's description of Ragin/Shostakovich as "a non-resister to evil by constitution and conviction", there is no reference to this in Chekhov's character who, as a dreamy man living in the prototypical boring town of 19th-century Russian literature, never encounters evil (unless at the end of the story when he ends up in his own mental ward). More to the point, how can such an image of limp quietism be considered a just summary of a composer whose music is one sustained expression of tormented moral resistance to an evil which never ceased to surround him throughout his life? The truth is that Shostakovich resembles Chekhov's Dr Ragin in some ways; in others, not at all. And the answer to the question of why he should have identified himself so wholly with Ragin in his letter to Tishchenko is simple: it represented what he happened to feel *at that moment*, having been manipulated into allowing his name to be added to the letter denouncing Andrey Sakharov. Driven in on himself, convulsed with guilt and horror at the reactions of those who (undistinguished by genius and therefore safe in their lack of comparable cultural prominence) despised him for his weakness, he had retreated to his inner world of 19th-century literature, chanced to reread "Ward No. 6" and, determined to do self-flagellatory penance, decided, absurdly, that he was Dr Andrey Yefimitch Ragin. Russians would recognise this as a "Dostoyevskyan" reflex. (Posing as an expert in these matters, Alex Ross naively swallows the "Ragin theory" of Shostakovich in his article in *The New Yorker*, 20th March 2000.)

The basic biographical requirement: empathy

During periods like the months following the Sakharov letter, Shostakovich was all alone; and, when we are all alone, our sense of proportion and perspective begins to shrink. In a

discussion of Shostakovich's mood-swings and suicidal tendencies (*Shostakovich Reconsidered*, pp. 710-714), I point out that when he was low and isolated, he seemed to himself to be a despicable coward; whereas, energised by interaction with others in a cause he believed in, he could just as easily act with extraordinary bravery. As for the opinion of others concerning his "cowardice" (an opinion which Fay appears to share), there is but one honest reply: judge not that ye be not judged. Only one man Shostakovich ever knew had the right to call him a coward, even if that right was vitiated by an iron indifference to what the composer had suffered in his life. That man was Alexander Solzhenitsyn; and, to someone as tough as him, anyone who hadn't been in the Gulag must have seemed like a child. As Fay observes, Solzhenitsyn called Shostakovich "a shackled genius... a wounded thing" when the latter failed to sign his letter of protest against the Soviet invasion of Czechoslovakia in 1968. But Shostakovich was not alone in shying away from such confrontational boldness: no one else signed Solzhenitsyn's letter and he had to drop the plan. Then 50, he led the lean life of a literary guerrilla. Vishnevskaya's account (pp. 414-20) of his grimly brutal sangfroid over the Alekseyeva affair gives an idea of how forceful a presence he was around that time. By contrast, Shostakovich, then 62, was a nerve-shredded chain-smoker, already terminally ill.

Fay quotes Rostropovich's report of Shostakovich in conversation about signing the Sakharov letter: "I'm very weak, ... the only place where I can still take a stroll is around my country house. Unfortunately, that's where Sakharov sometimes walks. How could I look him in the eye if my signature is put at the bottom of this letter?" The original passage (from *Mstislav Rostropovich and Galina Vishnevskaya: Russia, Music, and Liberty: Conversations with Claude Samuel*, Amadeus, 1995) is as follows:

Rostropovich: I'll never forget the time Shostakovich was forced, really forced, to sign a letter against Sakharov. Shostakovich tried to explain why he didn't want to sign: "I'm very weak" -- and he really was ill at the time -- "the only place where I can still take a stroll is around my country house. Unfortunately, that's where Sakharov sometimes walks. How could I look him in the eye if my signature is put at the bottom of this letter?" He was forced to sign, however. He really agonized over it, and he stopped taking walks.

Samuel: Would you have signed that letter if pressured?

Rostropovich: No. Absolutely not. Galina and I have refused to sign a number of letters, even very brief letters.

Samuel: So Shostakovich could have refused?

Rostropovich: I don't blame him. He was very ill with cancer.

Fay's expurgated version, apart from omitting Rostropovich's extenuating plea (not to mention his assertion that Shostakovich was "forced, really forced" to sign), gives the unfortunate impression that the composer was confessing to moral, rather than physical, weakness. Yet, as her own account makes clear, he was then very ill and in constant pain -- indeed, had been for nearly a decade. Furthermore, his imagination far outstripped the relentless recording-machine of Solzhenitsyn's mind, however illumined the latter was by piercing literary power. Shostakovich had the empathy of a Dostoyevsky or a Mahler. To identify with the suffering of others was a capacity his conscience could never shut off and something his imagination instantly amplified.

Even a dullard would have been marked for life by sitting outside his apartment at night, waiting for the secret police; how much worse it must have been for someone as hypersensitive as Shostakovich. He was mortally afraid of the *apparat* and certain *apparatchiki* in particular. He was aware of the methods used by the NKVD/KGB; of what the likes of Kaganovich and Beria did; of what had happened to Meyerhold. He knew enough about the Gulag from those who returned from it during the 1950s to tell Denisov (correctly) that "the truth was ten times worse" than what Solzhenitsyn had revealed in *One Day in the Life of Ivan Denisovich*. He feared obsessively for his children, whose careers could have been ruined had he indulged in any serious non-cooperation. (Lidiya Chukovskaya, who wrote in Sakharov's defence, lost her living as a result.) But despite these very real causes to be afraid and the deterioration which such fears had wreaked on his physical being over nearly fifty years, he nevertheless (as Elizabeth Wilson scrupulously acknowledges) signed a public letter in 1966 asking that Solzhenitsyn be awarded adequate living quarters, and wrote so many private letters in defence of the helpless that, as Oleg Prokofiev notes, the *apparat* gradually came to discount them "as an expression of his 'artistic eccentricity'" (Wilson, p. 401).

Fear... and courage

Quite apart from his manifest courage as an artist -- and any Western commentator who does not understand what is meant by this is unqualified to participate in this discussion -- Shostakovich became, through the refining fire of life in the USSR, a deeply moral man; indeed, a beacon of morality for many who knew him. Wilson supplies many testimonies on this theme, notably the vignettes preserved by Edison Denisov and Nikolai Karetnikov, but especially the statements by Kurt Sanderling's son Thomas (op. cit., pp. 232-4, 419-21), the second of which is worth quoting here:

The first thing that struck me about Dmitri Dmitriyevich was the immense power which emanated from him. I remembered this quality from my childhood, and it is something I have never encountered before or since.

Anyone who came into contact with Shostakovich, whoever he might be, could not but be intensely aware of being in the presence of a person of great spiritual purity and moral fibre. Shostakovich had an almost hypnotic effect on people. I myself felt virtually paralyzed during the first hour of that visit. There was nothing imposing about his exterior, and no affectation in the way he was dressed. But a sort of magical stillness surrounded him.

Of course, Sanderling's impression was -- exactly like Shostakovich's own passing impression that he resembled Dr Ragin -- a momentary thing. At certain times, the composer could radiate this power, as others have confirmed; at other times, he was gripped by nervous tension or reduced to hysteria. What is crucial (and what Fay is content to ignore) is that Shostakovich was a singularly mercurial man living in a social context which would strike most Westerners, were they to be plunged into it without warning, as close to a madhouse. Sofiya Gubaidulina speaks on this theme:

At the time our life was a nightmare, and many people went mad. I also went mad at the time -- clinically mad. So did the composers Roman Ledenyov [b. 1930] and Hermann Galynin [1922-60, a pupil of Shostakovich]. Russia underwent a kind of psychological catastrophe, which particularly affected the young[...] Shostakovich, with his youthful vulnerability, experienced things in the same way as we did[...] I now realize that the circumstances he lived under were unbearably cruel, more than anyone should have to endure[...] I see him as pain personified, the epitome of the tragedy and terror of our times. [Wilson, pp. 306-7]

It seems probable that Shostakovich returned to stories like Chekhov's "Ward No. 6" and "The Black Monk" precisely because they dealt with degeneration into madness; the strain on him at certain times was so intense that he may well have feared for his sanity. But there was probably a more sinister reason for him to reread "Ward No. 6", in particular. Like Orwell (whose experiences have been suggested as the basis for the torture of Winston Smith in *Nineteen Eighty-four*), Shostakovich was hospitalised often in his final years, enduring unpleasant and painful medical tests. At such times -- away from his own bed and apartment, at the impersonal mercy of doctors and nurses -- he must have felt more vulnerable than at any time since Stalin's death. If we are seeking a method of exerting (as Rostropovich insists) "real force" against the composer over the Sakharov letter, we need only consider the possibility that some *apparatchik* -- it need not even have been one of those who particularly frightened Shostakovich -- visited him in hospital around this time and, as Stalin did in 1949, asked him about his health. It would have sufficed to enquire "Are they taking good care of you, Dmitri Dmitriyevich?", accompanied by a meaningful smile, to make the point. Helpless, Shostakovich would have been left to imagine the worst, inferring anything from more painful tests to the possibility that premium treatment might be withdrawn or that he would be discharged forthwith and left to fend for himself (all of which adds further poignancy to his wail of

"In whose hands are you leaving me to die?").

The dread of madness

Were the Soviet authorities capable of such baseness? Indeed, they were. And there were even nastier possibilities -- possibilities which Shostakovich, with his extensive contacts and conscientious compulsion to be aware of the worst, is certain to have known about. Nominally a late-1960s development, the dissident movement in the USSR had, in fact, been under way in various guises since Khrushchev's "secret speech" in 1956; and, under Khrushchev's rule during the early 1960s, a new method was found of suppressing such public dissent. People questioning "Soviet reality" or particular state policies were (as Orwell prophesied in *Nineteen Eighty-four*) classified as insane for doing so and, with a doctor's certificate alone, could be confined without time-limit in mental wards. There, strait-jacketed, they were pumped with hallucinatory drugs and left to go genuinely mad, unless, by sheer will-power, they could endure. Under Khrushchev, this disgusting treatment was inflicted on the leader of the civil rights movement Alexander Esenin-Volpin, on the pioneering dissident Vladimir Bukovsky, and (most notoriously) on General Petr Grigorenko, who spent most of the decade 1963-74 in Soviet mental institutions. Hundreds of other, less famous, proto-dissidents suffered the same horrifying fate.

Isolated in various hospitals during his final decade, Shostakovich is likely to have imagined the possibility of something similar happening to him. After all, his public persona (which had increasingly absorbed his private persona) was one of *yurodivy* "eccentricity". A short, salutary spell in a mental ward -- even merely to witness what *might* happen to him -- could easily have been presented in the Soviet press as benign care for a temporarily exhausted "faithful son of the Communist Party". At the time of the Sakharov letter, the KGB was moving quickly to crush the dissident movement. In the very month (August 1973) in which the letter was published, the newspapers reported the show-trial of Petr Yakir and Viktor Krasin, the first political arraignment since the Stalin era in which the accused, broken under interrogation, not only pleaded guilty but repented. (First arrested in 1937, Yakir had been a leading light in the campaign against the Soviet abuse of psychiatry. He was released in 1974 but, cold-shouldered by his fellow dissidents, died six years later in isolation.) Again, Shostakovich would have known about this. Again, it must be taken into account.

Behind the facade

Of course, we hear nothing of these matters in Fay's biography and she would almost certainly dismiss conjectures based on them as speculation. Likewise, the testimony of people like Sofiya Gubaidulina and Thomas Sanderling, neither of whom appear in her Index, must be presumed to fall into the category of "self-serving, vengeful" reminiscences "distorted by faulty memory, selective amnesia, wishful thinking, and exaggeration" (Fay, p. 2). All in all, very little is allowed to disturb the bland surface of Fay's narrative, which, in itself, indicates a smug lack of acquaintance with the dark truth behind the micro-managed facade of Soviet life. Describing the events attending the premiere of the Thirteenth Symphony as a "flap", she fails to realise how serious were the potential consequences of sustainedly opposing the regime in this way. Time alone saved the composer's co-"conspirators" (led by Vainberg) from the fate which, two years later, befell the poet Iosif Brodsky. (Akhmatova personally appealed to Shostakovich on her friend's behalf, but Brodsky -- given five years in the northern Gulag for the catch-all crime of being a "social parasite" -- is yet another figure absent from the Index of *Shostakovich: A Life*.) Elsewhere (p. 164) Fay reports, as though surprised, that, in 1948, Shostakovich and his family were under NKVD surveillance. It is, however, a cast-iron certainty that, like every other prominent figure in the USSR, Party or non-Party, Shostakovich was *always* under surveillance of one sort or another. Similarly unreliable is Fay's suggestion that the composer's orthodoxy can be measured by the quantity of civic work he put in. In the USSR, one did as the *apparat* directed or suffered the consequences. As for the amount of time Shostakovich devoted to "social" functions after 1960, that came with his (imposed) official posts. Alexander Nekrich recalls that, as a member of the Party committee in the Institute of History, he had to spend 40 per cent of his time on such stuff to the detriment of research and publication (Hosking, *History of the Soviet Union*, p. 406).

Under normal circumstances, Shostakovich's later official positions, together with his concomitant membership of the Communist Party, would have qualified him as a member of the *nomenklatura*: the most privileged segment of Soviet society and the corrupt heart of the Soviet system. Based on lists of strategic social positions and adjunct lists of those in line for appointment to them, the *nomenklatura* system was equivalent to what Orwell, in [Nineteen Eighty-four](#), called the "Inner Party". One did not need to be an earnestly believing Communist to rise into the preferential world of the *nomenklatura*; indeed, earnestness was no more a quality appreciated at this level than it is in any other of the world's invariably urbane and cynical power élites. What was required was discretion, smooth compliance with directives from above, and the ability to exercise Orwellian double-think, whether ostensibly or genuinely, at the drop of a hat. Shostakovich's manifest "unreliability", demonstrated at many public functions (not least his embarrassing failure to show up at his enrollment as a candidate member of the Party in 1960), naturally excluded him from this society-within-a-society. Vishnevskaya's description of his situation at Zhukovka, where, like him, she and Rostropovich owned a *dacha* close to the Moscow *nomenklatura* compounds, makes it clear that Shostakovich lived, at most, on the fringe of Soviet privilege. This is confirmed by his wildly variable

income, the fact that lobbying was necessary to get him into Dr Ilizarov's clinic, that he was not sent abroad for specialist treatment, and that his family were not granted foreign travel visas or given access to the "special" stores. (Quite possibly, Shostakovich would have declined such perks as morally distasteful -- much as he returned to the state the *dacha* at Bolshevo which Stalin gave him in 1950, rather than selling it to help to buy his *dacha* at Zhukovka.)

In other words, Shostakovich did not shy away from becoming a dissident (public dissenter) because he wished to protect the sort of privileges which Erich Honecker and his cronies amassed for themselves in the German "Democratic" Republic. By the normal standards of his official position, he was poor. On the other hand, he had his children and grandchildren to protect and his other dependents to maintain. He also had his ongoing maladies to consider. In short -- and even without taking into consideration the probability that he was, in some ways, "broken" by his experiences in 1936 and 1948, and hence cowed by fear -- he had very little room to manoeuvre, apart from by writing letters and pulling strings on others' behalf wherever he could. The only domain in which he had a perceptible degree of freedom of action was his music. It is there that we should expect to find the hero in Shostakovich -- and, in the end, the only reason for this biographical dispute is the music and its meaning.

A reductive vision

Shostakovich: A Life represents a view of Shostakovich which reduces the scope of the music to an amalgam of earnest dutifulness and muddled personal agonising. Fay's methodology -- rely on Soviet sources, distrust those who knew Shostakovich -- is blatantly indefensible and, if attempted in any other field of Soviet study, would result in such basic attacks from fellow academics as to prejudice her continuance as a scholar. The approval expressed on her book's dust-jacket by Richard Taruskin and Malcolm Hamrick Brown reveals a major academic scandal: endorsement of a false methodology from the leading figures at America's two main centres for the study of Russian music (respectively, Berkeley and Indiana). As is shown by her misleadingly selective quotations from Rostropovich on Shostakovich's signing of the Sakharov letter and from Joachim Braun on the "'secret language' of dissent" in *From Jewish Folk Poetry*, we cannot even be sure that the sources which Fay arbitrarily admits as legitimate are dependably used by her -- and nor is her way with facts more reliable.

The Cultural Revolution, the overbearing context to Shostakovich's life and work in 1928-32, is all but ignored. Seemingly in order to present the Third Symphony as ideologically orthodox, Fay likewise ignores the preceding political furores over *New Babylon*, *The Bedbug*, and the concert audition of *The Nose*. Little is said, let alone further discovered,

about the "large symphony" *From Karl Marx to Our Own Days*. The nature of Shostakovich's relationship with TRAM is inadequately explained. His "sardonic commentary" to Sollertinsky on the RAPP campaign against cultural fellow travellers is mentioned, but no quotes are supplied. Yakubov's revelation of Shostakovich's satirical songs of the 1930s -- "Going Along With Kaganovich" and "The Song of the People's Iron Commissar Nikolai Ivanovich Yezhov" -- go totally unnoticed. Nothing new seems to have been discovered, supposing such research attempts were made, about early alternative drafts of the Fourth, Seventh, Ninth, and Twelfth symphonies. (Fay's apparent failure even to inspect the surviving draft of the "satirical" first version of Shostakovich's Twelfth Symphony is astonishing.)

Contrary to assurances of balance and objectivity, the account of *From Jewish Folk Poetry* is tendentious and flies in the face of any sensible deduction. Much the same goes for Fay's conclusions regarding the Eleventh Symphony's relationship with the Hungarian Uprising, a verdict which ignores testimony already published in English in Elizabeth Wilson's book. In her coverage of the post-Stalin period, Fay persists in presenting Shostakovich as authentically making statements in *Pravda*, *Izvestiya*, and other Soviet publications and arenas (statements which around a dozen of those who knew him insist were ghostwritten on his behalf and merely attributed to him); in doing so, she falsely describes him as "allowing" this, as if he had any say in the matter. Attempting to prove his political orthodoxy, she falsely claims that, after the Tenth Symphony, Shostakovich devoted "a disproportionately large portion of his music to the greater glory of Socialist Realism". As with her account of *From Jewish Folk Poetry*, Fay's account of the circumstances surrounding Shostakovich's joining of the Communist Party in 1960 is blatantly unbalanced, downplaying the testimony of those closest to him at the time. Similarly, her descriptions of three "Lenin" pieces -- the "Lenin Symphony" of the period 1938-41, the Twelfth Symphony of the period 1959-61, and the song-cycle *Loyalty* of the period 1968-70 -- fail to come to the obvious conclusion that he had no enthusiasm for writing music about Lenin. Her account of *Loyalty* includes statements for which she has no citations and which seem to have been interjected, without authority, in order to cover a telltale chronological hiatus.

Neglect and omission

Malcolm Hamrick Brown describes *Shostakovich: A Life* as "copiously researched" -- yet, apart from a few corrected dates, there seem to be no cases of original research in this book at all. Certainly there is no fresh interview material. Instances abound of cases where such original research is clearly demanded but not fulfilled. For example, we need to know far more about Shostakovich's friend Mikhail Kvadri, the original dedicatee of no less a work than the First Symphony and the person who introduced its composer to

Marshal Tukhachevsky (before being arrested and shot in 1929!). Fay supplies no more data about this seemingly key figure in Shostakovich's early life than she offers about the "internal political intrigues" which came close to barring him from his graduate course in 1924. Indeed, the entire period 1923-32 remains in urgent need of original research, Fay's coverage of it being noticeably spotty. Likewise she discovers nothing new about Popov, Dolmatovsky, Serebryakova, or Kainova, and offers very little information on two major figures in Shostakovich's life during the 1930s: his friend Ivan Sollertinsky and the theatre director Vsevolod Meyerhold. The question of the "satirical" version of the Twelfth Symphony is the most glaring instance of Fay's failure to venture out of the music and newspaper libraries and see for herself. All she had to do was ask Irina Antonovna to show the manuscript score to her. Why, too, did Shostakovich set the choruses by Davidenko, a composer he despised? And is it not possible that the Glinka Prize belatedly bestowed on *Loyalty* in 1974 (about which delay Fay tells us nothing) may have constituted a "reward" for Shostakovich's signing of the Sakharov letter? Again research is called for. Surely the Composer's Union archive has the answers?

Brown praises Fay's "factual accuracy". In mundanely literal terms -- dates, places, quantities -- *Shostakovich: A Life* is certainly more dependable than it is in terms of judgment. Yet, as we have seen, facts are sometimes presented out of chronological order with the effect of distorting comprehension of the composer's motives. And even at current, purely factual, levels, *Shostakovich: A Life* is not secure. For this to be so, every statement would need to be cited to an authoritative source; two-thirds of the sentences in this book remain uncited in this way.

Richard Taruskin -- in any other circumstance willing to push the case for irreducible subjectivity to absurdity -- is, it transpires, willing to describe *Shostakovich: A Life* as "a reliable book to consult for the facts of [the composer's] life". Were a revisionist to make the claims for objectivity advanced by Fay, Taruskin would respond with his familiar "no one can be sure of anything whatever about Shostakovich" disquisition. Indeed, those who prefer to believe that Shostakovich and the Soviet background are innately impenetrable -- such, invariably, being people who know little about these issues and do not intend to remedy this -- will probably enjoy being confused by Fay. The fact remains that those who give a good review to this dismal, devious, and at times dishonest book are merely signing a certificate of their incompetence as judges.

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Shostakovich Conference

Mannes School of Music

(New York, NY; 15 February 1999)



Transcript 1



Transcript 2



Transcript 3



Transcript 4

Shostakovich Conference

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(New York, NY; 15 February 1999: Part 1)

Transcribed and edited by Allan B. Ho and Ian MacDonald

The panelists were: Vladimir Ashkenazy, Dmitry Feofanov, Allan Ho, and Solomon Volkov. Other speakers included Joel Lester and, in the audience, Martin Anderson, Louis Blois, Tim Bond, Antonina Bouis, John Deredita, Maya Pritsker, and Terry Teachout. "??" indicates that the speaker in the audience did not identify himself. (The verbatim text has been minimally edited to remove redundant repetitions and clarify grammar where the original construction obscured meaning. Nothing essential has been altered.)

Lester: I'm Joel Lester, Dean of the Mannes College of Music, and I'm delighted to welcome you all to what I hope will be a most interesting event. The notion of absolute music, of Western concert music, emerged around the time of Beethoven's music and that was believed to be an art form that could say things without needing a text, and could say things without needing words to explain it. At the same time, there is no such thing, I think most of us would agree, as absolutely absolute music. (And we should have gotten Absolute Vodka to sponsor this, therefore.) [*Laughter.*] And nowhere, I think, in recent scholarship, in the last decade or so, has this issue arisen to the surface more directly than in the case of Shostakovich, with Solomon Volkov's *Testimony*, which was translated by Nina Bouis. I hope I pronounced it roughly...

Bouis: Very close.

Lester: Thank you. And then, of course, the current book [*Shostakovich Reconsidered*]. The authors are here and others [who are] interested. And all I want to say -- I don't want to hold up the events any further, but I'm delighted that Mannes, which is a school that has always believed that musicians are not merely finger athletes, is sponsoring this morning's event. [*Applause.*]

Ho: It's my pleasure to introduce the panel. I'm Allan Ho. I'm one of the authors of *Shostakovich Reconsidered*, the book that you see on the walls here. This is Solomon Volkov; maestro Vladimir Ashkenazy; and my co-author, at the end of the table, Dmitry Feofanov. I guess I'll start with a brief summary of the controversy surrounding *Testimony*. And then we'll open it up to questions, because what's most important is that you have the opportunity to ask us what you would want to know. Since its publication in

1979, *Testimony, the memoirs of Dmitry Shostakovich as related to and edited by Solomon Volkov*, has remained probably the most controversial book in the history of music. It was initially praised in the West for its insights into Shostakovich's life and works and, at the same time, it was soundly denounced by the Soviets as a forgery. And then what happened -- in 1980, a year after publication -- is that an article appeared in the *Russian Review*, written by a young American musicologist named Laurel Fay. This article was deemed to conclusively demonstrate that *Testimony* was not what it purported to be, was not the authentic memoirs of Shostakovich. And from that point forward there's been a shadow of doubt cast on *Testimony*, for nearly two decades. What we've done in the past six years is to investigate the claims and accusations against *Testimony*. And we've found them to be, one after another, bogus -- misrepresentations of fact. At this point, I think that I will not say anything more and I'll turn it over to anyone on the panel who may want to say something.

Ashkenazy: It just so happened that I, quite by chance, by accident, met with the great publisher of this book, Martin Anderson, and then again, also by chance, I decided that I would write a preface for this book. Not that I'm a scholar of Shostakovich's music. But I felt that I know his music very well. I recorded most of his symphonies and now I just finished recording the Preludes and Fugues as a pianist, too -- a monumental job. I lived in the Soviet Union. I met him. I was present at several premieres of his works. And I thought I had inside knowledge of how we reacted to Shostakovich's presence in the Soviet Union, Shostakovich's image. And I thought I could convey our understanding of what we knew about his attitude to the Soviet system, his tremendous contempt for the system in which he lived. I thought I had at least some right to write a modest preface for the book. And for that reason alone I am part of this occasion and I'm honored to be part of this book, which, of course, I read before I wrote the preface. *[Laughter.]* So I'm familiar with the concepts, with the arguments.

One of the very interesting arguments which I propose in my preface, and I don't know if it's open to debate, perhaps it's hypothetical, is this: had the Soviets not denounced this book, would anyone have come up with the notion that this is a forgery? It's a very interesting point. Of course, you can't live those years again, can't go back in life. But I myself doubt very much that, had the impetus not been given by the Soviets, it would be [anything but] just another memoir. People might have found some, maybe, misrepresentations, but not substantial ones. Somebody wrote a memoir about myself a few weeks ago in Russia. They made also a few mistakes. I think they are so small mistakes I wouldn't even worry about it. Stravinsky's memoirs... several different books. You can say maybe that's right, maybe this is right. But in this particular *Testimony*, if one finds any kind of small interpretations by Mr. Volkov, that doesn't matter because the main thing, the image of Shostakovich, his mentality, what his music meant, the fact that they met and discussed everything, is beyond any doubt. And if the Soviets hadn't interfered, would anyone say anything -- that it's a forgery? I would like to know what people think.

That's basically all I want to say. When I read *Testimony*, I thought "Oh, at last, the world knows what Shostakovich was like. That's about time the people know about it." There was not a shred of doubt in my mind or in the minds of my colleagues, musicians from the Soviet Union. It was an absolutely genuine presentation of Shostakovich's mind, what he meant in his music, etc., etc., etc. So, as far as I'm concerned, it's 100%. That's all I wanted to say. -- So the argument is an interesting one. I'd like to know what people think. What would have happened if the Soviets hadn't come out with their great pronouncements? Do you know what the KGB was like? What the Central Committee of the Party was like? It was the Department of Disinformation. And they were very clever in that. They couldn't leave the "loyal musical son" of their country hanging in the air with such a terrible *Testimony*, could they? Anyway, that's all I wanted say now. But I think we'll be happy to answer any questions.

Anderson: Can you identify yourself before you ask a question please? Since it's being recorded.

Blois: Louis Blois of *DSCH*, the publication dedicated to the study of Shostakovich. May I stand? I'm glad to have you gentlemen here and thank you for the stimulating information that you've brought forth on the controversy surrounding *Testimony*. One of the nagging problems that has faced the scholarship on *Testimony* are the eight interpolations which were discovered by Laurel Fay in her 1980 article. Eight interpolations, eight tracts in *Testimony* which were word-for-word duplications of articles which had previously been published by Shostakovich, dating as early as 1932. And this has been a problem with the scholarship, with claiming the veracity of *Testimony*, as a result of these word-for-word interpolations, which were not just small interpolations -- they went on for a number of pages. A second problem is that these interpolations, not only being word-for-word, they occur at the beginnings of chapters. So, therefore, this implies an editorial decision to place the interpolations at the beginning of the chapters -- rather than something that happened by way of happenstance, in the course of your dealings with Shostakovich. I've read *Shostakovich Reconsidered*, and Messrs Feofanov and Ho have attributed these interpolations to the phenomenal memory of Dmitry Shostakovich. And I wonder, Mr. Volkov, particularly, I wonder if you could address this in your own words. How do you explain the interpolations? If I may ask a third question: I wonder if you can explain your silence for the past twenty years on this matter? The ongoing controversy has been brewing with such fierceness. How come you have been silent for the past two decades on this matter? Thank you.

Volkov: Probably I should start with the third question, as I understand it. I'm not a very public person and, by the way, for this reason, this particular appearance at such a gathering is my first, and very probably last, one. I wouldn't be here today without the book *Shostakovich Reconsidered* first coming out, because I was raised in a very specific ethics. When I met Marianna, my wife, her mother, now deceased, used to say that "Your

own praise stinks." And I believe in it, I like this. And when I came here to the United States and I heard about the American maxim "Never complain, never explain," I subscribed to it, and I still subscribe to it, I believe in it. And I don't think that going before the audience insisting that you are an honest man is a comfortable position -- and I don't like to find myself in such a situation defending my integrity and my honesty. So I don't regret that for these twenty years I maintained silence on my own. I could only add that there were very few, if any, direct appeals to me from somebody that I would think about as an objective scholar, to reply to. I must admit that I never read this famous -- or infamous, as you wish -- Fay's article, to the end. Because I stopped reading it when I saw that she's misrepresenting the facts, she's distorting the facts. And I saw very clearly that she is not out to get the truth, but she's out to get *me*, which is somewhat different. And I lost interest in the article immediately and I'm still not interested.

Because, to mention just one example -- and that, by the way, I remember very vividly, that is the moment I stopped reading farther -- I believe that in the Preface I stated very clearly that what I did in Leningrad in regard to Fleishman's and Shostakovich's opera *Rothschild's Violin* was the first staging of the opera. When I saw that Fay absolutely deliberately misrepresents what was absolutely unambiguously stated in my Preface, and that she willfully misrepresents it, I lost interest. I saw that this is not an objective investigation. And the same was true for any subsequent attempts to discredit the book. I never believed that the people who stood behind it were disinterested scholars. I couldn't, as a former Soviet citizen, discern to what extent the KGB and its Misinformation Department were involved. I only learned the many details of it subsequently, here, in New York. And this involvement was very, very substantial. And, yes, these people were out to get me. And behind them was the power of a great state, a super power at that time. Honestly, you know, reading an article that distorts the facts so blatantly, I wondered how anyone could accept this article?. So that was my position in regard to answering these charges. And, as I said, I still have no regrets about it. That's first...

Second, about these interpolations. I was not aware of them before Fay's article. I have a number of theories about how it happened. You see, there is one thing about *Testimony* that I'm sure about and that's that while the book probably has many flaws, it's an absolutely honest book. But, at the time I was doing this book with Shostakovich, I was relatively young, much younger than now, and inexperienced in constructing a big book like that, in this genre. A relatively inexperienced writer. So now, after twenty years of working in the genre, probably I would edit it more carefully, I would construct it better, and so on. You should remember, as I said first, this was the first attempt of a young and inexperienced writer. Second, that it wasn't written in the comfort of uptown or downtown New York. It was done in the Soviet Union of the early '70s, in a very nervous atmosphere, in a hurry. And that's how, probably, you know, these... If I would have done more research *then*, in the Soviet Union, on this subject, probably I would have uncovered this. And then I would have decided, then I would have made my editing decisions more wisely. But the book exists as it is. And, once again, I consider this is an absolutely honest

book. And that's my position. In this respect, your theory could be as good as mine.

Blois: Did Shostakovich, in the course of your interviews with him, did he hold a paper in front of him and read certain articles? Perhaps he read his articles to you in the process?

Volkov: No, no, no, no. That would have alerted me immediately to the fact that he's giving a prepared [text]. Absolutely not.

Blois: Do you agree, do you take the position that it was probably his photographic memory that allowed him to duplicate, word-for-word, from those parts?

[*Volkov nods in agreement.*]

??: And it was just an accident that these appear at the beginning of chapters? All of them?

Ho: Could I just contribute something here? What we did in *Shostakovich Reconsidered* is we researched whether or not it was possible, given Shostakovich's other documented feats of memory, for him to repeat himself. And, I think, if you've read the book, we have leading psychologists, including the president of the American Psychological Society, agreeing that this was for Shostakovich not only possible but plausible given his incredible memory. What is often misconstrued is that, of these 2000 words that are recycled in *Testimony*, people think that Shostakovich did it, one word after another, from beginning to end. But these occurred over numerous meetings. I ask you, is it possible for someone to remember one or two paragraphs at a time, and repeat that? The introductory comments that I gave you just a little while ago are almost verbatim what I said at the American Musicological Society, that I wrote in August. I don't have anywhere near the memory that Shostakovich did. So this is the point: people have misconstrued the amount of recycling.

You mentioned the recycling from an article first written in 1932. You didn't mention that this was reprinted in the late 1960s and that Shostakovich had read that collection to refresh his memory. You asked Solomon Volkov why hasn't he spoken out in two decades. I ask you, why hasn't Laurel Fay reported any of the information in here [*Shostakovich Reconsidered*] for the past two decades? Why hasn't Richard Taruskin mentioned that Galina Drubachevskaya confirmed that she knew about the Volkov-Shostakovich meetings? She read the manuscript of *Testimony*. He cited her article, but he didn't mention that she corroborated *Testimony* and vindicated Volkov. So, if you ask Solomon Volkov why he has not responded, I hope that you will ask Richard Taruskin, Malcolm Brown, Laurel Fay why they have not reported 99% of the information that's included in our book. I raise the question: is it a cover-up to protect personal egos and professional reputations? Is it complacency, because they thought the case was solved in 1989? Is it incompetence? They are the only ones who can answer these questions and I

hope, Mr. Blois, that you will pose these questions to them. Because their silence is unexplainable.

Blois: I agree. I agree that they have to do that.

Pritsker: I have something to add to your answer. You should know that Laurel Fay was working for the Schirmer publishing house for a long time, and I think she's still there. And in this capacity she came to Russia quite frequently. She became probably the only person who frequently visited the Soviet Union for a long time. So a whole lot of information came to her through VAAP, the agency of the authorship -- which was headed by a KGB agent, as you know -- and also through the Union of Composers. I knew that because I was living then in Moscow. I was a member of the Union of Composers as a musicologist, and I talked to Laurel. So I know her views. If she'd spoken against the situation, she probably wouldn't have been allowed back into Russia. She would have lost her position as a leading specialist in Soviet music at that time. I don't know about Richard Taruskin, but Malcolm Brown also visited frequently and he had very close connections with the head of the Union of Soviet Composers [Tikhon Khrennikov]. So this is probably part of the explanation.

Volkov: Maya, could you please identify yourself, so the people would know?

Pritsker: My name is Maya Pritsker. I have lived in this country for eight years. I lecture sometimes at Lincoln Center, I do preview lectures, and I am now head of the Art Department for the American Russian daily newspaper, *Novoye Russkoye Slovo*.

Ashkenazy: Talking of incompetence, apart from deliberate attempts by somebody like Fay to discredit Volkov, there's so much incompetence, so much ignorance about what our life in the Soviet Union was like. How many years do we need to understand what the Soviet Union represented, the way they worked, the way their outlook to the world was, and their attitude to everything: music, politics, etc.? It's about thirteen years since *perestroika* and *glasnost*, and it's still not enough. I don't know if 113 would be enough. Because people are people -- they don't want to change something in their minds. A few weeks ago *The Economist*, a famous British magazine, in a review of *Shostakovich Reconsidered*, said "Outside the disputed pages of *Testimony*, Shostakovich rarely explained his pieces with a 'program' -- certainly not at the rehearsal, where his interpretive hints were always strictly musical." What is [the writer] talking about? Does he think [Shostakovich] would come to the rehearsal of, say, the Tenth Symphony and say "You know, here, I mean [to convey] how difficult life was, how we suffered under the Soviet system"? He would go straight to the concentration camp. How can anyone write such a thing today?... So, it's a combination of somebody like Fay and some others, a deliberate attempt [to misrepresent] -- plus incompetence.

How are we going to fight incompetence? How are we going to explain what it was like? You had to live in the country to understand what it was like. People talk, for instance, about Richard Strauss, who was the head of the Kulturkammer [Reichsmusikkammer] in Nazi Germany -- before the war, then he was fired. His daughter-in-law was Jewish. Could he really say no to Hitler? She would go to the concentration camp. People forget about this and denounce Richard Strauss for that. People really need to understand that to live in a totalitarian country is not a piece of cake. Before you criticize anybody, you have to create a very clear concept of what things were like. And it's very difficult to create such a concept. But if you can't, don't begin to criticize. Say "Look, I don't know enough. And I can't say this or that or that." Be modest enough and have humility. Anyway, that's what I wanted to say. I was just amazed -- I wrote to *The Economist* saying "how can you let your journalist write an article on a subject he's ignorant about?" Plus he distorts something in the book. He says that [Ian] MacDonald "believes that Shostakovich's music can only be understood programmatically." He never said that. He only said that in [Shostakovich's] case it's particularly important to know what he went through in his life. They published my letter -- a little bit censored, like in the Soviet Union. [Laughter.] I don't know the name of the journalist, because they don't reveal the names of their journalists. That's their policy. But I thought I should write a letter.

Teachout: I'm Terry Teachout from *Time* magazine/*Commentary*. I should begin by saying that I'm one of the people who questioned, in print, the documentary accuracy of *Testimony*. And having read *Shostakovich Reconsidered* carefully, I believe that the book is both accurate and authentic. Mr. Volkov, I would like to apologize to you for what I said in print. [Applause.] Now, having said that, one of the things that has struck me most about the debate that's arisen over this, and particularly the presentation that you made in Boston, is the seeming resistance of scholars to engage you with the facts that you present in this book. They don't seem to want to engage you at all, as far as I can tell from the reporting of the debate. Why is this? I ask all of you, what is the resistance to really engaging with the factual substance which you presented?

Feofanov: If I may tackle this one... I, of course, cannot say why Fay, Brown, and Taruskin do not want to engage in debating the issues rather than responding in a kind of ad hominem way by claiming that we engage in the technique of the "Big Lie" -- which, of course, is a veiled reference to Dr. Goebbels and his propaganda ministry. I'm not them. But we have our theories. The level of disinformation and misrepresentation which that camp engages in is mind-boggling. I dabble, in my second profession as a lawyer, in consumer fraud. And in my now home state of Illinois, there is a consumer fraud statute that prohibits people from suppressing, omitting, and concealing material facts in consumer transactions. If this were a court case, I would be very comfortable presenting it to a judge or jury, complaining that [Fay, Brown, and Taruskin] are engaging basically in consumer fraud, the "consumers" being you [readers and listeners]. Because they do suppress, omit, and conceal material facts, very important facts -- up to and including a smoking gun, which we discuss in our book in reference to Elizabeth Wilson, otherwise

one of the good guys. The only guess that we could come up with is that their reputations are at stake, their tenured jobs are at stake, and they cannot accept the notion that they could have been wrong and maligned Solomon for twenty years for no reason. That's the best we can do.

Ho: I might add that they went way out on a limb. In 1989, Richard Taruskin wrote: "As any proper scholar could plainly see, the book was a fraud." For him now, as "America's most brilliant musicologist", to say that he's been wrong and he's been wrong for twenty years is not an easy thing to do. Laurel Fay largely established her career as a Shostakovich researcher on the basis of that 1980 article. To come forward now, while she's working on a Shostakovich biography for Oxford University Press, and say "I'm sorry. I was wrong" would be quite a turnaround. So I really think -- I don't know any of them personally and there's no personal animosity between any of us or any of them -- I really think it's just an awkward position to be in now, to recant the accusations they've made against Solomon Volkov and against *Testimony*. They have no facts with which to respond to our book. One of Richard Taruskin's most famous phrases is that Shostakovich was "perhaps Soviet Russia's most loyal musical son." That's generated a lot of controversy. People have complained that we took that passage out of context. I see that maestro Ashkenazy has the complete article with him, so anyone who wants to read the context may do so. Now, what's interesting is that at the AMS meeting in October (1998), we threw down the gauntlet and we challenged Richard Taruskin to defend that statement, because some people were saying "Well, he only meant up to 1936" -- something we reject. We say clearly in our book that we reject the notion that Shostakovich was *ever* "Soviet Russia's most loyal musical son." And it caught Dmitry and I, and several other people at the AMS meeting, totally by surprise that Richard Taruskin did not try to back up his statement with facts. He said "I was being merely ironic" in writing that.

Feofanov: Now, of course, not a single one of his defenders understood it as such. Because they were all defending him and saying that Ho and Feofanov quoted him out of context, and he only meant until 1936. Now he says he's merely kidding. The level of intellectual dishonesty that was presented there and throughout the months that followed continues to amaze me.

Ho: Let me just identify the three people who wrote, in print, to say that Taruskin meant only up to 1936. They were David Fanning...

Feofanov: Our opponent in Boston.

Ho: ...Tamara Bernstein, and Malcolm Hamrick Brown. None of them read that passage as being ironic, so if the irony was lost on us, it was lost on them too. Now, the clinching thing is you have to read what Taruskin says right after "perhaps Soviet Russia's most loyal musical son." He says "and certainly its most talented one." Now, Taruskin would

have us believe that he was being ironic in the first half of that sentence, which is not in quotes at all..."

Ashkenazy: No. [*Holds up the actual article to confirm the point*]

Ho: ...but not being ironic in the second half. [*Laughter.*] You see, when we challenge these people to, as Ian MacDonald says, put up or shut up, they say "I was just kidding."

Ashkenazy: Interestingly enough, the paragraph before this paragraph ends with inverted commas. He was quoting somebody. The paragraph before that reads: "Its rhetoric notwithstanding, the editorial [*Pravda* editorial about *Lady Macbeth*] was the first conclusive indication that the arts policies of the Soviet state would be governed henceforth by the philistine petit-bourgeois taste of the only critic that mattered [Stalin]. In a phrase that must have scared the poor composer half out of his wits, the chief official organ of Soviet power accused him of 'trifling with difficult matters', and hinted that 'it might end very badly.'" The next paragraph: "Thus was Dmitri Shostakovich, perhaps Soviet Russia's most loyal musical son and certainly her most talented one, made a sacrificial lamb, precisely for his pre-eminence among Soviet artists of his generation." No inverted commas here. I think he's an experienced enough writer to know that if he means irony he should put things in inverted commas.

Ho: What does this say about the man if we take him at his word -- that he was just joking about this?

Ashkenazy: It doesn't seem that he's joking.

Ho: Only a highly insensitive person would joke about calling someone "Soviet Russia's most loyal musical son".

Ashkenazy: It doesn't sound like a joke.

Ho: No, it doesn't.

Feofanov: He meant it.

Ashkenazy: I can only read it to you and you can make up your own mind. It's very easy to get this article, I'm sure.

Ho: *New Republic*, 1989.

Ashkenazy: I have copies made. 1989.

Mannes Conference [continues](#)... Back to [Shostakovichiana](#).

Shostakovich Conference

Mannes College of Music

(New York, NY; 15 February 1999: Part 2)

Transcribed and edited by Allan B. Ho and Ian MacDonald

The panelists were: Vladimir Ashkenazy, Dmitry Feofanov, Allan Ho, and Solomon Volkov. Other speakers included Joel Lester and, in the audience, Martin Anderson, Louis Blois, Tim Bond, Antonina Bouis, John Deredita, Maya Pritsker, and Terry Teachout. "???" indicates that the speaker in the audience did not identify himself. (The verbatim text has been minimally edited to remove redundant repetitions and clarify grammar where the original construction obscured meaning. Nothing essential has been altered.)

Deredita: My name is John Deredita and I'm a future editor of a book to be published by Martin Anderson on Verdi's libretti. I wanted to ask about the word "revisionism", which has been used by the detractors of *Testimony*. In other words, *Testimony* is for them revisionism of the real Shostakovich, who, for them, is just what you've been saying in that quotation from Taruskin ["perhaps Soviet Russia's most loyal musical son"]. I think maestro Ashkenazy has already partly answered my question because he is representing these critics as culturally distant from the totalitarian aspect of the Soviet Union and unable to understand that atmosphere and that culture. I just wonder if you could address this: is *Testimony* a revisionist document conceived as such by Shostakovich, conceived as such by Mr. Volkov?

Feofanov: If I may start answering that question...

Deredita: By revisionism, obviously, what is being meant is that, [whereas] before, Shostakovich was the loyal son, [thereafter] he represents himself as the dissident.

Feofanov: Well, you know, when we went to Boston, I did a little paper there about Shostakovich the anti-communist. And I was able to trace his views, ambiguous as they may have been, throughout his years. And, granted, his views in later years clearly were different from the views of an eighteen-year-old youngster. That's probably true for everyone: views change as we age. But I was able to trace his attitude toward the Soviet regime to the time when he was sixteen and, at that time, he said to someone, "I am not a Red composer". Now, whether he really meant it and whether it was an internalized thing for him, a completely thought-out thing for him, I don't know. But I think it is important to know that that's what he said. It's kind of indicative as to his attitude towards the Soviet

regime throughout the years, because later in the paper I went through pretty much what is available in terms of the evidence we have throughout the '20s and the '30s and the '50s. In the '50s he was talking to his friends and saying things for which he could have been shot if the authorities knew what he was saying. He was a very clear-sighted guy, who had access to privileged information through his high-placed friends, and he knew *exactly* what was going on. He was way, way above the informationally-challenged regular Soviet citizen. So, in answer to your question as to whether *Testimony* and [some of the] subsequent books [on Shostakovich] are revisionist, in a sense they are because they revise the false image of Shostakovich -- the *Pravda* image of Shostakovich, if you will -- which, of course, was an alternative reality created by the Soviet equivalent of the Ministry of Truth. [Our "revisionism"] merely sets the record straight.

Ashkenazy: I think it's a misnomer. I think to use the word "revisionist" is very dangerous, because what are we revising? The image that was presented to us by the Soviet Union. But how can you take that image as a genuine image? Therefore, what are you revising? I think it's a wrong word altogether.

Bouis: I also think that what we're talking about is a great resistance of people to see Shostakovich in a different light in general. I remember one of the reviews of the book [*Testimony*] complained about the slanginess of the tone. And the reviewer said "perhaps Shostakovich did speak this way, but I don't like to think of him speaking this way." [*Laughter.*] Now that's a perfect example of the resistance to seeing a person, whose image you have fixed very firmly and perhaps incorrectly, in a different light.

Ho: And the statement was made that Shostakovich wouldn't use profanity. What we document in our book is that he used it all the time. In letters and in conversations with friends. We like to put some of these people on pedestals and say, no, they never said anything negative -- about Prokofiev, for example. And then we document that the relationship was not that positive at all times. But I'd like to say something about the naïvety of some of the critics of *Testimony* -- and there's no better example than what Laurel Fay recently published about the song cycle *From Jewish Folk Poetry*. She claims that Shostakovich was one of the bamboozled masses and didn't understand the dire circumstances in which Jews were living in the 1940s. And she says that he was trying to write socialist realist music to fulfill a quota and that it was "just his rotten luck" that of all the nationalities upon which he could base his work he chose the Jews.

Now, she was misleading us when she said that when Solomon Mikhoels, the great leader of the Jewish movement, died in January 1948, that the Mikhoels family did not know that he'd been murdered. In one of the sources that she cites in her article, she forgets to mention that Natal'ya Vovsi-Mikhoels, Mikhoels' daughter, said -- and this is a quote from her -- "Shostakovich appeared the day after my father died and he said this: 'This started with the Jews and will end with the entire intelligentsia.'" Now what was Shostakovich referring to when he said that "This started with the Jews"? Did Laurel Fay wish us to

believe that Shostakovich meant "this random car accident began with the Jews and so everybody's going to get hit by cars"? *[Laughter.]* No, he was talking about murder. This is in an article she referred to. She referred to Joachim Braun, the great Israeli expert on the Jewish aspect of Shostakovich's music. I called up Joachim Braun because I couldn't believe that, as he was quoted in her article, that he supported her views. I spoke with him twice on the phone and he said when he read Fay's article originally he was outraged, but he was busy at the time and didn't have an opportunity to respond. So he asked me to fax him her entire article. He reread it. He read it again. And then he submitted a damning letter accusing her of distorting his views. And that's included in our book. Now, when the sources she cites in her own article say that she's distorted *their* views, what does that tell us about what she might have done with her 1980 article?

Ashkenazy: A comment just about *From Jewish Folk Poetry*. You have something else?

Feofanov: Well, I just wanted to say that I don't think it was Shostakovich's rotten luck that chose Jews as the "wrong folk" for his inspiration, it's his rotten luck that he has Laurel Fay as his officially designated biographer. *[Laughter.]*

Ashkenazy: Was it '52, *Jewish Folk Poetry*?

Ho: Well, it was begun in '48, but first showed at the Moscow Composers' Union in '53. Premiered in '55.

Ashkenazy: It's because I remember that I was asked to play. You see, I was there when the "Doctor's Plot" was "discovered" in '53. I was still in the Central Music School in Moscow. As you know, my name is Ashkenazy, but you didn't know that my mother was Russian. Plotnova her name was. And I, as one of the talented students of the Moscow Central Music School, I was usually chosen to participate in the school concerts, which usually were held in the Small Hall of the Moscow Conservatory. In '52 I was chosen again, and suddenly the director of the school calls me and says, "You know, Vladimir, I'm afraid that if you don't use your mother's name, hyphenated with your first known name, you can't play the concert." I said, "Okay, you print Ashkenazy-Plotnov. I don't mind. That's fine." So I played in that concert. This is just to demonstrate to what degree anti-Semitism was there, how people were afraid not to toe the Party line, etc., etc. etc.

Then, why I'm talking about this? Because I didn't know about the *Jewish Folk Poetry* cycle until -- you say it was first performed in '55? Probably at that time I just won a prize in the Chopin Competition and I became well known at that time. And I remember that Nina Dorliak, Richter's wife, suddenly summoned me: "Volodya, I would like you to play this cycle [by] Shostakovich." I didn't know about the cycle. I said, "What cycle?" "Jewish Folk Poetry." I said, "But why *me*?" I didn't realize that because Ashkenazy is a Jewish name -- I myself was actually brought up as a Russian because my mother had been

christened and I was very much in the Russian frame of mind. I didn't feel myself Jewish -- but I realized, because my name is Jewish, she chose me to be the pianist in the performance of this *Jewish Folk Poetry* cycle. She got very famous singers -- I think Maslennikov it was, Dolukhanova -- and she asked me to play in the Moscow Conservatory, in the Small Hall. Probably wasn't the first performance. Probably the second, otherwise you would have known it was me. But I know I agreed because for a young boy to play with Dolukhanova and others in a public concert -- it wasn't a school concert anymore! I played it and ever since I was wondering why it was so important. Only many years later I realized how important it was: that, on the face of it, it was just another piece by Shostakovich -- but, in fact, it was another demonstration [protest]. Otherwise Nina Dorliak wouldn't have tried to get a well-known young pianist with a Jewish name to play this piece. I'll never forget this. Very interesting. -- That's the way we lived, you see. Everything was a grey area. We tried to do what we could... not too much because otherwise it would be very difficult. But what we could, we would do. You can't help imagine what Shostakovich had to do in order to save his creative position, his *skin*. Just... it's unbelievable. Just unbelievable.

Ho: If I might add one other thing to come full circle about the point of naivety that I was referring to earlier. Not only did Laurel Fay not mention what Shostakovich had said at the Mikhoels family home, but she presents the view that Shostakovich was not protesting or standing up for beleaguered Jews. One of the pieces of evidence that she mentions is a front-page editorial in *Pravda*, which touts the mutual respect with which all the nationalities are being treated. She's suggesting that Shostakovich read the editorial in *Pravda* and said "Well, there's no discrimination against Jews." I think that most of us would find that laughable, that anyone would accept what is in *Pravda* -- and then cite it as a source in a *New York Times* article! We've asked Fay to respond to our comments about *From Jewish Folk Poetry*, and I'd love to hear from her. Is she here today?

Ashkenazy: No. It's a pity because, after all, what are we for? To find the truth. And why can't we be in the same line with Fay, Mr. Taruskin, whatever? The main thing is to find out what was right, what was wrong. And why is it so difficult to lose face if you see that actually you might have made a mistake -- like this gentleman [Terry Teachout] actually was so nice to say that he's apologizing for something he had said that wasn't right. There's only one truth really. And we should face it in life.

Bond: My name's Tim Bond, and I don't have an affiliation. I'm simply an interested individual. Maestro Ashkenazy has referred to the complexity of the situation in the Soviet Union, which, of course, now has changed. And one of the things I would be very interested in is the extent to which you had access to what you might call the other side of the argument: establishment figures, the authorities who were responsible. I'm thinking particularly of people like Tikhon Khrennikov, for example, because I read an article, I think from *The Times* -- Martin [Anderson] would probably know the article that I'm thinking of -- a long article that included an interview with Khrennikov in maybe '95. He

seemed to be suffering from very convenient lapses of memory over some of the things he had or hadn't said in 1948 and subsequently. Did you have access, did you get any joy, really believable feedback, from what you might call authority figures in your research?

Ho: Actually, we know what he's said on the record and we didn't find sources such as that useful or valuable because his views are so distorted. As one person remarked, "The wolf cannot understand the fear of the sheep." Khrennikov's view is that no Soviet composer suffered while he was the head of the Composers' Union. I think that is something that could be documented not to be true. But it's such an extreme view. Talk about revisionism! I think that's what's going on there.

Feofanov: I was involved in an internet exchange with a gentleman, speaking loosely, on that very subject. There is a story that goes around -- apparently it comes from Tikhon Nikolayevich Khrennikov himself -- claiming that, while under his chairmanship of the Union of Soviet Composers, nobody was arrested and sent to the camps. Through a little research, with the help of Mr. Volkov I must admit, but also by just looking at the *Biographical Dictionary of Russian/Soviet Composers* -- which was written by some Ho and Feofanov fellows, which we forgot -- we discovered that there was indeed one person who was sent to the camps. And after looking through the *Dictionary* some more, I sent the gentleman three more names. But he chose not to respond. And that's how the game is played. They throw an argument at you. You give them undeniable, hard, verifiable facts. Then they throw another argument about something else. It never ends and probably never will end. -- But, at a certain point, objective observers get the picture.

Volkov: In regard to Khrennikov, I would just like to add a few things. For me, he's a fascinating figure. I happened to know him personally. And he is a genius in his own field. No question about it, he is an administrative genius, who survived all the regimes and recently got his additional Orders and many others from Yeltsin, in the new "democratic" Russia -- he got his Order of Merit just recently, a few months ago. I always wonder about the fact that he hounded Shostakovich. He [Khrennikov] was once again chairman of the committee that was preparing the later Tchaikovsky Competitions, and a friend of mine told me that he walked into the room with the committee there and Khrennikov as the chairman -- and it was like 20 or 30 years ago: the committee sitting around Khrennikov, [who was] blabbering about the new successes of our Fatherland and of our glorious music and so on. Like in a time hole. He is there forever and he served every regime since Stalin. And he will die a celebrated person. Because he is useful. As I said, he is a genius...

Ashkenazy: Not so much as a composer. [*Laughter.*]

Volkov [*smiling*]: No, no, no. I said as an administrator.

Ashkenazy: I just wanted to make sure. [*Laughter.*]

Blois: I've read *Shostakovich Reconsidered*. It's a fascinating, compelling, very absorbing book, and an important piece of scholarship. I just wanted to ask another question for the record. Certain questions have to be asked. You mentioned that you had not received a response from Laurel Fay or Richard Taruskin. I wonder if they were invited to participate as contributors to the book -- and, if not, do you regret not having invited them?

Ho: The way we look at it is that, for twenty years, they've had the floor. Laurel Fay said at the national meeting of the American Musicological Society that she had not changed her views at all about *Testimony*. She said, "For the record, nothing that I have seen has made me change my views about the memoirs." We took her at her word. And we did investigate. I followed their papers around the country, whenever they gave a paper. They presented two Shostakovich sessions at national meetings of the American Musicological Society. They never invited a member of the opposition to be a part of their panels. So we thought the purpose of this book was to respond to twenty years of allegations against *Testimony*. Now if they want to respond to this book, we'll be happy to respond to them. As maestro Ashkenazy said, what we're interested in is the truth. And I want to make clear that we never started out in this book to praise Volkov. In fact, we wrote the complete article and then showed it to Solomon Volkov. Dmitry and I had an agreement from the start that whatever we found -- if we found conclusively that *Testimony* was a fraud -- that's what our book would be [about]. And, in fact, when Solomon Volkov first read the book, he made two comments. The first was "Do you have to repeat all those negative things that people have said about me?" [Laughter.] And it's quite overwhelming. No one can accuse us of leaving out very negative things that have been said about him.

Feofanov: We said, yes, we have to.

Ho: That was part of the official record. The other thing he said was that Fay, Taruskin, Brown, and even [he] himself are really insignificant in the big picture -- that what's important is the truth about Shostakovich. And that changed the thrust of our book. Initially we were just responding to the allegations. You know, it would have worked out better for me, as a card carrying musicologist, if I had attacked Solomon, because that's how Laurel Fay became known as a Shostakovich expert. I was very skeptical, and Dmitry can confirm this. In fact, you may be surprised to know that the first time I met Solomon in person was last night, because I did not want to be viewed as a friend of Solomon Volkov. We corresponded, we spoke on the phone, but it was important to me, as a musicologist with a reputation of my own to defend, that I had to look at this thing objectively. For six years, I worked on this [*Shostakovich Reconsidered*]. I was initially convinced by Laurel Fay's article, which I took at face value. I had to be persuaded, myself.

Ashkenazy: Bravo!

Ho: By the way, I met maestro Ashkenazy for the first time last night, too. So there's nothing in cahoots here...

Ashkenazy: No.

Ho: I did what I think any scholar that was interested in the truth would do. We contacted Volkov; we talked to people who knew Shostakovich, including the children; we talked to people who worked at *Sovetskaya Muzyka* at the time *Testimony* was in progress. Again, I ask you, why didn't Laurel Fay do any of this?

Feofanov: If I could follow up on that with several points. In researching this tome, we found many examples of concealment, omission, and suppression that I alluded to previously. One of the most interesting examples, which shocked me, was the statement of Shostakovich's close friend named Flora Litvinova, in her memoirs -- to which, by the way, we owe gratitude to maestro Ashkenazy, who provided us with the Russian version of those memoirs. I think it would be interesting for you to hear the story, understand how it all happened. The English version of Litvinova's memoirs was translated and published in Elizabeth Wilson's book. We read it and it was very interesting. I think we cited Wilson on just about every page of our book. It would not have been possible without Wilson's book. Then Allan received the actual Russian version which you [Ashkenazy] sent to us and he said "Dmitry, read it. Translate it and tell me what's in there." And I said "Why do I have to read it? We already have it translated in Wilson's book." "No," he said, "read it." So I'm reading it, you know, underlining stuff, with my significant other on a train. All of a sudden I jump and start screaming because I see something that is *not* in Wilson's book. Which is, for the lack of a better word, a "smoking gun" paragraph in which Litvinova quotes Shostakovich as saying, in the mid '70s, "You know, Flora, I've been meeting this wonderful Leningrad musicologist" -- whom, by the way, he does not name -- "and I've been telling him everything I remember about myself and my music. And he writes it all down and at the next meeting I check it over." I said "Gee, that sounds familiar." The question immediately arose: why is this paragraph, the smoking gun out of the horse's mouth, if I may mix my metaphors, not in Wilson's book? We're not about to ambush someone from round the corner, so we sent a letter to Elizabeth. And she sends us a response which basically says "Look, I had a 500-page book. I didn't have space."

[Gasps.]

Ho: Well, she also gave another answer -- which is she didn't want to get too involved in the vexed controversy about *Testimony*.

Feofanov: That's true. That was the second answer. So this is the suppression, omission, and concealment I'm talking about. She wrote a very important book -- which convinced a lot of people, by the way, without her probably realizing, that *Testimony* was completely

authentic. But that was [the result of] fear -- and I don't blame her. I mean, she probably *was* afraid, for all I know. But that's the kind of attitude that's pervasive in the musicological field. If you go against Fay, Brown, and Taruskin, you will suffer consequences. I see that Mr. Teachout wants to interject. Yes?

Teachout: Have any of the scholars that continue to question the authenticity of *Testimony* responded specifically to the Litvinova paragraph that you have published for the first time in English?

Feofanov: No. In fact, these scholars have not responded to *any* pieces of evidence that we have presented. None. The best they could do is for Richard Taruskin to stand up in Boston and say "I was just kidding" and accuse us of using the technique of the Big Lie. Some of them, at least, have not read the book. In fact, I know for a fact that two out of three have not read the book. Malcolm Brown said that he's not buying the book and he won't read the book. And I suspect that Mr. Taruskin hasn't read the book either because, by the last count, out of some eighty university libraries that have *Shostakovich Reconsidered*, [University of California at] Berkeley's not one of them. And probably will remain that way. *[Laughter.]*

?: Did you give him a copy?

Feofanov: We figured: let him pay for his own. He asked for one, by the way, and I said to Martin, "Don't." -- But, in six years, Litvinova's testimony, though a very compelling piece of evidence, is just the tip of an iceberg. There are a great many other pieces of evidence which are interspersed in *Shostakovich Reconsidered*. Of course, the perplexing question, which you referred to, is the recycled passages at the beginning of chapters. Now, of course, Laurel Fay, in her piece, makes an inference that this is part of a kind of conspiracy to fool the poor old man, who was not quite himself at that time -- to make it into something which does not correspond with his views. Now, two points need to be made about that. After the publication of *Letters to a Friend* -- which unfortunately is not translated in English, but those of you who read either Russian or French, I strongly recommend that you acquaint yourself with that book, which consists of Shostakovich's letters to his friend Glikman -- there's no doubt, none whatsoever (in conjunction with Wilson, especially) that he was extremely anti-Soviet in kind of a sarcastic way. He did not hide, apparently, these feelings from a very few select friends whom he trusted. As I said when we spoke to the NPR people the other day, fortunately censors in every country, be they censors of the internet or music, are kind of stupid. If you do it with a straight face and use Aesopian language, usually you can get away with it. And he did, even though I'm sure they probably opened up his letters.

The second point I wanted to make, which is usually lost on people, is that the conspiracy theory is refuted by one single fact. Laurel Fay thought that Volkov fooled Shostakovich

into signing non-controversial material. She forgets the first chapter, which opens with "I look back at my life and all I see is a mountain of corpses." That's not the usual Soviet style, you know, to start with a reference to "a mountain of corpses." That chapter doesn't [begin with] recycled material, it opens up with very -- for the lack of a better word -- anti-Soviet material. It's signed. There is no doubt it's an authentic signature. This whole thing is kind of silly because when Malcolm Brown started talking about signatures, his excuse was, "Indiana University Library doesn't have the Finnish and German editions, and so I didn't see the signatures; and I don't have to see the signatures because we don't have the book in the library" -- even though they've been available since '79. He was misrepresenting the true state of affairs since that time.

Volkov: I would like to add one thing that somehow got lost in these twenty years of controversy, which have [largely] focused on my position in my relationship with Shostakovich. I always wondered silently how the people who wrote about this process of our conversations and consequent doing of the book, how they imagined Shostakovich's frame of mind. The discussion of Shostakovich's frame of mind and position, in my opinion, somehow mysteriously gets completely lost. You should remember that he was, first, a genius; and, second, one of the most prominent people of the Soviet Union of the time. You can't fool a genius and a leading personality. Somehow people assume that I, a young journalist and writer, could fool this all-time genius into signing something which he wasn't aware of how it would be used. I don't know. For example, ask maestro Ashkenazy here to sign a bunch of papers for you. I really doubt that he will do it.

You should imagine the real situation. I was awed by this man. I never asked him to sign anything. It was *his* initiative to do so. In all this relationship, I always considered myself to be a vessel through which the thoughts and ideas of Shostakovich went through. Nothing less, but nothing more as well. And I still consider myself to be a vessel. I was young, as I said -- inexperienced, and *insignificant* in relation to Shostakovich. Still, after all these years, if we could meet again, I would feel the same awe and the same fear and the same nervousness. This whole process for me was one continuing catastrophe, so to speak, one continuing earthquake, emotional rollercoaster. I was doing *his* work, it was *his* idea to convey all these things from me. And it couldn't be the other way around. It's absolutely unrealistic. You should consider. You should place yourself in my position at the time. Imagine how unequal our positions were. I was approaching him tip-toeing -- in fear that every session might be the last one. I didn't know if I'd be invited the next time. I just don't understand how Shostakovich's position in all this, in my opinion, somehow gets lost. *His* authority -- and what *he* was thinking about about this whole process.

Mannes Conference [continues...](#) Back to [Shostakovichiana](#).

Shostakovich Conference

Mannes College of Music

(New York, NY; 15 February 1999: Part 3)

Transcribed and edited by Allan B. Ho and Ian MacDonald

The panelists were: Vladimir Ashkenazy, Dmitry Feofanov, Allan Ho, and Solomon Volkov. Other speakers included Joel Lester and, in the audience, Martin Anderson, Louis Blois, Tim Bond, Antonina Bouis, John Deredita, Maya Pritsker, and Terry Teachout. "???" indicates that the speaker in the audience did not identify himself. (The verbatim text has been minimally edited to remove redundant repetitions and clarify grammar where the original construction obscured meaning. Nothing essential has been altered.)

Anderson: Can you just identify yourself?

Lieber: Ernest Lieber. A lover of Shostakovich, who I met -- and I carry his picture with me eternally -- as a young man. Two questions: (1) why didn't Shostakovich emigrate? Is it perhaps because his family remained? I mean, a man like that could have lived in any country in the world and would have been loved in England, where he had Benjamin Britten as a friend. I think something that we don't understand in America -- perhaps, I think, the three Russians do -- is that there's a sense of patriotism which we can't understand. The United States had the HUAC committee (House Un-American Activities Committee) in the late '40s. I don't compare that in any way with what happened in the Soviet Union. But the people who were called before that committee remained patriots even though they went to jail, lost their rights. A lot of them had to write under different names, assumed names. It was a very difficult period, but they remained patriots. I think, perhaps -- and it's hard to say that in the face of three Russians -- perhaps we're missing what it meant to be a patriot for Shostakovich. I do not believe that the Seventh Symphony had anything to do with Stalin. And (2), if Stalin hadn't lived, or if he [Shostakovich] hadn't lived under an authoritarian, totalitarian state, it seems there would have been no music by Shostakovich. Because, from what I gather, every note is anti-Stalin and anti the regime. And there's no question that it was. I think of Akhmatova, who lived during the war -- I forget whether it was in Leningrad or Moscow -- but she contributed whatever money she had. I think every day on the radio she read poetry to the Russians -- something Americans couldn't begin to understand, I think. [\[Note 1.\]](#) What you seem to be saying is that if there hadn't been an authoritarian regime, he would have never written anything -- that, in everything he wrote, he was only interested in bringing down the Soviet system.

Incidentally, Rostropovich, who I got to know in my strange way, did a performance of the Seventh Symphony many, many years ago. And I went backstage and the manager, or whoever she was, she said "He's not receiving visitors today." So very gently I pushed her aside and I went in. I had the score of the Seventh Symphony. And I said "Maestro." And he thought I wanted him to write something for me. And I said, "No, no, for Shostakovich and Leningrad." Now Rostropovich must have read your book [*Testimony*], he knew Shostakovich, he was a student of Shostakovich -- why didn't he just say "Oh, the Leningrad Symphony, it's just a symphony, it has nothing to do with Leningrad or the war." There are contradictions here. There may be emotional... what we did is we clasped each other and started to cry, in private in this room. And then he wrote something, I don't know what he wrote, it was in Russian. But I think it said "for Leningrad and Shostakovich." What about that? You know, why didn't he emigrate? [\[Note 2.\]](#) And if there hadn't been an authoritarian regime, would Dmitry Shostakovich have been the genius that we're all -- and he is a genius, by God, he's a genius...

Ashkenazy: It's not so difficult to answer your questions, I think.

Lieber: It is difficult or it's not?

Ashkenazy: Not, not.

Lieber: Please answer it, maestro Ashkenazy.

Ashkenazy: Please contribute something if you think I neglected something. First of all, to emigrate from Russia was...

Lieber: Difficult.

Ashkenazy: No, not difficult, but *impossible*. You couldn't go to an office and say, "Look, I would like to go to Paris for a weekend" or "I want to emigrate." They'd say "What??" You'd go straight to a camp -- you're anti-Soviet. That would have been that.

Lieber: But, excuse me --

Ashkenazy: But he went to America once.

Lieber: I don't know whether he took his son. I doubt he took his son or daughter, but he did spend a lot of time with Benjamin Britten.

Ashkenazy: That was much later. Yes, that was later.

Lieber: In the '60s.

Ashkenazy: Yes, but then we have to enter his mind at that point and understand whether the composer who devoted all his life to his country in his music, whether he could really see himself living the last, whatever, thirteen, fourteen years of his life in the West. To emigrate in the '50s -- after giving all your life to one place, one country, one people -- is not so easy. I don't think he could do it. That's my speculation. Before, he was sent to America once in...

Lieber: '49.

Ashkenazy: He was a very nervous person at that time. There's a point: he could have stayed then. But I wouldn't know why he didn't stay then. About patriotism. Patriotism is a category that is not so easy to interpret -- in a way, *especially* in a totalitarian country. Because you're brainwashed into being patriotic from your childhood. I remember, myself. I think by the time I was in my late teens, only then I began to suddenly put two and two together and think "What's happening? Everything is a lie." But until then... Say I had a different type of intellect or emotional make-up, so to speak, I might have never thought about it. But people are brainwashed into being patriotic. They don't know the rest of the world, they can't travel, they are told from their early childhood this is the best country in the world, the only possible system for mankind, there is nothing better. And so...

Lieber: Excuse me, that's a different kind of patriotism, that's true. We have that in this country too. But I have not yet met a Russian who doesn't know Dostoyevsky. I work with a lot of Russians and every Russian I show that picture to [knows] Shostakovich; every Russian I met knows Chekhov backwards and... You see, that's a different... I'm not talking about the patriotism on the radio which we get here in this country too. But I'm talking about a cultural depth...

Anderson: Let them answer the question. You've asked it several times.

Lieber: Please, I'm sorry for the interruption.

Ashkenazy: Well... *that* is belonging to a certain culture. I don't know if it's necessarily patriotism. We have to define what we mean by patriotism. I think Shostakovich was a great patriot of his country -- with another sign in front of the word "patriot." He wasn't a patriot of the Soviet system; he was a citizen of his *country*, whatever system there was. And the system was despicable and he had tremendous contempt for it. So his patriotism was to do whatever he could to reveal what was happening in his country. To be the conveyor of truth, if you like. So that was his type of patriotism. And he couldn't exhibit it because it was extremely dangerous -- not only dangerous, but fatal for him to say

anything about it. Is that a good enough basis for the answer to your question? Or is there anything else that I didn't cover?

?: What about whether there would have been any Shostakovich at all if he hadn't [lived in] the Soviet Union? Would there have been any music? That should be addressed.

Ashkenazy: Of course, of course. It's impossible to answer. We come [back] to what we started with today. In Shostakovich's case, the way he mirrored his experience and the experience of his people is essential to understanding what his music was about. Right? ... It's arguable that if the system was different, if the country was a democracy without that monumental problem of human rights -- the suffering of people, their inability to be free, as we all strive to be free -- I think his musical content would have been totally different. I'm absolutely sure of that. What is very interesting is to look at his music before his Fourth Symphony, say -- even the Fifth Symphony. The music was of a very talented person. I hate describing music because it's very dangerous when you get into generalities, but there was not yet a hint of embracing the situation of the country in general -- a country going into the black hole of totalitarianism and generating the suffering of millions, etc. He was not yet, maybe, aware of... maybe the Terror hadn't started yet. It was just the very clever music of a very talented composer -- but there was not yet such fantastic self-expression, such substance in the music of that time. It started later.

Lieber: I would agree with that to some degree. I think the third movement of the First Symphony is pretty powerful and not that distant. But I think he grew. I mean Beethoven also wrote very early light pieces and, if you look at Op. 132 and 130, there was a growth. I mean, after all, this man read... in the Fourteenth Symphony, he quotes from Lorca, he quotes from Rilke, "The Poet's Death". I mean, he was a truthsayer. I absolutely agree. And his truth was universal. What I'm saying is that... you can't say that... I think that if he lived in Chicago he would [still] have written that kind of music. He did live through the revolution, he lived through the war, he was imbued with the Russian spirit, whatever. And I think he would have written that music. But what you're saying, then, is that he's invalid as a composer.

Anderson: It's a pretty fruitless line of argument. We don't know what he would have written.

Ashkenazy: We don't know what would have come.

Lieber: That's true.

Ashkenazy: By the way, about the Seventh Symphony, actually, he said himself that the famous tune is not necessarily about the war, just against any oppressiveness. He said that himself, so you're not well informed about that point.

Lieber: That could be.

Ho: If I could say one word, Maxim Shostakovich is often asked the same question. And if you've read *Shostakovich Reconsidered*, Maxim's answer is "Of course, the question is absurd." All that we can do is speculate what might have happened. It's like asking what would have happened if Beethoven didn't go deaf?

Lieber: Exactly. It's speculation. That's what I'm saying...

Ho: And it becomes just a series of speculations...

[Ashkenazy rises.]

?: Are you leaving maestro?

Ashkenazy: I'm afraid I have a rehearsal in San Francisco this afternoon.

?: Would you sign my *Testimony* please?

[Ashkenazy signs autographs and leaves. Applause.]

Feofanov: Yes, sir?

Deredita: It is my opinion -- as, in this crowd, a relatively casual listener of Shostakovich and a great admirer of *Lady Macbeth of Mtsensk*, for example, the Fifth Symphony and other things -- it is my opinion that Shostakovich was primarily, fundamentally, and totally a musician and a great composer, and not an ideologue. Certainly ideology entered into his life, as it necessarily had to do. But I think that the implication that his creativity was based on the need to make ideological statements is misplaced. Do you agree with that or...?

Feofanov: Yeah, I don't think he felt the need to make ideological statements. But I have to explain to people here that, during our lives in what was then the Soviet Union, we were, by necessity, very politically sensitive. Because our survival depended on that. So ideology played probably a very important role in Shostakovich's life -- not because he wanted it to, but because that's the way it was. Now in answer to your question, sir -- if I could follow up to what maestro Ashkenazy said -- the other day on the radio, somebody asked me whether my understanding was that Shostakovich was free. At that time I gave kind of a paradoxical answer: that even though, externally, he probably clearly thought himself to be living in a prison, somehow that allowed him to express himself -- let him express everything that he wanted to express. So, paradoxically, he was free inside that

prison in which he found himself. He was internally free, but externally not. And that's, I think, the best we can say. Of course, if you're externally not free, those [external] things affect you even while you're striving to maintain your internal creative freedom.

There's something else I want to add in reference to what was said before. Perhaps we should have started with this, since it's also in response to Mr. Blois' initial question. One of the purposes of this press conference was to finally provide answers to people who kept saying that Solomon Volkov never answered questions. That actually is not entirely correct. We want to make sure that the record is clear on that. Mr. Volkov participated in various symposia throughout the world in the [past] couple, five, six, or seven years, I suppose? [*Volkov confirms.*] He certainly answered all of our questions. I think it's important to disclose for the record how we put that book together. Because those of you who have that book know that about half of it deals with the controversies surrounding the memoirs of Dmitry Shostakovich, *Testimony*. We were fortunate, because of our previous relationship with Mr. Volkov, to have his confidence in this project. Because of that, he answered literally hundreds of questions that we posed to him. My phone bill to him was quite substantial. He opened his archives for us. So, he, in fact, *did* answer questions, and he answered them on the record, so that the record is clear. This conference is kind of the concluding act in that process, because from this point on -- and we've attempted to publicize it the best we can -- people will not be able to say, "well, that Solomon Volkov is hiding and not answering questions." In fact, one commentator went so far as to question Solomon Volkov's existence. [*Laughter.*]

Folks, this is Solomon. He does exist. [*Applause.*]

Pritsker: I have a small addition to all this. I want to tell you that these days no one who lives in Russia and who can travel or who has wide access to media information -- and this has loosened up a lot in the past few years -- no one like this has any doubts about *Testimony*. So, the question isn't "Is this book truthful or not?" For musicians, for musicologists, there's no doubt. I'm very grateful to the authors of this book [*Shostakovich Reconsidered*]. I hope it will help now to bring the same kind of assurance to the public, to the people who go to concerts. When you attend concerts, you hear various interpretations. Actually, musicians like Mr. Ashkenazy or Kurt Masur and many others go to the core of Shostakovich's music in such a way that you can clearly hear what this music is about. But when one opens program notes, one can sometimes still be shocked to find absolutely irrelevant, stupid, obsolete information. Outrageous stuff, based on information which came from Soviet sources. Which is why this new generation of books is so necessary. What more can one do to convince the rest of the press corps, or anyone else, that there's no doubt in this case? Forget what was written in the past! It was simply because people were unable to relinquish their preconceptions. It's difficult for them to forget those false ideas, especially for those who thought they knew everything about the Soviet Union. Now that's over. So never, never recycle anything published in the Soviet Union before 1990. This should be the rule for the American press, for anybody who

writes about music.

Feofanov: Mr. Teachout has a question?

Teachout: One of the points made by the opponents of *Testimony* is that there's been no Russian-language publication. The book [*Shostakovich Reconsidered*], of course, deals extensively with the question of why this has not been the case and I won't rehash that here. But I wonder if you have considered posting a Russian-language text on the internet so that it would then be available.

Feofanov: I think that question is better answered by Mr. Volkov.

Volkov: About the internet, I don't even have an answering machine. [*Laughter.*] I'm living in the pre-Gutenberg era, I guess. Second line, or fax, or email -- I don't know what it is. Second, about the possible publication in Russia, formerly the Soviet Union, I was approached by some people, and still am, from Russia, who identified themselves as publishers -- you know, I had to trust them -- who asked me about the possibility of publishing *Testimony* in Russian. The big problem here, as I have informed them, is that world rights to the book, including the Russian edition, belongs to the American publisher. [I] referred them to my American publisher, HarperCollins, [and] their interest disappears right before your ears. I could state that *no* Russian publisher ever approached my American publisher with an offer to do the book in Russian. And I doubt in the present situation, the present economic situation in Russia, that it will happen at any time soon.

Teachout: That's why I suggested, since it seems highly unlikely that there's going to be any commercial publication of it in Russia, that it might --

Volkov: But my publishing house is a commercial enterprise. It belongs, I believe, to [??]. The ownership changes so often that I lose track. It's a commercial enterprise and it's in their hands. I signed off all my rights when the book was first published. That's simple. Simple as that.

Ho: If I might just add something to Mr. Teachout's question. This thing of the Russian text not having been published has always been raised to cast doubt about the accuracy of the translation. I have two things to say about that: (1) the original Russian text has been seen by over fifty people, including the Shostakovich children. And since our book was published, people have contacted us and said "Yeah, we saw the Russian text of *Testimony* even in the 1970s, before Solomon Volkov emigrated." The other thing is, people forget that Seppo Heikinheimo translated the Finnish edition of *Testimony* from the original Russian manuscript. Anyone who wants to compare the accuracy of the English translation can just look at this [the English edition] and look at the Finnish: we have an A-B comparison from the Russian text. There are small differences, of course. Ms. Bouis

probably could address the translation a little bit better than I could. But this happens whenever a book is published in a different language, if there are phrases that are more idiomatic in one language than another. Martin Anderson changed some of my phrases. I wasn't too happy with it, but the book was being published in London. If you compare the Bouis translation printed in England with the American publication you'll see small differences too that were not done by the translator.

Teachout: A point of information, by the way. Did *Testimony* ever circulate in samizdat? Do you know?

Volkov: Not to my knowledge and not with my participation. I wasn't a part of the samizdat movement, didn't have access to it, or wasn't interested at that time.

Feofanov: Well, since this is a subject that we actually discuss in the book and which is an important one, I think -- and we're very fortunate to be in the presence of the first translator of *Testimony* -- perhaps you would care to say a few words about it, how you did it?

Bouis: Well, I did it the way one translates any manuscript. As carefully and as scrupulously as one could, in consultation with the author -- I was very fortunate that the author [Volkov] was available -- and with the editor [Ann Harris of Harper and Row], who worked very closely and used a very strong editorial hand, I would say. We often had discussions, sometimes on the question of finding the more accurate phrase in English, rather than a merely literal translation. Of course, editorial changes were made, but none that detracted, in any way, from the accuracy and the truth of the manuscript. This is twenty years ago. Editors made more changes in translations than they dare do now.

Volkov: Another thing I would like to add [is] that, if somebody in Russia was really interested... Because they were really interested in publishing my book of conversations with Joseph Brodsky, so they did approach another American publisher, they negotiated a contract, they published the book, which appeared in Moscow in September of last year. I'm happy to tell you I received my first literary prize here in the United States for *Testimony*. And the second prize, I was just informed, I got for the Brodsky book in Russia. So that was a nice touch. But there is one thing for me at least that also helps explain something, and that is that -- contrary to maybe what people here in the West think about the mentality of Russian intellectuals, the Russian intellectual elite -- Russia is a very logocentric country that is primarily interested in literature. We all know the names of the great Russian composers and, say, ballet dancers. But in Russia itself music and ballet were comparatively marginal arts. For example, I have a lot of Russian friends who consider themselves very cultured persons -- they know Russian literature by heart -- but they have never heard a note of Shostakovich in all their lives. And they never went to the ballet. And Joseph Brodsky, by the way, wasn't interested in the ballet at all, and he was

an extraordinarily educated person. He was never interested in ballet. And when he learned that in my book about the culture of St. Petersburg I was planning to devote a whole chapter to Shostakovich, he protested very much. He said that Shostakovich doesn't belong to St. Petersburg's culture at all. And this is not an unusual position for a Russian intellectual. [\[Note 3.\]](#)

It's an aberration to judge from "our" perspective -- now it's also mine after 23 years in New York -- to confuse our Western perspective with the Russian one. When I wrote [about] the history of culture at St. Petersburg [*St. Petersburg: A Cultural History*], I myself -- and it was my mistake -- I considered it to be a book written from a Russian perspective. Then I got the first reactions from very cultured Russians. For example, Mikhail Petrovsky. And his first question was "Why so much about music and ballet?" And then I realized for the first time that I have written actually the book from the *Western* perspective. Because if I had lived in Russia, there would not be a special chapter on Shostakovich and special chapter on Balanchine, who is an absolutely totally marginal figure in the Russian picture of the culture of this century and who is a semi-god here, in American culture, where we consider him to be a representative of the great Russian culture as well. But it's not the case for Russia. The composers are very seldom included in the usual recitation -- when they routinely speak of the greatest sons of Russian culture in the twentieth century. That's a simple statement of fact.

Deredita: I'm wondering [in] what languages Russian musicologists and intellectuals can read *Testimony*. It's been translated into Finnish, English, French, I assume?

Volkov: It's been translated into every major language. Practically everybody from Russia whom I met and who was interested in Shostakovich read the book in one or another of the languages. It started to be smuggled into Russia as soon as it appeared in '79. I know that many copies are over there. Later I was told, for example, how the people who knew German and English would translate it from the English copy to German and then read it in circles. So, in this way, yes, it circulated in samizdat, but when I was here. It was distributed, the text went by... you know, there are two different designations: samizdat and tamizdat. Samizdat was published inside Russia and tamizdat was published abroad and then smuggled into Russia. As a tamizdat publication it circulated widely and was part of discussion inside the musical circles. But, once again, Shostakovich, unfortunately, was never in the center of the intellectual discourse in Russia. The one person who put him there, twice, was Joseph Stalin, first in '36, then in '48 -- by issuing first this infamous editorial ["Muddle Instead of Music"], then the Party Decree. Then Shostakovich's name became part of the discourse. And it's interesting to see that Shostakovich himself understood that. If you read his letters to Glikman, you'll find a letter in which he refers to this stuff specifically. He uses the word "reclama", which could be roughly translated "advertisement", which in this context means "promotion". "There was a big promotion for me twice," he says, of course, with a hint of irony and sarcasm, but also with understanding that all these misfortunes, his personal misfortunes, would also have cast

him in the center of the intellectual debate. Not comparing, of course, in any sense, myself to Shostakovich, but I just want to tell you what maestro Ashkenazy told me before this panel opened. He said to me "Well, of course, you have suffered for twenty years. But probably it was a good thing because it drew attention to the book." For culture it was better; for you definitely it was not so good -- but, you know, you have to be happy that it was good for the culture. I accept this situation.

Feofanov: There is actually a theory that in order to write really, really, really great music a composer has to suffer a lot. You know, Beethoven, Schubert, Shostakovich.

Deredita: A very romantic theory.

Mannes Conference [continues](#)... Back to [Shostakovichiana](#).

Shostakovich Conference

Mannes College of Music

(New York, NY; 15 February 1999: Part 4)

Transcribed and edited by Allan B. Ho and Ian MacDonald

The panelists were: Vladimir Ashkenazy, Dmitry Feofanov, Allan Ho, and Solomon Volkov. Other speakers included Joel Lester and, in the audience, Martin Anderson, Louis Blois, Tim Bond, Antonina Bouis, John Deredita, Maya Pritsker, and Terry Teachout. "??" indicates that the speaker in the audience did not identify himself. (The verbatim text has been minimally edited to remove redundant repetitions and clarify grammar where the original construction obscured meaning. Nothing essential has been altered.)

Oswalt: My name is Ed Oswald. I can't say that I'm entirely satisfied on the matter of the quoted passages. First of all, is it true that the quoted passages tend to occur, or all occur, at the beginning of chapters? And, two --

Ho: No, that's not true. In fact, if you look at Laurel Fay's [article], one of Laurel Fay's passages is in the internal part of a chapter. And then we've called attention to others, and of course...

Feofanov: We found another one.

Ho: ...Shostakovich's friends say "he told us that same story". So actually it's again been misrepresented -- it's been made to appear that they only occur at the beginnings of chapters. But I'm happy that you raised that because I don't want to read in the pages of *DSCH Journal* that somehow we avoided the plagiarism issue. In our book, we talked about investigating the possibility that Shostakovich had the ability to quote himself. I think that point's pretty well made. I would ask you here to use your common sense. We know from Litvinova's statement that Shostakovich himself told her: "I met a wonderful young Leningrad musicologist. We now meet constantly and I tell him everything I remember about my works and myself. He writes it down and at a subsequent meeting I look it over." There's been a suggestion that Volkov and Shostakovich were working on some type of compilation of earlier articles. One person has even suggested that Volkov took the first page of the old article, already signed, and that he fleshed out the rest of the chapter. First of all, there's no difference in paper type or font between those first signed pages and the other pages. Harper and Row weren't idiots. They took two years to authenticate the text. Don't you think that they would have noticed something suspicious

-- if the first pages all looked different? The other thing is, if we read the first signed page of the manuscript, what are the first words that Shostakovich says? "These are not memoirs about myself. These are memoirs about other people. Others will write about us. And naturally they'll lie through their teeth -- but that's their business." He doesn't say "Volkov and I are working on some compilation of old articles." If that were the case, why would Shostakovich have told Litvinova "we meet constantly and I tell him everything I remember"? Why would they have to meet constantly? Why would Shostakovich have to tell him everything? Why would Shostakovich have to check over the manuscript later?

Feofanov: And from what we know about his memory, we know that when he says "I am telling him everything I remember about myself and my music," that was *a lot*. This is the guy who could play the the second violin and cello part of *Die grosse fuge* from memory with no prep. He could remember a lot.

Ho: The point I was leading to was that initially the plagiarism argument seemed to be sensible because it was alleged that Volkov and Shostakovich had two or three, or three or four, meetings. Now, if you have constant access, as Shostakovich said -- and Shostakovich said he was telling Volkov everything -- you have the horse's mouth. Why would you plagiarize passages such as "I met Meyerhold in such and such a year...", "The first work by Stravinsky I knew well was such and such..." These are boring, factual, innocuous passages. If I were plagiarizing something I'd certainly find something juicier. If you're going to plagiarize, why not only choose such innocuous passages but also put them on the first page of chapters where they would be most easily found? If you were going to plagiarize, why would you *disguise*, as Fay suggests? Why would you modify some of these "plagiarized" passages, to avoid detection, and then leave others verbatim so that they would be easily found? None of this plagiarism argument makes common sense.

What no one has ever thought of before is that Shostakovich may have had some decision as to what was recycled and how. What Solomon has said on the record is that Shostakovich would be very nervous when they met and, at the beginnings of conversations, he would start slowly, like a locomotive. Is it so hard to believe that, since Shostakovich -- who, we know, thought for twenty years about working on his memoirs and, in fact, asked for a notebook to outline the names of people he wanted to talk about -- that since Shostakovich himself was nervous about the situation, he might come prepared with one, two, three paragraphs of [memorised] text to get started? As I said to you today, I gave an introductory comment at the beginning of this that is basically verbatim from the AMS meeting three months ago. Then after that I elaborated and strayed from the prepared portion. Don't some of you work this way? That, if you're asked to talk about something, you might think ahead of time "Well, today I'd like to speak about Stravinsky." And then think about a paragraph, in pretty polished prose, just to get things going?

Teachout: When Mr. Feofanov told the story a few minutes ago of the Litvinova

discovery, I've heard him tell that story before, and part of his telling of it is verbatim the same as the last time. We all do this.

?: It's part of the aging process.

Feofanov: I guess so.

?: We repeat the same story over and over.

Feofanov: Akhmatova called those sort of things "gramophone records". She, on cue, would get into little composed anecdotes, repeated verbatim. Two interesting things we discovered in researching *Shostakovich Reconsidered* -- which are bordering on sensational, I would have thought, although some musicologists disagree -- is that (1) that he was considering emigrating, and (2) he was considering writing memoirs, which is something no one ever mentions. With respect to emigration, he apparently thought about it quite -- well, *thought* about, I don't know how seriously he thought about it -- in the late '20s and even in the '50s. And it is through the good luck of our publisher, Martin Anderson, that we found that he actually sent a letter to one of his Western friends [Alexander Tcherepnin, in Chicago] asking for advice on how to go about it. So it's not an isolated occurrence. Which, as far as we're concerned, was sensational news, but nobody seems to have picked up on this.

The other thing we discovered is that he was, indeed, planning, thinking, talking about writing his memoirs for several decades. Now, Mrs. Shostakovich said a couple of things that are interesting about that. On one occasion, she said [in an interview in *DSCH Journal*] he never planned to write his memoirs -- yet, at a meeting nine months earlier [at California State University, Long Beach] she said not only was he planning to write his memoirs, but they also bought a notebook and came up with an appropriate motto for the book. Obviously that was something that was on his mind at the end of his life. He, perhaps, wanted to define his place in history. As Mr. Volkov pointed out to us during the time we were writing the book, in that regard it was very common: he was following the tradition of many, many Russian composers and other figures, who did exactly the same thing. One only needs to remember Rimsky-Korsakov and his *Chronicle of My Musical Life*, which, by the way, just like in the case of Shostakovich, was supposed to be published only after his death, etc. Sir, you have a question?

Bond: Yes, as I said earlier, I'm not a scholar, but I want to make two comments and pose a rhetorical question. First comment relates to what Mr. Volkov was saying about his nervousness not only about meeting the man, but also about engaging in this subversive activity, if I can put it that way. Second, I want to reinforce what was said earlier about censors and the appointment of censors. I mean, frequently these people are "several sandwiches short of a full picnic." And the rhetorical question is: Isn't it just barely

possible that, where Shostakovich had some responsibility for the assembly of material in discussion with Volkov, isn't it just possible that by using previously published material, what might have been running through his mind -- with a degree of nervousness about the subversive nature of this publication -- isn't it possible that he thought "Well, if anyone does see this, and they read the first couple of pages and find that it's previously published material, maybe they're not going to go any further...?"

Ho: That's very possible. There's another theory that, perhaps, this was a way of authenticating his words. In other words, whenever he dealt with autobiographical works -- the Eighth Quartet, Viola Sonata -- it was his practice to self-quote, in music as well. He was well aware of Stravinsky's memoirs, too, and the organization of that: expositions and development. So his idea might have been: "I start out with what I was allowed to say in the Soviet press, and then I'm going to elaborate and tell you what I couldn't say afterwards."

Feofanov: Maybe it was just a convenient starting point. We don't know.

Ho: The thing that we tried to make clear in our book is that Laurel Fay said that it was "utterly inconceivable" that those passages could have appeared in *Testimony* in any other way than Solomon Volkov plagiarizing. We ask her, did she ever check to see? She never even mentioned that Shostakovich had the ability, with his memory, to repeat himself. And we're not talking about a lot of material.

Volkov: I want to add a few words about this. For me, this is kind of irrelevant. I really never understood what this word "plagiarism" is all about. Who is plagiarizing from whom? Shostakovich is plagiarizing from Shostakovich. This is absolutely absurd! The people who repeat these words, they are just not thinking, they are parroting somebody else. It was first introduced as an issue of plagiarizing and nobody thought "what was plagiarized?" -- Shostakovich repeating the thoughts he expressed on Stravinsky earlier? That's absolutely absurd. Once again it implies that "devious Volkov" was able to manipulate this innocent dupe or dummy, Shostakovich...

Feofanov: "Puppet".

Volkov: Yes, that's the regular, famous phrase of Taruskin, who describes me as a puppeteer of this little dummy Mitya. It describes probably Taruskin's frame of mind more than anyone else's -- what *he* would have wanted to be, if he'd been in my situation. And that, to my mind, belongs more in the realm of psychoanalysis than anywhere else.

Oswalt: The issue really isn't plagiarism, and I didn't use that word in my question. The issue is simply trying to get as much understanding as we can into the manner in which the book was written.

Anderson: May I ask a question to get off this issue of plagiarism? Did Shostakovich ever discuss his motivation with you, off the record, before you sat down to talk about it? And did he give any consideration, allowing that he intended it to be published after his death, to the possible repercussions on his family? The fact that you'd both initially intended it to be published in the Soviet Union, obviously, should be borne in mind...

Volkov: Yes, this is a thing that is frequently misunderstood -- that it all started in all innocence by both of us, as a book that could be published inside the Soviet Union. When I spoke about nervousness initially, I certainly didn't have in mind the nervousness about smuggling [the book] into the West and publishing there. That wasn't in my mind at all. Because I assumed -- more importantly, *Shostakovich* assumed -- that he had earned his right to say whatever he wanted at the close of his life. For me, it was always like that. Take, for example, dissidence. The first Soviet dissidents, they never said -- if you look closely into their statements -- they never said that "we are anti-Soviet and our line is anti-Soviet." They said "we are defending the human rights of individuals inside the Soviet Union according to the Soviet Constitution." And, in fact, I believe that that was their earnest belief. The Soviet Constitution said that you could express yourself freely -- so we were following the Soviet Constitution. I myself never considered the book, when it was written, to be anti-Soviet. No! Anti-Stalin, yes, 100%. It was very clear from the beginning that this book was going to be an expression of Shostakovich's real sentiments towards Stalin. But both of us made the same mistake at the beginning. We considered then that it would be somehow possible for Shostakovich to speak his mind about Stalin. If you look with a magnifying glass at the book, you will not find one anti-Soviet [remark] or anything criticizing the Soviet authorities as such. [\[Note 4.\]](#)

Teachout: In what year did you have your first conversations with him? In what year did you have your first talks with him that went into the book?

Volkov: I believe it was at the end of the '60s. I would like to have the exact chronology, day by day; it doesn't exist, unfortunately. I didn't think, at the time, of it as being important. I couldn't later take anything out of the Soviet Union; it would be arrested at the customs or going through the customs. Of course, the KGB was there. When we arrived in Vienna and opened our suitcase, Marianna was horrified because somebody tore through everything in the suitcase. Those things now are funny, but then they were not: because there was a pot which we depended on to make food, because we were without money. But there was no cover. The cover had been removed. Somebody left the pot but removed the cover. And the few photographs that were taken with us were all crumpled and some of them torn. People went through our belongings with a vengeance... So the situation changed during the writing, when I first discussed the possibility of publishing this material with my boss at *Sovetskaya Muzyka*, Yury Korev -- which he has confirmed to the present researchers -- and with a representative of an official Soviet publishing house. They flatly refused to do so. Only after that... they were interested at first -- and by

the way we didn't make a secret of our sessions. Everybody around knew about it. So I was summoned first to my boss at the magazine, and he says "OK, let's listen. We're interested. What are you talking about?" And the moment I started to tell him he just went pale and said "No, no, no - *that* we're not printing from anybody, including Shostakovich." The reaction was absolutely terrified. That was the first time it dawned on me that probably to publish the book inside the Soviet Union would be impossible, which proved to be correct.

Feofanov: If we could get back to Laurel Fay and her article, one of the accusations that she makes, is that Mr Volkov made this book up when he came to New York and took three years to have the book published. And the implication in Laurel Fay's article, and on various internet sites that are dedicated to this subject [such as that by "Redrick"], is that that was the time when he made it up using recycled materials, etc., etc. Now Professor Taruskin says that Dr Fay meticulously tested her claims of Mr Volkov with respect to *Testimony* -- nothing of the kind. Allan Ho was the one who meticulously tested her claims because we checked Mr Volkov's words and we checked whether or not people knew about *Testimony's* existence before he emigrated. And what do you know? It turned out to be the case. Mr Korev confirmed everything that Mr Volkov was telling us and just last week we learned the names of yet two more people who saw the manuscript of *Testimony* before Mr Volkov's emigration. And so yet another theory of Laurel Fay's goes up in flames. This book was not created when Volkov emigrated to New York, it was not written when he was working as a research associate at Columbia [University], which by the way an American Communist newspaper said was a known euphemism for "working for the CIA"!

Blois: Mr. Volkov, does the material in *Testimony*, in the sequence that it appears, does it approximately reflect the sequence of meetings, the chronological sequence of meetings with Shostakovich? Could you tell us something about that?

Volkov: No. Once again, it was done in a big hurry from a pile of handwritten material. And the manner in which it was done... I can only now reflect here in a safe environment, postmortem so to speak, how it was done. If I'd known that this would be such a controversial book for which accounting of day to day to day activities and material would be needed, maybe I would at least have tried to preserve all this material -- which is not the same as saying that the material would be there, considering all the external facts of our existence in the Soviet Union. But once again, as I said at the beginning, it was my first big project in this genre. If I'd been wiser by twenty-five-plus years, then probably I would have handled it better. My book of conversations with Joseph Brodsky -- my personal belief is that it's structured better than *Testimony*. And, as I said, I certainly see some flaws in the organization and structuring of material [in *Testimony*]. But that's it. That's how the book exists, for better or for worse. And -- in my opinion, once again -- it honestly represents the views of late Shostakovich.

Anderson: Can you address the issue -- you haven't yet done so -- of his willfully exposing his family to potential danger? "When I'm dead you can..."

Volkov: The moment it became clear that the book could be published only in the West, of course that was the first [thought] which entered his mind. That's why he asked me repeatedly to publish the book only after his death -- and he asked me to put this agreement in writing. Which I did. And the letter was brought from me to Shostakovich by none other than [Boris] Tishchenko himself. It should be somewhere in the Shostakovich Archive in Moscow.

Feofanov: Something else to keep in mind with respect to the family -- which, of course, is a very legitimate question and something with which we struggled in trying to figure out how it happened -- is to look at Shostakovich's life and activities not in this isolated moment, when he was writing or dictating *Testimony* to Volkov, but as a whole. Was that the most daring and risky act that he had done in his entire life? Actually, no. In one of the chapters in our book, we discuss the absolutely suicidal work which is commonly known as *Rayok*, and formally known as the *Struggle Between Realism and Formalism in Music*, which he wrote in the wake of the 1948 Zhdanov Decree. And, according to the best sources we could track down, *Rayok* was actually begun back then, in 1948. Now, I don't know whether I can explain this adequately, but you don't mock -- rather viciously, I might add -- you don't mock "No. 1" [Stalin] back in 1948 and expect to stay alive. Yet he did that. He was kind of one moment very depressed about [things] and, apparently, in the next moment was full of vigor and humor. Sometimes he did such things as that -- and, as we mention in the book, the fact that he did survive indicates that perhaps he understood the Soviet authorities better than his critics [did]. And the fact that he calculated it right and he survived and his family did not perish even after *Testimony* proves that he knew the regime that imprisoned him better than we do.

Anderson: We ought to be bringing this session to a close before too long, so can we have some last questions, please?

Deredita: I have a very quick question. Mr. Volkov, you represent yourself as "pre-Gutenberg". So I assume that you write your books with a quill pen, right? [*Laughter.*]

Volkov: No, even worse. I dictate.

Deredita: I'm wondering about the technology of the interviews with Shostakovich for *Testimony*. Was that [done with a] tape recorder or just transcription by hand?

Volkov: I still can't manage to use a tape recorder. At my sessions in the United States, Marianna, my wife, manages all the recording. So I wrote down my notes [while Shostakovich was talking]. I formed my own shorthand method which I perfected through

doing numerous interviews, and subsequent publishing of these interviews, in the Russian press. By the way, the first time I realized that I was good at this was after I met with a very famous Soviet poet of the time for an interview. We did it using my technique and then I published the interview -- and to my amazement it appeared next in the poet's collection, verbatim, as I published it, without any mention that this was the result of an interview. I concluded that I had mastered the technique, because he just accepted it as his own words. (It was published as a statement, not in question-and-answer form.) So, I was and I still am very good at it, although after thirty years my hands are not so agile and so forth. Then I deciphered it, first in long hand, and then it was retyped. And then it was given, chapter by chapter, to Shostakovich.

*I never asked him to sign for or authenticate it in any way -- that would be absolutely insensitive and stupid for me to ask. And another thing: do people really think that without all these signatures, or without even one signature by Shostakovich, the book wouldn't have been published here? It would. My credentials were checked very carefully by Harper & Row. So, even without a single signature, the book would have appeared anyway. So why would I need to present not one signature, but several of them? As I said, I never intended to ask Shostakovich for anything like that. It was absolutely his initiative. I was stunned myself when the chapters -- which, by the way, were sometimes returned by Irina, his wife, as a go-between in these situations -- when I saw these signatures "Read.-- Shostakovich"... Which, once again, postmortem, after the time, I interpret as a really very clever statement on Shostakovich's part. Because if, say, the manuscript had found its way to the KGB, or the authorities, or whatever, he could say, "Yes, I read this. That's all." It's a very specific inscription, I believe, and a result, perhaps, of long thinking. My theory of a genius is that a genius is a person who arrives at a correct decision very quickly -- as opposed to an average person who might arrive at the same correct decision after spending a lot of time thinking about it. The minds of geniuses are like big computers, they work very quickly. Having met four or five people belonging to this category, I can say, yes, that's how they work. So maybe he arrived at that signature intuitively, or maybe after some consideration -- but that was *his* formula. And I think it was a very clever one.*

Ho: If I could just emphasize one point -- which is that what's important in the authentication of the text of *Testimony* is that Shostakovich read the manuscript. We have that not only from Solomon Volkov, but also in the statement from Flora Litvinova, where she says "Shostakovich told me 'I tell Volkov everything I remember, he writes it down, and at a subsequent meeting I look it over'." So whether or not you're convinced about how these recyclings appeared there, the fact of the matter is that Shostakovich read this and he was satisfied. I don't want that point to escape: that this was sort of a check and balance -- that it wasn't that Volkov was just writing everything down and Shostakovich would never have a chance to look at it. We spoke to Galina Shostakovich and she is of the opinion that, while her father did sign some ridiculous letters of denunciation against people without reading them carefully, that on this project, something so big and important -- about which he thought for twenty years -- he would not have just

automatically signed it without reading it.

Feofanov: She also said that she often hears people saying that this book is a half-truth about Shostakovich and wonders which half they're talking about. She said that -- I'm getting into this because I'm the one who spoke to her -- she said that she not only recognizes the choice of words, but even her father's sentence-structure in *Testimony*. As far as she's concerned, this is a slam-dunk. The only complaint that she had was that there was too much "kitchen talk" in the book -- kind of, you know, anecdotes. That, of course, is her desire to protect her father's image, but has nothing to do with whether Shostakovich actually said these things to Mr. Volkov. I'd like to conclude our conference by asking Mr. Volkov to retell that anecdote about the breakfast... when Maxim spoke about his father...

Volkov: Yes. We talked with Maxim -- with whom I maintain a perfectly friendly relationship nowadays -- about some particulars in this book, which aroused some controversy. In particular, the attitude of his father to Prokofiev was one contentious point. He said to me, "Yes, but father's attitude towards Prokofiev was very complex and contradictory. In the morning he could attack Prokofiev, then in the middle of the day he could say, 'oh, you know, he was a great composer', and then in the evening he might say, 'well, he was a great composer with some flaws.'" To which I replied, "Well, I met with your father usually in the mornings." [*Laughter.*] Another anecdote that relates to this, in my mind, concerns Lunacharsky, the Peoples' Commissar for Education and a person very close to Lenin, who after Lenin's death, at some public meeting, quoted Lenin. Somebody from the audience shouted "Lenin didn't say that!" To which Lunacharsky answered: "To you he didn't, to me he did." [*Laughter.*] Thank you very much.

[*Applause.*]

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THE DISSIDENT

by **Mark Aranovsky**

Muzykal'naya Akademiya [Musical Academy]
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English version by **Véronique Zaytzeff and Ian MacDonald**

So much has been written or said about Shostakovich that adding something new seems a nearly impossible task. Indeed, almost all his compositions have been very intensively studied, his treatment of musical genres has been established, and the most diverse facets of his style have been researched. Various aspects of the composer's life have also become a topic of research, including aspects that present hardly any serious interest for the public. This has resulted in a large body of literature diverse in theme: from thoroughly researched works to the thoroughly trivial. The latter, it goes without saying, offend our taste and the memory of a great artist. However, to be a topic of interest not only of scientific, but also philistine minds, seems to be the fate of genius.

The field of musicology (particularly that of his native land) has indeed accomplished a great deal in comprehending the Shostakovich phenomenon. Yet, after the 'Shostakovich boom' of the Sixties and Seventies, the quantity of research decreased abruptly; it was generally felt as though the works of the great composer were entirely understood. Naturally, this was an illusion. The reason for this decrease lay elsewhere -- in the narrowness of the scientific paradigm formulated in our musicology, which became quasi-dogmatic. And, as is well known, any scientific paradigm plays the role of a sieve in selecting the objects of research in accordance to its distinctive methods while ignoring everything else. This was what happened here. The research focused solely on what corresponded to the traditional notion of musical structure and the fields of expertise in musicology, since Shostakovich's music fully complied

with this notion. It was important to determine what innovations Shostakovich had contributed to the musical language of the twentieth century, and what his specific role had been as an innovator. On the whole, musicology has solved this problem, and the discoveries and observations made at the time have not lost any of their significance. The question lies elsewhere. Today we look at Shostakovich's art differently than we did in the past. The great artist's work, so recently experienced as contemporary, *has become part of history* before our eyes. His status has changed. The social context which gave meaning to the symbolism of his music for his contemporaries has likewise disappeared. And most importantly: the musical awareness of the last decades has been in many ways determined by a different artistic practice entailing new concepts of the organization of musical material and the principles of composition.

In point of fact, there is nothing unusual here. The hand of the clock of history always moves on, introducing new systems with new values; even genius cannot shield itself from the implacable judgement of time. Yet, while conceding the inevitability of such 'strides in history', we must acknowledge that they can bring with them not only gains, but also occasionally vexing losses. Such periodic transitions disrupt our living, spontaneous link with the music of earlier times: its umbilical connection to the present is cut. The genuine understanding which Shostakovich's music enjoyed during the time it captivated his contemporaries has been replaced by divergent opinions -- opinions which are, by turns, contingent, incorrect, unverified from personal experience -- or merely rational interpretations vitiated by obvious simplifications. It is not surprising that today we write and speak of Shostakovich in varying ways: with scepticism as well as enthusiasm, with condescension as well as deference, and with irascibility as well as indifference. Like no other major figure of twentieth century music, he remains a cause for argument.

As in death, he was fated to be at the heart of controversy during his life. However, if, during the Thirties and Fifties, Shostakovich was subjected to so-called 'right-wing' criticism from official circles professing the most reactionary conservatism, today he often becomes the target of attacks from the 'left', either from those post-war avant-garde adepts who see him as a traditionalist, or from 'truth lovers' bitten by the bug of unmasking, who smirk at his imagined conformity. Today it is very easy to be more Catholic than the Pope. It is more difficult to find what can be called the *historical ear* -- something that anyone who has pretensions to the title of music historian or music theorist should actually possess. Naturally, it is naive to expect younger generations to be informed of the social experience of the previous generations, for they will never be able to bridge this gap. They hear and see the recent past differently from those who experienced it, and that is not in the least surprising. Nevertheless, those who study the art of the past ought at least to try to correlate it with what used to be social practice during that time. The lack, among the young, of personal knowledge of these matters can be compensated by the study of historical facts and, naturally, as far as possible, by their correct interpretation. Otherwise, distortions -- or, at the least, superficial judgements -- will become etched in stone. To restore the historical truth and take a fresh look at Shostakovich's work are endeavors that are equally imperative today.

Thus, two questions acquire a particular importance: (1) *was Shostakovich truly a traditionalist?* and (2)

what kind of relationships did his work have with official aesthetics? It should be noted that, because of historical reasons, both questions are tightly interwoven and must therefore be answered simultaneously.

The answer to the first question will depend on what meaning we give to the concept of tradition. If this is defined solely as the orthodoxy of the Forties and Fifties -- when tradition was understood, in essence, as the 'repetition of what had been done': a blind faithfulness toward the most academic standards of Russian music (first and foremost at the harmonic level) -- then, the answer will certainly be in the negative: in that sense, not only was Shostakovich not a traditionalist, but, on the contrary, he was the embodiment of what can boldly be called *counter-tradition*.

The perception of Shostakovich's music during those 'distant and remote years' can be its best witness. As is known, the listener's ear is, initially, subjected to the auditory effect of the music. If this corresponds to expectations, we may perceive the music's deeper, more significant levels. If, however, expectations are not fulfilled, there can be only two possibilities: either our perception will cross the threshold of the unfamiliar, or it will be defeated by musical difficulties, whereupon the question of content simply falls away. We can assert that, in most cases, Shostakovich's music did indeed transgress the system of expectations which society had developed at the time -- a system that, on the whole, was extremely conservative. In his music, everything was unusual, from 'intonation' to dramatic conception. Hence, it was not surprising that the majority of listeners rejected it. Even many musicians of the time were no exception to this rule. Under normal circumstances, this would not have been blameworthy: any innovative art conflicts with the conservative tastes with which society is brought up under the previous aesthetic paradigm. However, one cannot call normal the aesthetic circumstances in Soviet society. At that time, ideological oppression and subsequent persecution of artists became a routine phenomenon, the result of which was that the innate conservatism of the public found 'theoretical support' from above. It was this officially sanctioned conservatism which suppressed any possibility of progress in taste, and consequently, of a productive dialogue between the public and the artist. A situation very close to ostracism developed. The artist would sometimes find himself locked up in a prison of silence (unless he ended up in a real one).

There is no secret why totalitarian regimes are satisfied with conservatism in the artistic expectations of society: any forward movement in the social sphere carries a threat of the development of free thinking, and the arts have long been a strong catalyst of such processes. This, the authorities have always understood well. A list of those, who, while sometimes quite gifted, voluntarily 'ran down their flags', could be very long -- let us recall N. Roslavets, A. Mosolov, G. Popov, and L. Polovinkin. On the other hand, to keep one's right to real artistic freedom required common courage. Shostakovich's whole life took place under the 'high voltage' wire, in constant risk. He struggled ceaselessly for this right to a real, rather than false, art. The tactics of this struggle could change, but the strategy always remained the same. The unbending will of an artist was manifest in this struggle, an artist who survived everything that fate threw at him, and emerged victorious.

The victory of Shostakovich is even more amazing and extraordinary because, after all, it was his art (and we understand it more clearly now), which, over the course of many years, remained practically the only artistic event which, socially and substantively, *actively resisted* the totalitarian regime. Without

risking exaggeration, we can say that *dissidence* was the unifying, integral feature of the entire artistic output of this great musician. And if we understand this, we must also note that the history of 'dissidence' among the Soviet intelligentsia finds its roots decades ago, and in fact began long before the time when this term itself appeared.

But let us come back to the problem of tradition. In our time, this concept has noticeably changed its range. From the heights of the end of the twentieth century, the wide panorama of the valley of time opens up, and the divide created in history by the post-war avant-garde is clearly visible today. By promoting new principles of organization of musical material, the post-war avant-garde decisively sidelined as obsolete all those spectacular innovations with which the art of Stravinsky, Prokofiev, Shostakovich, Bartok and other leaders of the first half of the century had stunned their contemporaries. Thus it became clear that, however revolutionary these finds had once been, they nevertheless remained within the boundaries of the system of musical language which had arisen in European music over the previous four centuries. In the music of the above-mentioned composers, pitch, intonation, mode, key, harmony, meter, dichotomy of theme and form, and so forth, were indeed preserved. Naturally, theirs were *different* types of intonation, mode, key, harmony, thematic construction, and so forth. However, the innovators of the first half of the twentieth century did not infringe on the quintessential foundations of musical art as it was understood at the time. In this sense, and only in this broad sense, does Shostakovich's art belong absolutely to *tradition*: the tradition of the homophonic system of musical language. There is no doubt that one can also find other indications of Shostakovich's ties to a more or less distant past of European and Russian music; for example, his treatment of genres, understanding of musical form, technique of thematic development, and much more. The threads linking him to the history of music are real and diverse and, with time, are becoming more obvious.

Shostakovich was an artist with a complex and tragic fate. Persecuted for almost his entire life and almost sharing the fate of Meyerhold, Mandel'shtam, and [the writer Varlam] Shalamov, he courageously endured hounding and persecution for the sake of what was most important in his life: his art. Occasionally, however, during the most complex conditions of political repression, he had to manoeuvre. Without this manoeuvring, there would have been no Shostakovich art at all. Many of those who had started with him perished, while many others were brought to their knees. He survived and persevered, endured everything and, in the end, fulfilled his calling. And we can only bow before his fortitude and steadfastness.

What is important is not only how he is perceived and listened to today, but also *who* he was for his contemporaries. For those who listened attentively to his strong voice, filled with anxiety and, at times, breaking with despair, Shostakovich became *a crucial symbol of intellectual integrity*. For many years his music remained a *safety valve* which, for a few short hours, allowed listeners to expand their chests and breathe freely. At the time, his music was that truly indispensable lungful of *freedom* and *dissidence*, not only in its content, but also -- which is no less important -- in its musical form. However, first and foremost, we were grateful to Shostakovich for the fact that during those precious minutes of communion with his music, we were free to remain ourselves -- or, perhaps, *to revert* to ourselves. The

sound of Shostakovich's music was not only always a celebration of high art, but also an *interlude of truth*. Those who knew how to listen to his music would take it away with them from the concert hall. His music became an emblem of spiritual experience and of hope for the future. It can be said, without exaggerating, that Shostakovich was the authentic *conscience of his time*. I would suggest that it is our task to carry over that understanding of his work into the present and to instill it into the coming generations of musicians and listeners.

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SOUND-ALLEGORIES

A summary of Manashir Yakubov's programme notes for the 1998 Shostakovich seasons at the Barbican, London

In February-March and October 1998, the London Symphony Orchestra, conducted by Mstislav Rostropovich, played two seasons of music by Shostakovich, including all the symphonies. Manashir Abramovich Yakubov (b. 1936), director of the DSCH publishing house and president of Russia's Dmitri Shostakovich Society, wrote programme notes for the series, published by the LSO in an illustrated 104-page booklet. What follows is a summary of Yakubov's introductory essay "Shostakovich Yesterday and Tomorrow", his interview with Rostropovich ("Shostakovich's World Is Our World"), and his notes on the works played in the LSO's 15 concerts.

Yakubov begins his introductory essay by remarking on the controversial nature of Shostakovich's public image (alluding, in passing, to "falsified memoirs"):

Some consider him a totalitarian accomplice - for did he not write the cantata *Glory to the Communist Party*? [(?)*The Sun Shines Over Our Motherland*, Op. 90, 1952] - others see him as one of its most implacable opponents - for did he not write *The Anti-Formalist Puppet Show* [*Rayok*] - a furious, fearless musical caricature of Stalin and his henchmen strangling culture?...

Yakubov notes that Shostakovich's work is rooted in the events of Soviet history - he refers, for example, to *From Jewish Folk Poetry* as a "direct response to growing official anti-semitism" - and observes that, as time moves on, the music risks losing "some of its sharp sense of reference". This presents the danger that Shostakovich's oeuvre will become "not so much unfashionable as 'purely' classical - the property, in other words, of the academy and school anthologies". Yakubov regards a

"pure" approach as quite unsuited to Shostakovich, partly because of his complexity of tone and use of ambiguities, but also because of his wish to reflect a heterodox cultural context (the "motley, chaotic, sound-palette of [his] times, in which the exalted was found jostling unpredictably with the lowly, the modern with the ancient"):

Shostakovich was acutely sensitive, in a way that no one else was, to the ambiguity of all that went on around him, to those glimmering, elusive double-meanings that everything possessed, but which we ourselves have only recently begun to acknowledge as an agonising aspect of our former physical, social, and psychological lives [in the USSR]. He would combine the lyric with the grotesque, and joy with irony, while the weak voice of hope was filtered through the deepest of despair. Grief was intertwined, somewhat paradoxically yet perfectly naturally, with lighthearted frivolity and mindless merriment. Shostakovich sees both sides of the coin at once with his extraordinary double vision. In his ballets and symphonies, his quartets and concertos, the solemn, the formal and the heroic can all suddenly turn shallow and comic, while in a single moment the ridiculous can descend into tragic nightmare.

For Yakubov, this ever-shifting tone arises from its the composer's wish directly to reflect what was happening in the world - and, far from regarding this as an obstacle to universality, argues that it is the very basis of it: "It is this capacity to give shape to actuality that guarantees his art will endure." As for the underlying unity to which Shostakovich's ambiguities and shifting tones refer, Yakubov sees it as related to the liberal tradition of Russia's intelligentsia, with its firm resistance to totalitarianism:

Under no matter which totalitarian regime, bent on enforcing whichever way of thinking, Shostakovich will never fit in with any ruling ideology or official "national idea". He will always remain a subject for discussion, for argument, and for attack or hostility. But also for delight. Shostakovich's music continues to hold its appeal precisely because it is inspired with the spirit of free thought and free creativity, an inspiration derived despite, or perhaps because of, being created under hopelessly oppressive conditions. *His music holds within itself the inner secret freedom that has long been a feature of Russian culture.*

It was no accident that the mission of preserving freedom fell to music. Under the unimaginable pressure of censorship in the Soviet Union, neither literature nor art, nor the theatre nor cinema could express directly or openly the real feelings people experienced in those times. Shostakovich elaborated *a special musical language* which his contemporaries fully understood, and which allowed him to talk openly about himself and what was going on around him. He achieved a virtuoso perfection in creating *sound-allegories* - in the Eighth Quartet, for instance, he wove in with the tune of the revolutionary song his own cryptic sound-monogram, thus saying to his listeners:

"Tormented by terrible lack of freedom... Dmitri Shostakovich." [Emphasis added. - I. M.]

Yakubov speaks of the till-recently hidden legacy of the liberal "resistance" to Soviet totalitarianism,

referring to works by Shostakovich not in the official list, such as "parodies of the hymns of loyalty honouring Party leaders" composed, with Isaak Glikman, in the late 1930s: "One of these was called *Going along with Kaganovich* [Lazar Kaganovich, one of Stalin's closest Politburo croneys] and another: *The Song of the People's Iron Commissar Nikolai Ivanovich Yezhov* [director of the NKVD during the purges of 1936-38]." Yakubov further confirms that *Rayok* was written (or at least originally drafted) "at the end of the 1940s", i.e., soon after the 1948 Congress.

It is the heterodox nature of Shostakovich's music, says Yakubov, which makes it so contemporary, so perpetually relevant. This is music which exists in relation to an increasingly chaotic world, to real events and tendencies; and it is precisely this facet of the composer's art which will ensure its survival. Yakubov sees Shostakovich's work as a force for unification in a time when "cultural disintegration" threatens us all. His vision of Shostakovich is thus, as it were, communitarian in principle.

Yakubov begins his interview with Rostropovich by asking him why he has chosen to do yet another Shostakovich series: "Why does the work of a composer who was working during the middle years of the century in a totalitarian society - which was alien and incomprehensible to most people elsewhere - still manage to excite not only his own fellow-countrymen, but the whole world as well?" Rostropovich replies by putting the question in historical perspective, blaming Lenin for inflicting a cruel tyranny which brought "starvation, cannibalism, concentration camps, mass executions and so on [to] a sixth of the Earth's surface". Rostropovich holds that Shostakovich resisted this tyranny by "describing, in a musical language that could be understood without an interpreter, the entire history of the Soviet Union and Russia". He continues: "I always believed that someone would eventually emerge in literature or painting whose work would convey the horrors and nightmares of our own age, in much the same way that Goya managed to capture life in Spain during his own time. Our era did not produce a painter of comparable calibre, but it did produce a composer, and this was one who lived through it all and expressed it all with genius, and who depicted the tragedy of this process, furthermore, not from outside like an observer, but from the inside... Many believed that a new era, an era of real freedom, had begun after the Revolution and that everything was going to start afresh... Many people with great gifts and high intelligence were completely taken in by it. I might mention here that, when he was young, Dmitri Dmitrievich [Shostakovich], whom I admire most profoundly, was also taken in, just as were - in some respects - Kandinsky and Meyerhold and such different poets as Blok and Mayakovsky... But then it quickly became clear that it was only [a new form] of terror... It was a total catastrophe and people went underground, they withdrew inside themselves. Shostakovich also withdrew and went underground... That is why the figure of Shostakovich is so important, for he personifies an entire epoch in the life of this planet, and not only for those who lived in totalitarian countries."

Asked by Yakubov to profile Shostakovich's essential qualities, Rostropovich singles out the composer's "deep humanity towards everything - in life, in his relationships and in his art". To illustrate this, Rostropovich recalls an occasion, following a play-through of the First Cello Concerto, when he and Shostakovich walked together through the old railway building in Leningrad: "I caught the way he looked at everything. Though it was summertime, the weather was still not yet hot, and there were

enormous numbers of people either asleep or just lying around next to each other on the cold tiles of the floor. The look on his face was so full of compassion, the sight of it all made him wince. He did not notice me observing him but at that moment I realised, seeing him so moved by what was after all such an everyday sight, the extent to which he felt for other people. This was his true self."

Rostropovich dismisses what he calls the "rubbish" in *Testimony* to the effect that Shostakovich was critical of aspects of Prokofiev's life and works. He has, he says, an unpublished article in Shostakovich's own handwriting in which the composer states that "Prokofiev's *War and Peace* is an opera of genius". Rostropovich adds: "Shostakovich once even stated in an interview that the impulse for writing his First Cello Concerto sprang from Prokofiev's Sinfonia Concertante for cello and orchestra. It always delighted him. Whenever I played the Sinfonia Concertante in Moscow, Shostakovich would always come along if he was in town, and he never missed a single concert... He also remarked *à propos* the Sinfonia Concertante: 'How wonderful the cello sounds with the celesta!' There is such a passage in the finale, when the main theme drops to a slow tempo for the cello while the celesta plays ornamental passages. And at the end of the second movement in Shostakovich's First Concerto, when I am playing on the cello, the string harmonies and celesta play along with me as well. So there are things in his First Concerto which I know for sure he took from Prokofiev, because Shostakovich, in full admiration, pointed them out to me himself. To suggest antagonism towards Prokofiev is sheer nonsense, in my view." [For Shostakovich's remarks about Prokofiev in *Testimony*, see Ho and Feofanov, *Shostakovich Reconsidered*, pp. 91-105.]

Yakubov's own commentaries on the works performed during the LSO seasons are disappointingly at odds with his introductory essay in interpreting Shostakovich's music at face value or in comparatively unexploratory ways. For example, he hears the coda of the finale to the First Symphony as a straightforwardly "triumphant, optimistic, joyful", identifies no ambiguity in the Second Symphony or the finale of the Sixth Symphony, and makes no attempt whatever at any interpretation of the Fourth Symphony. His reading of the Fifth Symphony acknowledges that it was composed "under conditions of spiritual constraint and bloody terror" (and takes into account the "Rebirth" code in the finale), but otherwise adopts the old Soviet concept of the work as embodying "the making of a man" ("the tormented search for inner repose"). His view of the march in the first movement is that it is merely thematically transformative - an abstract exploration of duality. For Yakubov, the Allegretto is "a carnival procession of masks", while the Largo evokes "an anxious search for the hero of the symphony which attains amazing power". In the coda of the finale, Yakubov hears "festive triumph" associated with the verses of "Rebirth": "the idea of culture triumphing over barbarism, and the immortality of beauty".

On the subject of the Seventh Symphony, Yakubov states that the work was, as tradition has it, written in Leningrad under siege, thus disregarding recent evidence to the contrary [see Ho and Feofanov, *op. cit.*, pp. 150-59]. He likewise accepts the simple anti-Nazi interpretation of the Symphony, quoting in full Shostakovich's Soviet-published "commentary" on it. (Such Soviet-published statements are used throughout the booklet.) The Eighth Symphony also receives a standard treatment: a journey through the

"circles of hell" followed by "a peaceful dawn after a dark night, melting everything away: in spite of everything, life goes on". The mood of the Ninth Symphony, according to Yakubov, is one of "cheerful humour... glad and light-hearted, transparent and scintillating": "an entertainment in five acts" with an "occasional sense of tragedy". David Oistrakh is quoted as saying of the solo part in the First Violin Concerto that "it is rather like a great Shakespearean role, full of meanings which demand a great deal of thought and emotional input from the interpreter"; Yakubov offers no exegesis of this "role". As for the Tenth Symphony, he hears it largely as a broodingly subjective work, mainly reflecting its composer's inner moods. No reference is made to the "portrait of Stalin" in the scherzo, as revealed in *Testimony*. The finale is described as evoking "the first ray of spring sunshine suddenly bursting through a heavy fog hanging over a winter's night". For Yakubov, this movement is "dominated by the image of nature, fully awake and jubilant, with the chattering of birds and the swift bubbling of brooks". His account of the Eleventh Symphony is comparably conventional, although he concedes that, from the première onwards, some people have believed that the work involves an allegorical cross-reference to the Hungarian Uprising of 1956.

Yakubov's remarks on the string quartets ("the confessional diaries of a great soul") follow the same conventional pattern. There is, for example, no recognition of the Jewish character of the Recitative and Romance in the Second Quartet. As with his views on Shostakovich's symphonic music, Yakubov's comments on the chamber music are pictorial, often nature-based, and generally biased to the meteorological (wind, rain, clouds, spring, and bright sunshine feature extensively). An exception is made for the Eighth Quartet, where Isaak Glikman's disclosures about the work are accepted (although no mention is made of Lev Lebedinsky's similar revelations). "It was," concedes Yakubov, "a requiem for the composer". (He quotes Shostakovich's third wife Irina as saying that, when she asked him why he had joined the Party in 1960, he told her: "If you love me, never ask me about that. They blackmailed me.")

Yakubov acknowledges that Shostakovich's failure to fulfill his frequent promise to compose something about Lenin calls into question his sincerity in composing the Twelfth Symphony, but quotes Irina's opinion that "Dmitri Dmitrievich thought highly of Lenin". Nothing is said of the complete redraft the Symphony underwent, or of the claim, made by Lebedinsky, that this redraft was to cover an originally too blatant satirical intention [see Ho and Feofanov, op. cit., pp. 248-9]. Nothing new is said about the Thirteenth Symphony, although Yakubov quotes an excerpt from a typical Soviet "review" of the work (i.e., an official reaction sent down from above in preparation for a ban): "The newspaper *Sovetskaia Belorussia* said, for example, that 'the ideological concept of the work is seriously flawed', that Shostakovich's 'sense of high duty has deserted him', and that he 'failed to understand the needs of society'. On Yevtushenko's poems, the critic complained that they 'distract attention and get in the way of understanding the music'!" Referring to the Second Violin Concerto, Yakubov proposes the gastronomical theory that "the Odessa street song 'Bagels for sale!'" probably refers to the Odessa origins of David Oistrakh, [since] the violinist was, as it happens, partial to all types of bagels, pastries, and doughnuts".

Yakubov reveals something new about the première of the Fourteenth Symphony:

At the general rehearsal, which was held in a hall full to overflowing, Shostakovich - in a rare personal departure - offered a few words of introduction. "You probably wonder why all of a sudden I've become so interested in such a ghastly and frightening topic?" said the sixty-year-old composer. "It's not because I'm already getting on in years, nor because, as the artillery men would say, 'the shells are exploding all around and friends are dying...'" The audience was listening to him with bated breath, and Shostakovich then sprang his surprise. He began to recite the passage that every Soviet schoolchild knows, the one they were made to learn by heart in literature lessons, as if it were great poetry - the words from the propaganda novel *How the Steel was Tempered* by Nikolai Ostrovsky: "Man has only one life, and must live it so that he does not recall with pain and regret the aimless lost years, and does not blush with shame over his mean and trivial past, so that when he dies he can say, 'All my life has been devoted to the struggle for the liberation of mankind.'" However, although Shostakovich began this passage using its original words, he left out its closing reference to the liberation of mankind, and said instead: "One must live life in all its aspects honestly, nobly, properly and in such a way as never to commit any shameless deeds." The important thing was not to die honestly, but to live honestly.

As Yakubov notes, Shostakovich was talking about "the moral basis of existence" (as he did to Nikolai Karetnikov, Edison Denisov, and Boris Tishchenko around this time). Westerners may not understand how explosive it was to raise the subject of morality in the USSR, for communism was based on the destruction of "bourgeois morality", which it replaced with allegiance to the Revolution and unwavering duty to the Party, whatever the Party-line dictated. To speak of "morals" was, by implication, anti-Soviet: the subject was a flash-point. Yakubov continues thus:

Shostakovich's words at the rehearsal caused such a tremendous shock among the party functionaries present in the hall that during the performance of the symphony that followed, Apostolov, an executive of the Soviet Communist Party's Central Committee and a former persecutor of Shostakovich, collapsed and died from a heart attack.

Shostakovich's reflections on morality are at their most uncompromising in the *Suite on Verses of Michelangelo*, as Yakubov takes great care to point out:

As always with Shostakovich, a work on "eternal themes" proved to be excitingly relevant for the audience and painfully topical for the authorities. Three central movements of the cycle echoed events in Soviet social and artistic life that were uncomfortably close: the persecution of dissidents, the exile of Solzhenitsyn, and the forced expulsion of Rostropovich and Vishnevskaya from the Soviet Union. These lines seemed to have been written expressly about Solzhenitsyn's years in the gulag and his subsequent fate: "For our sake he descended into the realm of evil... but the door, which even heaven had not closed, was spitefully shut in his face by his homeland" ("To an Exile"). These lines were taken, similarly: "Ingrate! To your own sorrow you prolonged the torments of your son. As there is nothing more base than his banishment, so the world has never had a higher knowledge

of man." And the following lines rang out in a passionate tirade: "If only I could have been he! O if only his deeds and the grief of his exile had been mine, I could have wished no better fate in all the world!" However, even the censorship of that time was not prepared to pull Shostakovich up when he declared that these settings had been written for the fifth centenary of the great Italian's birth!

In the main, Manashir Yakubov's remarks about Shostakovich's music are cautious and clichéd in the old Soviet style. Middlebrow literalism abounds (e.g., the "crystal clarity and infinite depth" of the Viola Sonata, "the triumph of reason and goodness and the indestructible beauty of life" of the Eighth Symphony, etc, etc). Yet his ear for Shostakovich's musical personifications can be alert (e.g., the "small boy's voice" of the piccolo in the first movement of the Ninth Symphony, and the "intensely grieving and ailing, elderly hoarseness of the bassoon" in the same work's closing movements). Such views will not please the "pure music" adherents of Western anti-revisionism, yet arguably Yakubov is at his best when hearing Shostakovich's supposedly absolute music as illustrative, as in his account of the Third Symphony where he identifies the work's ethos as that of the Soviet mass demonstrations and street marches and describes its design as "a vast procession with a huge number of participants rolling past, one after the other, each performing something different - an entertainment or a song - in order to create a moving sequence of images". Yakubov points out the Symphony's "strong resemblance to Shostakovich's theatre and film music, and to the sports and athletics passages in the ballets": "The long slow movement in the 'Mayday' Symphony closely resembles the lyric Adagio from a ballet, while there is another 'genre' passage - quite unusual for an orchestral piece - in the musical portrayal of a meeting, which precedes the chorus in the Finale. The deafening sound of percussion and the powerful chorus of voices singing in unison (resembling a crowd shouting out slogans) give way to the sounds of a public speaker, here imitated by a trumpet solo and three trombones, in response to which we hear the hubbub of a huge crowd, represented by a *glissando* of cellos and double basses." In a similar vein, Yakubov identifies the ethos of the first movement of the Sixth Symphony as "a slow, funereal march" and speaks of "a marionette-like quality" about the work's scherzo.

Yakubov's general approach is distinctly redolent of the moribund Soviet style, as his trusting reliance on Shostakovich's Soviet-published materials makes plain. This, to some extent, contradicts his introductory remarks about the composer's anti-totalitarian engagement with external reality - which, in turn, suggests that, in his reference to "those glimmering, elusive double-meanings that everything possessed, but which we ourselves have only recently begun to acknowledge as an agonising aspect of our former physical, social, and psychological lives", Yakubov is speaking for himself, as one only recently coming to grips with the history of the USSR and with the Aesopian language it spawned. Accordingly, he produces only two new suggestions in the specifically Aesopian vein. He refers to *The Golden Age* as "a parody of propagandistic 'art'" (which Western critics have usually taken as the real thing), observing that the ballet was later banned on the grounds of "promoting ideology that was alien to the proletariat". He also reveals - comically, in the context of the high-mindedness of most of his commentary - that, following the "Suliko" (Stalin) quotation in the finale of the First Cello Concerto, the melodic shape of the movement's second theme is "based on a derisory tune, famous among musicians,

that has the indecent words 'You can go and fuck off!' (the 1920s had seen publication of a jokey song called 'Go To Hell' using the same tune)". Yakubov remarks, discreetly: "It was obviously no accident that Shostakovich had difficulty telling the interviewer from *Sovetskaia Kultura* 'something specific about the content of the Concerto'." It appears that we now have a second "linked" code. First: "Tormented by terrible lack of freedom... Dmitri Shostakovich"; second: "Stalin... you can go and fuck off!" For this, we should be grateful to Manashir Yakubov.

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THE WAR SYMPHONIES

Shostakovich Against Stalin

A film by Larry Weinstein



We've not been short of TV and cinema films/documentaries about Shostakovich during the last decade or so. In Britain, the question of the composer's true moral-political orientation has been dealt with in BBC-2 programmes by Peter Maniura (*Shostakovich: A Career*, 1987) and Gerard McBurney and Barrie Gavin (*Think Today, Speak Tomorrow*, 1990), and also by Channel 4 in *Soviet Echoes* (1995). In addition, we've had Tony Palmer's film of *Testimony* (1987), plus several BBC Radio 3 talks and even a play or two. All have adopted much the same revisionist agenda, often including audio- or video-tape interviews with former Soviets who knew the composer and have vouched for either the literal or essential accuracy of *Testimony*. The degree of consensus from such sources, as well as in the editorial line taken by the programme-makers, is impressive in itself. Only one programme on this subject has so far taken an anti-revisionist tack: Tamara Bernstein's radio series *In Search of Shostakovich*, made for the Canadian Broadcasting Company in 1994. This follows the Fay-Taruskin-Brown thesis that the composer, far from a secret dissident, was an earnest civic artist genuinely striving to produce work acceptable to the Soviet state, and who only in his fifties began to resent its censorious reception of his music. (For a review, see "The CBC Shostakovich Documentary" in [Centre and pseudo-centre](#).)

[The War Symphonies](#), a 1997 Canadian-German coproduction with executive input from teams in Britain, Holland, and Finland, is the most recent, and in some ways the most impressive, of the sequence of revisionist programmes on Shostakovich. Produced for Rhombus Media by Niv Fichman, *The War Symphonies* is directed by the distinguished multiple award-winner Larry Weinstein, among whose previous films are *Thirty-Two Short Films About Glenn Gould* (1993), *Shadows and Light: Joaquin Rodrigo at 90* (1994), and *September Songs: The Music of Kurt Weill* (1995). Editor David New acts as co-writer with Weinstein and associate director Gemma Van Zeverter, and there are consultant credits for Yosif Feyginberg and Elizabeth Wilson (though not for Solomon Volkov, who also assisted and whose copyrighted *Testimony* is used, without acknowledgement, throughout the programme). Shot on location in St. Petersburg and Moscow, this 82-minute documentary includes excerpted performances by the Netherlands Radio Philharmonic and the Mariinsky Theatre Orchestra, both conducted by Valery Gergiev, who in addition offers his views on the featured works: a scene from *Lady Macbeth*, symphonies 4 to 9, and the burlesque *Rayok* (given in tantalising glimpses of a sharp Mariinsky production).

Throughout the film, the editing together of music, image, and voice-over is often masterly (as, for example, in the sequence in which the "Song of the Counterplan" segues seamlessly from composer

Dmitri Tolstoy playing it on the battered piano in his apartment to Flora Litvinova singing it, with apparent perfect pitch and tempo, in another location, before it's finally taken up, again seamlessly, by the soundtrack version as recorded for the film in 1932). Elsewhere, passages from the symphonies are adroitly matched with documentary footage of Soviet public events, the Fourth Symphony being used as the framing reference-point, starting the programme and recurring (the coda to III) as the underscore to its last ten minutes. Needless to say, not everyone will approve of this illustrative method; indeed, those diehards who refuse to admit Shostakovich's moral anti-communism, or even that his music is anything but purely abstract, may well squirm at Weinstein's approach. Let them. Their seemingly incurable historical ignorance is the cause of their discomfort: they deserve to be annoyed by this programme. Sensible viewers need have no qualms.

The tell-tale sign of the pundit who knows little of the Soviet background is his or her ritual plaint that to be explicit (whether by associative imagery or programmatic interpretation) about the totalitarian context in which Shostakovich worked, and against which his art was pitched, is automatically to perpetrate "propaganda". No one with any deep acquaintance with the subject would wave this term around so crudely, the readiness to do so betokening only the vague reflexes of the indignant cultural generalist. One such brandisher of crass placard-criticism is Royal S. Brown, whose review of *The War Symphonies* in *Cineaste* earlier this year trots out the usual untutored prejudices. The film, Brown asserts, turns "Shostakovich's great music into cheap vehicles for anti-Stalinist propaganda... In many ways, *The War Symphonies* out-agitprops the agitproppers. We needed more than propaganda." In fact, one may only distinguish between truth and propaganda with any accuracy if one has a basic grasp of the subject at hand -- in this case, the Soviet context. Brown, in several statements in his review, unwittingly betrays his lack of this basic grasp.

Aside from Shostakovich's music, the focus of interest of *The War Symphonies* lies in the testimonies of the twenty or so witnesses whose statements occur throughout the programme in standard documentary style, appropriately juxtaposed with music and image. These testimonies, insinuates Royal S. Brown (adopting the "blind eye" view of Laurel Fay, Richard Taruskin, and Malcolm Hamrick Brown), are to be seen as deliberately false or in other ways unreliable. "The various witnesses," he claims, "go through great contortions to make their view of history fit the Volkov thesis." It's unclear how many of Weinstein's witnesses have read *Testimony*, which still lacks Russian publication. In any case, the fact that all of them (except Tikhon Khrennikov) sing from the same hymn-sheet about Shostakovich must mean that they are either (1) mischievously pushing the same "propagandist" deception; (2) suffering from an identical hallucination; or (3), like the Kosovar Albanians whose reports to UNHCR of Serbian atrocities were so consistent because they were true, merely recording the facts of the matter as they saw them. It is hard to discern which of Options (1) and (2) Royal S. Brown takes to be the reason for the consistency of Weinstein's witnesses. Perhaps he supposes their testimonies were deviously coached from the mouths of these drily ironic Russian intellectuals by Weinstein, or by Solomon Volkov, or even by Elizabeth Wilson (around a dozen of whose interviewees reappear here to repeat what they told her in *Shostakovich: A Life Remembered*)? Perhaps he thinks they congregated together somewhere twenty years ago and agreed on an elaborately phoney version of events for the arcane pleasure of fooling

Western film directors?

What, though, of the historical "contortions" allegedly committed by Weinstein's witnesses?

Disappointingly, Brown manages only one example: "How about the fact that Shostakovich composed his Fourth Symphony before the Stalinist purges had begun? No problem [for] composer Dmitri Tolstoy [who declares that] the symphony tells us 'of the coming of the Stalinist tragedy'." Actually, the claim that the Fourth Symphony "prophesies" (sic) "the coming Stalinist tragedy" is made not by Dmitri Tolstoy (b. 1923) but by conductor Valery Gergiev, who is by some way the youngest speaker here, having been born in 1953, seventeen years after Shostakovich finished the Fourth Symphony in May 1936. Being a mere child compared to the composer's friend Natan Perelman (b. 1906), the conducting guru Ilya Musin (1904-1999), and the composer Vissarion Shebalin's dignified widow Alisa (b. 1901), Gergiev could be forgiven for misconstruing the chronology of their times. And, indeed, it might well appear -- particularly to the sort of irritably superficial attention which is all Royal S. Brown seems to have allowed himself ("irritating" is the fifth word in his review) -- that Gergiev credits Shostakovich with precognition. Yet such an impression is false. In 1936, avers Gergiev correctly, "it was already clear that the country was becoming one big concentration camp". In case one should miss this statement through a fit of irascible distraction, Shostakovich's friend, musicologist Abram Gozenpud (b. 1908) is on hand to restate it for us: "This [1936] was a time when the concentration camps were full of hundreds of thousands of political prisoners." That Brown misattributes Gergiev's statement, misunderstands it, and fails to notice that Gozenpud confirms it, is evidence, at best, of an excess of zealous wrath. More to the point is that anyone writing on Shostakovich nowadays ought to be aware that, irrespective of any words of Valery Gergiev, Stalin began his repressions as soon as he became dictator in 1928.

The "Stalinist purges" -- which Royal S. Brown appears to imagine broke out quite unexpectedly months after Shostakovich finished his Fourth Symphony -- were, in fact, continuous throughout Stalin's 25-year reign. From time to time, these purges became excessive even by Stalin's standards, reaching frenzies which were popularly known by the names of the sub-dictators nominally in charge of their prosecution, such as the Yezhovshchina of 1936-38 and the Zhdanovshchina of 1946-48. What Brown understands by the phrase "the Stalinist purges" is what Gergiev calls "our famous year of 1937", when the Yezhovshchina was at its height. What Brown fails to grasp, having presumably read no Soviet history, is that the Yezhovshchina was itself part of something larger called the Great Terror, which brewed up after the Kirov murder in late 1934 and only simmered back down to normal levels in 1939.

Shostakovich's Fourth Symphony, then, was begun (in late 1935) not only within an ongoing culture of fear and purge, but nearly a year into the Great Terror itself. The claim that Shostakovich was "prophetic" in this work is erroneous -- the product of Valery Gergiev's misconception of chronology. The Fourth Symphony was as much a child of the Terror as were the Fifth and Sixth, as Royal S. Brown should be aware by now. If he has an alternative concept of this work, he's entitled to advance it, but he has no right to poohpooh Russians who demonstrably know more than he about the context and thus hold a weightier opinion -- people like Shostakovich's friend, the musicologist Marina Sabinina (b. 1917) who tells Larry Weinstein: "The Fourth Symphony was about the times, the cruel times, about the nightmare of repression."

From the Fourth Symphony, Weinstein's storyboard takes a brief backward turn to visit *Lady Macbeth* by way of the *Pravda* attack at the beginning of 1936. We see the poisoning scene sung by Irina Loskutova and Bulat Minzhilkiev at the Mariinsky Theatre, intercut with Gergiev suggesting that Katerina's murder of the tyrant Boris had subversive resonances in the USSR of the Thirties. It's true that resistance and hatred of Stalin were alive and bubbling in Soviet society at that time. Gergiev may be onto something. However, the majority opinion here is that the opera's famous fall in 1936 was due more to Stalin's philistine incomprehension of Shostakovich's idiom (cue a trio of soulful Russian street minstrels warbling "Suliko"). Annoyed by Gergiev's guess, Royal S. Brown ignores the idiomatic argument in order to revive the obsolete conjecture that Stalin, being a prude, disapproved of the sex scene. But the dictator, no sort of prude, was incapable of being shocked by anything on earth, let alone a detumescent trombone. What Stalin -- who walked out shortly before the Third Act (i.e., a minute or two after the episode at the police station) -- would have disliked was the opera's pulsing sense of independent life, its spontaneous vitality, its desperate consecration of love above all other ties and responsibilities, and its Politically Uncorrect emotional authenticity. In short, he sensed its innately counter-revolutionary *individualism*. That he also hated most of the music was no doubt the clincher, but, given contemporary developments in other walks of Soviet life, he must have been looking for an excuse to crack down on the intelligentsia, and *Lady Macbeth* offered the perfect opportunity. What tends to get missed in all this is that while Stalin may have preferred a sentimental folk-song, he was canny enough to detect from the young Shostakovich's opera that it was the work of a powerful artist: someone potentially useful to the state if he could be licked into shape (and not just for film music). As with Bulgakov and Pasternak, Stalin seems to have been a little intrigued by Shostakovich -- a more than usually engrossing puppet to play with.

Although Stalin is known to have kept a close eye on his puppet-victims, it's highly unlikely that he listened in on the rehearsals of Shostakovich's Fourth Symphony in the way, for example, that he listened in (from the lighting booth) to the show-trials of 1936-8. On the other hand, it's conceivable that he ordered his underlings to report to him about the rehearsals and that the decision to forbid the symphony was taken at a high level. A couple of Weinstein's witnesses reiterate the long-standing official line that Shostakovich voluntarily withdrew the Symphony. However, it beggars belief that any Soviet composer could withdraw a work of this importance at the final stages of rehearsal solely on his own initiative. To do such an inconvenient thing without official directive, let alone official sanction, would have represented suicidally willful individualism. Shostakovich could only have "withdrawn" the Symphony because Stalin's *apparatus* gave him to understand that such was the public form of what was required of him, i.e., it was a ban publicly presented as a voluntary surrender. (This is how Isaak Glikman, Daniel Zhitomirsky, and Evgeny Mravinsky saw it -- and, curiously, how Tamara Bernstein reports it in her CBC documentary.)

Why did Stalin's *apparatus* ban the Fourth Symphony? Shostakovich's friend Mariya Konniskaya (b. 1905) hoods her eyes with patrician wryness: "The system suspected that something was wrong here. 'Life has become better, life has become merrier', said Stalin, but Shostakovich insisted on writing tragic themes. They sensed with their snouts that something was wrong." Marina Sabinina agrees: "Its tragedy was so sharp, so cutting that it was impossible not to notice." *Testimony* implies that Shostakovich had

mapped out much of the Fourth Symphony in his mind before the *Pravda* attack on *Lady Macbeth*--a fact which, as we have seen, in no way affects the claim that the Symphony is "about" aspects of the Terror. However, it is hard to believe that the final stages of composition, which took place over the four months after the *Pravda* articles, left no additional mark on the work. As Dmitri Tolstoy observes: "The ban on Shostakovich was in force. And the whole population was so terrorised that they didn't know how to relate to him. Many thought he'd soon be in prison. Many betrayed him. Those in the Composers' Union who had once praised his music now began to denounce him." Larry Weinstein is quite right to make this vertiginous work the cornerstone of his film: it embodies the story he's telling with a quasi-cinematic precision which ideally suits his purpose. (Readers of [The New Shostakovich](#) will perhaps observe how closely Weinstein follows its suggestions.)

In stepping back barely an inch from what Gavriil Popov called the "very caustic, strong, and noble" outspokenness of the Fourth Symphony, Shostakovich's Fifth, composed about a year later at the height of the Terror, demanded an extraordinary courage (combined, perhaps, with a compulsion to tell the truth which, regardless of his fears for himself and his family, he was unable to evade). The design of the Fifth may be tauter and its tone more astringent than the free-ranging phantasmagorical Fourth, but the message it conveys is much the same. The reasons for these stylistic developments, however, were not, as Western musicologists have assumed, merely formal, as the composer's daughter Galina (b. 1936) is at pains to remind us: "Under Stalin, many people were repressed and imprisoned. Those arrested included friends and relatives of Shostakovich. For instance, his sister Mariya's husband was arrested and died in prison. My grandmother, that is my mother's mother, was also arrested and exiled." (Indeed, Shostakovich's elder sister Mariya was also internally exiled at this time.) The imprisonment or exile of four of the composer's relations probably followed the usual rationale in such cases: they were *warnings*, and those held in custody were understood as "hostages" (sic). Such a situation, Galina adds, "makes a profound impression. [My father] was very austere, very reticent about this subject."

The War Symphonies makes no expressive use of the Fifth Symphony's grieving slow movement in this connection; nor does the film broach the issue of the coda to the finale. That's been done before and, in any case, this is not that sort of film, being instead a broad-brush canvas designed to convey the continuity of Shostakovich's "compositional opposition" by juxtaposing music with historical footage in almost impressionistic ways. Weinstein's approach stresses the caricatural satire and sense of the monstrous in the composer's music. Its tragic aspects, well covered in earlier treatments, are correspondingly leant on less heavily than usual. (Royal S. Brown predictably objects to "the juxtaposition of parts of the Eighth Symphony, one of [Shostakovich's] most profound utterances as a composer, with an agitprop parade". In fact, the "part" in question, the trio from the third movement, is clearly sarcastic and legitimately juxtaposed as such. Brown is merely paying pompous lip-service to the "profundity" of a work whose tragi-satiric shifts he fails to hear or understand.)

The Fifth Symphony is, of course, a key work for revisionism -- a piece for decades praised as an abstract "neoclassical" meditation by Western critics who copied down its year of composition without

comment, not realising that it was significant. The composer Vladimir Rubin (b. 1924) is explicit: "It was written during a very difficult time, a time of terror in our country. Many people close to Shostakovich were swept away by this bloody meat-grinder. This symphony was crucial for his destiny because his very life was at the brink of extinction." Ilya Musin elaborates: "With the Fifth Symphony, Shostakovich expressed allegorically everything he had endured -- all those persecutions." Marina Sabinina, who was at the Leningrad premiere, sums up the feeling behind the half-hour of tumultuous applause with which the audience greeted the work: "*Finally we have heard the music which we wanted to hear!*" (For the sake of bemused Western musicologists, it should perhaps be explained that this sentiment referred to the expressive directness and emotional authenticity of the Symphony rather than its formal-stylistic niche in the canon of Western classicism.)

One might ask: if Stalin's *apparat* took sufficient interest in Shostakovich's Fourth Symphony to ensure that it was effectively forbidden, why did they not do the same with his Fifth? It's a fair question since, despite certain claims to the contrary, there was no official *apparat* position on the Fifth until two months after it had begun to be performed in the Soviet Union. The probable explanation is manifold. Stalin and his henchmen maintained the impetus and thoroughness of the Terror by moving from one area of concern to another, leaving each situation alone for a while after the necessary alterations had been put into effect (for example: the progress, month by month, through the fields of Soviet culture during 1936, following the inaugural attack on Shostakovich and his fellow "formalists"). By the time Shostakovich came to write his Fifth Symphony, the main focus of the Terror had shifted to the Party and the armed forces, for the moment leaving the cultural intelligentsia untouched. Complicating matters, Stalin's multi-centred power-structure produced, during 1937, a species of mutual cannibalism by which one political sub-organisation hastened to denounce its nearest rival before it was itself denounced. This, too, happened inside the musical *apparat*, with the probable result that many of the local officials who had overseen the quashing of Shostakovich's Fourth Symphony were no longer in place, or had lost immediate touch with their central command, when the Fifth came into rehearsal in September 1937. In effect, the overworked Stalinist system took its eye off the ball during a time of intense organisational convulsion, thereby allowing the Fifth Symphony, every bit as subversively critical as its predecessor, to slip through into the public arena and become a *de facto* popular success before it could be halted.

One of the strengths of Weinstein's film is that, through well-selected documentary footage, it conveys some of the atmosphere of apocalyptic hysteria attendant upon the prosecution of the Terror at its height. Thus, over the sinister build-up to the grotesque march in the first movement of the Fifth Symphony, we are given show-trial footage of public prosecutor Andrei Vyshinsky demanding that "the disgusting Trotskyite agents of international Fascism be shot like filthy dogs". This, in turn, is intercut with horrible film of such filthy dogs being shot, as recommended, before being kicked casually into open graves -- followed by marching "angry workers" and (for the edification of Royal S. Brown) some *real* propaganda drumming home Stalin's surrealistic assertions that all his erstwhile Bolshevik colleagues (rivals) had been spies, saboteurs, and would-be assassins on the payroll of America and Japan.

In keeping with his apparent policy of not milking the pathos (and thereby allowing pompous advocates of profundity to overlook the attacking *satire* in Shostakovich's music), Weinstein segues from the Terror to an extended evocation of the siege of Leningrad via the drained desolation of the Sixth Symphony's *Largo*. Here -- while quoting the passage in *Testimony* in which Shostakovich describes the Seventh Symphony as "not about Leningrad under siege [but] about the Leningrad that Stalin destroyed and Hitler merely finished off" -- the main emphasis among the witnesses is on the traditional anti-Nazi interpretation of the work. Isaak Glikman (1911-1996), for example, is clear that the march in the first movement of the Seventh represents the "Fascist invaders". We are offered moving firsthand accounts of the legendary Leningrad premiere, as well as film of Shostakovich playing the first movement of Seventh Symphony in a piano reduction, and reading -- with vehemence -- an anti-Nazi speech at a broadcast public meeting. Though she contributes elsewhere, Flora Litvinova (b. 1920) is not asked about her war-time conversation with the composer in which he told her the Seventh was "not just about fascism, but also about our system, about any tyranny and totalitarianism in general". (Perhaps she was asked about this during the making of the programme, but it was dropped for reasons of structure. Since so many of those witnesses who took part are now dead or nearly so, it is to be hoped that outtakes, or at least unedited transcripts of the interviews, have been preserved by Weinstein as vital historical documents.) As for the substantial evidence in support of Litvinova's report, readers are directed to pages 150 to 159 of Allan B. Ho and Dmitry Feofanov's monumental [Shostakovich Reconsidered](#).

Shostakovich, of course, was in Leningrad for only a few months of the siege, being (on Stalin's personal order) flown out to Moscow and sent thence to Kuibyshev. The film's long Leningrad meditation is, however, justifiable as conveying a properly sombre impression of the Soviet experience of the war. This is thrown into relief by the equally emphatic identification of the Eighth Symphony as very far from the war-dominated work which anti-revisionists take it to be. Dmitri Tolstoy: "In plain language we can say that it is about totalitarianism -- this horrible reality, and the pitiable human soul which is looking for a place to hide from it." From a similar perspective, Vladimir Rubin characterises the work as a synoptic contemplation of the horrors of our time, these being more moral and political than merely military. As for the pokerfaced satire of the Ninth Symphony, Tolstoy drolly describes it as "what is called giving the finger in the pocket". Glikman adds a codicil: "When the war ended, I was in Moscow. Dmitri did not come out to the square that day because his joy over the victory was mixed with a feeling of bitterness. He hid this feeling. He told only me about it. He was afraid that on the crest of this victory, Stalin would consolidate his tyranny, consolidate his despotism and his inhumanity." (The lame pretence, in certain quarters, that Glikman was a fence-sitter hereby bites the dust.)

The tribulations of 1948, and Shostakovich's scabrous satirical riposte *Rayok* (here accepted as originating within months of Zhdanov's attack), occasion a contribution from St Tikhon Khrennikov (b. 1913), who opines that the fear which Shostakovich lived in "has been terribly exaggerated". "There was nothing," insists the old rogue, silkily, "for him to be afraid of." Vladimir Rubin is sardonic: "The wolf cannot speak about the fear of the sheep. Shostakovich was subordinate to Khrennikov, and Khrennikov was Shostakovich's curator from the Party. Khrennikov has said that he himself had nothing to be afraid

of, but I doubt this statement. All were afraid. Khrennikov had his fear, Shostakovich his. We were programmed with it -- it infiltrated our innermost life." Understandably so, for death or the Gulag awaited any dissenting voice. Alisa Shebalina confirms that Shostakovich played *Rayok* to her husband Vissarion, who urged him: "Destroy it immediately -- or hide it well!"

Elsewhere, Veniamin Basner (1925-1997) tells the 1937 [interrogation story](#), as he did in Channel 4's *Soviet Echoes*, calling the interrogating officer Zakovsky, as distinct from Zanchevsky in his alternative version for Elizabeth Wilson (and Zakrevsky in the same story retold by Krzysztof Meyer). Karen Khachaturian (b. 1920) likewise re-runs Shostakovich's joke-toast "Here's to things not getting any better!", as he told it to Wilson. He adds that Stalin personally ordered Shostakovich to write the score for his autohagiographical film *The Fall of Berlin*, from which we see extended clips.

Flora Litvinova summarises: "Shostakovich embodied our epoch. He portrayed its controversy and its tragedy." Gozenpud is more specific: "Shostakovich juxtaposed the individual and subjective to the collective and the national. He spoke about the tragedy of the self in a cruel world, a world which threatens the very existence of mankind." As for whether the composer had any illusions, political or artistic, about the cause of this cruel tragedy, Gozenpud firmly shakes his elderly head: "He was too sober and wise an artist to depict heaven on earth at a time when hell was on earth."

Royal S. Brown has the nerve to tick off senior musicologists like Gozenpud and Sabinina (and, by logical extension, also Mazel', Lebedinsky, Aranovsky, and Laul, not to mention half a dozen eminent Russian conductors) for what he calls "purely programmatic readings [which] would get a student in Music Appreciation 101 an F for the course". It seems not to have occurred to him that the case of Shostakovich implies that there's something wrong with Music Appreciation 101. And, of course, his accusation entails blatant sleight of hand. These are not "purely" programmatic readings, but secure contextual indications from professional analysts, formerly close to the composer, as to the underlying meaning of his music. The fact that very little is said about the technical details of Shostakovich's music reflects the structure of the film rather than any alleged inadequacy among the participating musicologists.

The same sleight of hand, or contortion of thought, is evident in Brown's suggestion that Shostakovich's venerable friends and colleagues claim "the turn toward the tragic in his music was caused by the advent of Stalin and the Soviet state". In the first place, no such claim is made or implied; Brown has misunderstood the script. In the second place, the fact that Shostakovich wrote tragic music long before Stalin took power (for example, the Suite for two pianos, Op. 6) has no logical bearing on the claim that his later tragic music often stemmed from aspects of life in the society Stalin created. Deriding the respectable testimony aired in *The War Symphonies* as "propaganda", Brown complains that "we needed more". Indeed, we always do; but not more lying obfuscation and pseudo-centric flannel. Larry Weinstein makes no pretence at a plodding survey of every quaver Shostakovich wrote. Anyone in his job must be selective, and he has taken a conceptual line which is coherent in its own terms and firmly

defensible in its contentions. The subtleties it misses are not those appertaining to a composer who changed his thoughts every second of the day, or who ignored his world in favour of inner exploration of his own psyche, or who worked philosophically in a mood of exalted abstraction. Such fancies are merely a Western cultural delusion imposed on the reality of Shostakovich's life and art.

Brown rebukes *The War Symphonies* for evoking "very little of the real horrors imposed by Stalin on at least thirty million of his countrymen. Where, for instance, is a witness to tell of the hideous torture inflicted on Shostakovich's fellow artist, the brilliant theoretician and theatrical director Vsevolod Meyerhold, before he was finally executed, two years after his arrest, in 1940?" We are entitled to respond by asking which is the real Royal S. Brown: the one who pretends *Testimony* told us nothing we didn't already know, or the one who rejects it as a "decidedly slanted presentation"? The one for whom the Stalinist background is overrated as a source for Shostakovich's inspiration, or the one who insists that this background should be stressed by detailing the fate of Meyerhold? And why Meyerhold, in particular? Can Brown supply the name of anyone else tortured by the NKVD -- or is he just quoting the only one he's heard of? "We still have a very incomplete picture of the horrors of Stalinism," he declares, having presumably read no Soviet history during the last twenty years. (He certainly can't have read much about Meyerhold, who was arrested, not in 1938 as he appears to think, but on 20th June 1939, being shot eight months later on 2nd February 1940.) *The War Symphonies* has its limitations but they don't detract from its impact and are, in any case, minor compared to those of Royal S. Brown.

No one really interested in Shostakovich will be disappointed by this film, which contains much valuable footage of the man himself and conveys an important part of the truth about his life and times with considerable visual and sonic verve.

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The War Symphonies: Shostakovich Against Stalin is available on colour VHS from [Bullfrog Films](http://www.bullfrogfilms.com), Box 149, Oley PA 19547, USA. [(610) 779-8226; bullfrog@igc.org]

Interviewees:- Veniamin Basner, Valery Gergiev, Isaac Glikman, Abram Gozenpud, Karen Khachaturian, Tikhon Khrennikov, Mariya Konniskaya, Flora Litvinova, Ksenia Matia, Ilya Musin, Maria Novikova, Natan Perelman, Tatiana Petrova, Vladimir Rubin, Maria Sabinina, Nikanor Shabanov, Alisa Shebalina, Galina Shostakovich, Yelena Sonina, Dmitri Tolstoy.

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CENTRE AND PSEUDO-CENTRE

Points in response to issues arising from DSCH 10

Ian MacDonald

While I sympathise with Michael Kerpan's weary wish (DSCH 10, p. 42) that all the wrangling over Shostakovich would stop - in particular the bitter tone of it, which the record will show originated from the anti-revisionist side, but which has now regrettably become general (*mea culpa*) - the fact is that this debate, together with the anger it sparks in the participants, is based on genuine issues rooted in a terrible reality. Shostakovich's music deals with matters certain to provoke strong feelings, and those who profess casual amusement in these matters show only that they do not begin to grasp what is ultimately involved. To fully engage with Shostakovich's music is not your typical armchair pursuit; this is not comfortable art. Russians who knew the composer have repeatedly stressed the inextricable link between his work and the horrors of Stalinism. Knowing little about the latter, many Western critics have sought to detach the music from its context; hence the wrangling (of which the controversy over *Testimony* is merely one aspect). Michael Kerpan is correct to the extent that this wrangling is exhausting and often unseemly, but his hope that it is soon scheduled to end is, I'm afraid, forlorn. If nothing else, the variety of outlook displayed in the reviews of *Shostakovich Reconsidered* will tell him that. But there is, in addition, the question of accumulating knowledge. Nothing even approaching a definitive study of Shostakovich's life and work has appeared yet, nor seems likely to emerge for at least another five or ten years. (When such a thing arrives, it will probably come from Russia in multiple volumes.) Meanwhile, our knowledge will continue to accumulate, and wrangling over it will accordingly persist. As for "ad hominem" criticism, a certain amount of this is built into the debate inasmuch as views are attached to assumptions, and assumptions attach to individual persons. I would be most happy to lower the temperature, but names will always have to be named and this must inevitably evoke subjective responses from those involved.

I'd like here to float a concept: pseudo-centrism. In "The Turning Point" (DSCH 9), I predicted that anti-revisionists would "quietly and gradually abandon their former posture and move closer to the revisionist position, declaring as they do so that they are assuming a notional 'middle ground' - a supposed point of balance between 'extremes' from which they may re-establish themselves as 'temperate' arbiters of the real truth about Shostakovich: that he was a puzzling, inconsistent, essentially incalculable figure about whose life and work it is, conveniently, impossible to say anything definite at all". DSCH 10 provides much wearisome evidence of this. It also shows that this "notional 'middle ground'" serves mainly as a retreat for those who lack sufficient knowledge of the Soviet context to risk making categorical statements.

Louis Blois, for example, hopefully suggests that we must acknowledge "a position of uncertainty" and learn to live with "the annoying ambiguities". This is becoming a favourite premise among those pundits

whose slim acquaintance with the Soviet context fails to prevent them pontificating not only on the supposed inscrutability of Shostakovich's motives but also on the alleged opacity of the Soviet scene (in which, they would wish us to accept, contradiction was a fundamental condition of life and no one could ever be certain what they, or anyone else, really believed). This vaguely Kafkaesque vision holds obvious appeal to those wishing, for whatever reason, to avoid firm conclusions. The trouble is that the more we learn about Soviet life, the less inscrutable it becomes. There are, as books like Sarah Davies' *Popular Opinion in Stalin's Russia* demonstrate, coherent patterns under the apparently cryptic surface: patterns of resistance and dissent. Nor, as Vladimir Ashkenazy has pointed out, is Shostakovich much of a mystery. The congruity of the views of the composer offered by those who knew him is truly impressive (see "Witnesses for the Defence", DSCH 10). Yet, even if his colleagues had not left us so consistent a picture of his character and motivations, we would still have the Soviet context, general and particular, to guide us. The more we learn about this context - and our knowledge is developing fast - the easier Shostakovich becomes to understand. Indeed, it is mainly ignorance of this context which leads pundits like Taruskin, Blois, and Fanning to suggest that Soviet reality was irredeemably enigmatic and that consequently we cannot be sure of anything about Shostakovich. On the contrary: Soviet reality is getting clearer, and so are our lines of deduction and conclusion about Shostakovich. In addition to *Testimony*, the "small 't' testimony" of those who personally knew the composer, and the continually clarifying Soviet context, there is the music itself. To many, it does not need decoding; its message of dissent and protest is manifest in its moods and forms. Others claim not to detect this. Yet, when it can, Shostakovich's music speaks without equivocation, as Richard Taruskin has been obliged to concede in the cases of the Eighth Quartet and the Fifth Symphony (III), and as commentators such as Shostakovich's colleague Lev Lebedinsky and the musicologist Rein Laul have contended in respect of several other ostensibly inexplicit works. Similar decoding of details by which music apparently "silent" of meaning can be made to "speak" will continue, whether legitimately or not. One example of such legitimate decoding is Raymond Clarke's suggestion (in DSCH 10) regarding the Fafner motif in Wagner's *Siegfried*, as alluded to in Shostakovich's Fourth and Thirteenth symphonies. It is worth adding that RC's observation about the chronological closeness of work on these symphonies in 1961-2, with his suggestion of compositional cross-fertilisation, is supported by a similar chain of associations in that period between Shostakovich's and Vainberg's work, centred on the latter's Fifth Symphony, which stands between Shostakovich's revived Fourth and his work on the Thirteenth (see *Shostakovich Reconsidered*, p. 697, fn. 156). Furthermore, RC's thesis supports my suggestion of a programmatic parallel (RC: "the secret fear of a knock at the door", cf. Eighth Quartet, IV) between "Fears" in the Thirteenth Symphony and the passage at figs. 46-7 in the first movement of the Fourth Symphony (which, as I note in *The New Shostakovich* [pp. 112-3], suggests a midnight visitation by the Soviet secret police.) While we're on the subject, may I point out, vis-à-vis Derek Hulme's "Shostakovich and the Scottish Connection" (DSCH 10), that "O, Wert Thou in the Cauld Blast" is quoted in the first movement (fig. 13) of the Thirteenth Symphony (cf. Ho and Feofanov, op. cit., p. 603).

Louis Blois

It is to be hoped that Louis Blois is paying attention here, since he has spoken more than once, off-

handedly, of the "absurdly detailed meanings" writers like myself have advanced in respect of Shostakovich's ostensibly abstract music. I cannot be sure, however, that he *will* pay such attention, since his equally off-hand reference to my piece "The Turning Point" (DSCH 9) as a "tirade" shows him unwilling to recognise that it is a reasoned dissection of facets of anti-revisionism which require rebuttal or acknowledgement. How can Blois complain about my supposed failure to address what he calls "the blatant flaws of *Testimony*" when he so cavalierly fails to address the multiplicity of points raised against anti-revisionism in "The Turning Point"? Speaking of which, it seems fair to ask why Blois fails to address any of the similar multiplicity of points raised in defence of *Testimony* by Allan B. Ho and Dmitry Feofanov in *Shostakovich Reconsidered?* - For instance, what has Blois to say about the evidence, officially conceded by Irina Shostakovich (and ignored by M. H. Brown), that Volkov's work with Shostakovich on *Testimony* was known by at least four people to be proceeding at the very time Volkov claims it did? And what of the mass of ancillary evidence presented by Ho and Feofanov in favour of Volkov and against Fay and Taruskin? One is obliged to suppose that Blois wrote his attack before reading *Shostakovich Reconsidered*, supposing he has read it yet - much as he attacked "The Turning Point" without addressing its arguments. That Blois had not read the pro-*Testimony* case in *Shostakovich Reconsidered* before weighing in would also account for his ingenuous confidence in proposing his own theory of the genesis of *From Jewish Folk Poetry*:

"According to Laurel Fay, the Op. 79 songs, with their basis in folksong, were originally intended as a gesture of compliance with the [1948 Composers' Union] decree, yet had the misfortune of having been completed in Fall, 1948, when Stalin was launching a fierce new anti-Semitic campaign. Not everyone agrees with this position. Those opposing this view feel that the choice of Jewish material was a conscious gesture of protest from the point of conception. The truth seems to lie somewhere in between."

On what authority does Blois inform us that "the truth seems to lie somewhere in between"? If he has not read *Shostakovich Reconsidered* and did not read the issue of *East European Jewish Affairs* in which my rebuttal of Fay's claims about *From Jewish Folk Poetry* first appeared, then he has presumably not read the accompanying case for concluding that Shostakovich knew exactly what he was doing when he wrote *FJFP*, intending it as a piece protesting in Aesopian style against official persecution of Soviet Jews (which had been in full swing since 1942 and which finally provoked him into artistic action against it when it extended to the murder of Solomon Mikhoels in January 1948). Blois concedes, as though in full possession of the facts, that "not everyone agrees with" Fay's aberrant thesis. Yet, if he hadn't read my case against Fay when he wrote his review (DSCH 10, p. 79), how can he know who these mysterious dissidents are and what they say? Does he realise that they include Fay's friend Elizabeth Wilson, Mikhoels' daughter Natalya Vovsi-Mikhoels, Fay's cited authority Joachim Braun (who, like Madame Vovsi-Mikhoels, has directly repudiated Fay's claims) and, latterly, Eric Roseberry (who confidently interprets *FJFP* as a "fierce protest" on behalf of Soviet Jews, devised, like Shostakovich's other "Jewish" works, using "a form of Aesopic [sic] language, in which the composer identifies with a persecuted race" [notes, Chandos CHAN9600])? Is he aware that Richard Taruskin (*Defining Russia Musically*, p.473) and Manashir Yakubov (LSO series booklet, p. 11) hold the same view of *FJFP* as Vovsi-Mikhoels, Braun, et al? If Blois doesn't know any of this, how can he pass judgement on what these various commentators - revisionists and anti-revisionists alike - think (or, as he

dismissively puts it, "feel") about this issue? And how can he purport to tell the world that "the truth lies somewhere in between" and expect to be taken seriously?

Pseudo-centrism

Louis Blois's offhand claim to have the key to *From Jewish Folk Poetry* is a prime example of pseudo-centrism. In putting forward his own tenuous hypothesis, Blois attempts to stake his place in the "notional 'middle ground'" - a supposed point of balance between "extremes" from which he may establish himself as "temperate" arbiter of the real truth about Shostakovich. Given the facts and arguments I have advanced in this matter, Blois's conclusion - that "even by the most conservative interpretation, one must acknowledge that the composer must have had some idea of the controversial nature of an explicitly Jewish theme, particularly in the midst of Zhdanovshchina, and even before it" - amounts to a deliberate evasion designed to present himself as a "balanced" moderate, instead of what he is: a sympathiser with anti-revisionism who, rather than concede that revisionism has the answer in this case, has opted to dream up a non-existent "central" position into which to retreat, and from which to muddy the waters of the debate. In truth, there is no justification whatever for adopting such a pseudo-central position on Shostakovich's motives in *From Jewish Folk Poetry*. Consequently I request Blois to tell us why he does so, making appropriate reference to my full case against Fay's thesis, which I cordially invite him to rebut (as in "contend reasonably against" rather than "loftily insult").

The concept of pseudo-centrism implies, somewhere in the debate on Shostakovich, a genuine centre: a point of reasonable balance as near as possible congruent with the truth. Before *Testimony* - and, later, *The New Shostakovich*, *Shostakovich: A Life Remembered*, and *Shostakovich Reconsidered* - that central point was taken to be identical with what has since become the diehard persuasion of anti-revisionism (what, in "Witnesses for the Defence", I call the Naive Approach). The Shostakovich debate is now witnessing a struggle to define the *real* centre of the debate. It is my contention that revisionism resides at that centre. While anti-revisionists disagree, they have failed to establish a defensible stance in juxtaposition with revisionism; hence their characteristic slogans: "the truth seems to lie somewhere in between", "we must distrust all extremes", and so forth. (Those temperamentally disposed to "distrust" extremes are urged to put that distrust to the test by reading - at the very least - *The Gulag Archipelago* before venturing any more judgements on who is closest to the truth in this debate.) Theories are judged by their success in explaining phenomena. The more phenomena and the more ostensible contradictions a theory explains, the stronger it is. I submit that revisionism explains more phenomena and more ostensible contradictions in the life and work of Shostakovich than any rival contention (supposing that coherent rival contentions do exist, which is debatable).

Barbara Amiel

The incoherence of revisionism's rival contentions is illustrated repeatedly in the hostile reviews of *Shostakovich Reconsidered* reproduced in DSCH 10. For example, vis-à-vis Shostakovich's contested motives in composing *From Jewish Folk Poetry*, Barbara Amiel claims:

"There is nothing mutually exclusive about the same person at the same time being (1) an inner dissident, (2) wanting to satisfy the Politburo, (3) knowing Jews were persecuted by the Communists, and (4) writing a piece of music about Jews to please the Communists. And further, (5), having had the 'rotten luck' to pick the wrong group, turning that accidental act into a deliberate act of heroism in his own mind."

Nothing mutually exclusive about being a dissident and wanting to satisfy the Politburo? A fair, if limited, definition of Soviet dissidence would be wishing to blow the Politburo to kingdom come. Only a non-dissident would wish to "satisfy" it. In any case, how could writing a piece sympathetic to Soviet Jews in 1948 "please" the political body which had organised their persecution since 1942? Only if Shostakovich hadn't known that Soviet Jews were persecuted could he have made such a blunder. Yet, as Amiel allows in the third of her allegedly compatible options, Shostakovich *did* know that Jews were persecuted by the Communists. All the evidence we have suggests Shostakovich was *incensed* by Soviet official anti-semitism. Why then would he try to please the Communists who were persecuting Jews? Why not simply avoid the issue by picking another group instead of annoying the anti-semitic Politburo he was allegedly trying to satisfy? The evidence - Amiel is as loose with this as she is with logic - conclusively shows that "Fay Laurel"[sic]'s proposition that Shostakovich merely "had the rotten luck to pick the wrong group" is flatly untenable. As Amiel herself concedes in her option (3), he knew exactly what he was doing. No luck, rotten or otherwise, came into it. What need, then, to "turn" it into anything else at all, let alone "an act of heroism in his own mind"? (And where is the evidence that he, a modest man, ever did so?) The overwhelming conclusion is that Shostakovich's composition of *From Jewish Folk Poetry*, far from "accidental", was knowing and purposive, and hence, in its context of Soviet anti-Semitism (and *pace* Amiel), dissident.

Amiel's inability to connect two thoughts in logical sequence is confirmed by her reference to "sarcastic allusions to Stalin" in Shostakovich's First Cello Concerto. "These allusions," says Rostropovich, "are camouflaged so craftily that even I did not notice them to begin with. I doubt if I would have detected [them] if Dmitry hadn't pointed it out to me." Amiel remarks: "If Slava couldn't hear the tune, I'd say it wasn't there!" Does she mean that (1) Shostakovich said it was there but was mistaken, (2) Shostakovich said it was there but was lying, (3) Rostropovich said Shostakovich said it was there but was lying, (4) she can't hear it, (5) she can't see it (on pp. 478-9 of the very book, edited by Elizabeth Wilson, in which Rostropovich claims this)? "I don't believe Shostakovich was a closet dissident," Amiel opines. But if Shostakovich wasn't a dissident, why did he write savagely dissident works like *Rayok* (1948/57) and the Thirteenth Symphony (1963)? Why do half of the witnesses in Wilson's book speak of him as a dissident? Why do none of the others call him a conformist? Has Amiel read Wilson's book with her mind engaged? Has she read Allan Ho and Dmitry Feofanov's book *at all*?

Canadian curiosities

Barbara Amiel's review - an oddity in itself, since she is better known as a general political pundit and (as her reference to "Fay Laurel" shows) she has no background in the Shostakovich debate - appeared out of the blue in the Canadian magazine *Maclean's* in June 1998. Apparently she had read Norman Lebrecht's column (DSCH 10, p. 50) in *The Daily Telegraph* - one of hundreds of publications owned by her husband, the Canadian newspaper magnate Conrad Black - and decided to appoint herself a national Shostakovich expert for a week. I sent the substance of the above rebuttal to *Maclean's*, but received no acknowledgement. Presumably Amiel read it.

By intriguing coincidence, a second attack on *Shostakovich Reconsidered* (Tamara Bernstein's "Memoirs in the Wrong Key") appeared five months later in a leading Canadian publication, Conrad Black's *National Post*, this time including a personal swipe at me. Suddenly, for some reason, the Shostakovich debate was big news in Canada. Bernstein's review - which twice opts for the adjective "rabid" in accusing Ho and Feofanov of using "overwrought and paranoid imagination" to produce "a scurrilous volume" - was the result, among other things, of a curtailed encounter with *Shostakovich Reconsidered* under the pressure of a deadline. Conceivably, Ms. Bernstein might have been more calmly magisterial had she had enough time for a redraft. Let us give her the benefit of the doubt. In any case, speculation of a more enlightening sort, as those who read her review with a cool head will have noticed, arises from phrases used by her which seem curiously redolent of another voice: "the authors can only argue their case by appropriating the tried and true techniques of Stalinism to silence those who dare to see things differently"; "the perilous (and for most westerners, probably unimaginable) dance of dissent and collaboration citizens of a totalitarian state must perform"; "a sophomoric attack on three of the most eloquent and informed scholars in the West: Fay, [...] Richard Taruskin, and Malcolm Brown..." The echoes are uncanny. Is it possible that we hear, murmuring in the background of Tamara Bernstein's torrid exposition, the "ventriloquial" voice of none other than Professor Taruskin himself? Such a suspicion would conceivably constitute rabid and scurrilous imagination were it not for its dénouement. Hoping to correct certain misconceptions in Ms Bernstein's review, my colleague Dmitry Feofanov emailed her to this effect - only to receive, with uncanny promptness, a derisive reply from Richard Taruskin. Presumably uncertain of being able to answer Feofanov's points, Ms Bernstein had hastily forwarded these to her sponsor, who, instead of remembering to maintain his cover by feeding the answers back through her, replied directly to Feofanov. Had Taruskin, then, used Tamara Bernstein as his mouthpiece, dictating her review, as it were, from behind her name? Her allusion to my "long-standing vendetta" against Taruskin suggests this, since it conforms less to anti-climactic reality than to Taruskin's more dramatic elaboration of it. This calls for a brief, skippable, digression so that earnest readers have the means of judging:

In September 1990, I wrote to *The Times Literary Supplement* in response to Simon Karlinsky's review of *The New Shostakovich*, in which he commended Taruskin's reading of *Lady Macbeth* as an apologia for genocide. I proposed several obvious arguments against this reading, which I perhaps incautiously referred to as a "cross-eyed hypothesis". Neither Karlinsky nor Taruskin replied. Silence ensued till 1995, whereupon Taruskin appeared in David Fanning's *Shostakovich Studies*, abusing me in a most resourceful way and, more to the point, advancing an account of the reception of the composer's Fifth

Symphony which misrepresented Soviet history and falsified the record so as to lead his readers to conclude that Shostakovich was not a dissident. I rebutted Taruskin's essay in my review of *Shostakovich Studies*; he again made no reply. I subsequently discovered that he had attacked me further in *The Atlantic Review*, a piece later worked into a chapter in his book *Defining Russia Musically*. Since this contained additional misrepresentations and apparent logical inconsistencies, I rebutted these in my article "The Turning Point" - to which, yet again, Taruskin made no reply. I have since added a sub-set of criticisms of Taruskin in my piece "Moral Anti-Communism". My criticisms of Taruskin have consisted of closely-argued factual counters, to which he has never replied. If this meagre non-exchange of views constitutes a "vendetta", I confess that it has not, at least to me, been a very exciting one. Ms Bernstein's review, however, forces the conclusion that it has been extremely exciting (as in "absolutely infuriating") to Richard Taruskin.

Tamara Bernstein

But who, some readers may be asking, is Tamara Bernstein, and how does she come to be running errands for Taruskin? Ms Bernstein is a producer of classical profiles for CBC radio. In late 1994, CBC broadcast her three-part documentary, *In Search of Shostakovich*, for which she commenced her research in 1993, starting out from an inclination towards the revisionist view of Shostakovich which led her to approach me for an interview. Since I make a rule of not submitting my Shostakovich work to outside editorial control and was, in any case, then immersed in writing another book, I politely declined her request, instead posting her English versions of various Russian articles attesting to Shostakovich's disposition as a secret dissident. These included Lev Lebedinsky's long letter to *Novy Mir*, Daniil Zhitomirsky's two-part article in *Daugava*, and Lev Mazel's piece in *Sovetskaya Muzyka*. I had no idea then of Ms Bernstein's assumptions and hoped that reading these pieces might assist her. In the event, I heard no more from her. I must conclude that she soon afterwards called off her "search" for Shostakovich, having approached Richard Taruskin who, I deduce, followed his well-known anti-Stalinist principles by "dissuading" her from having anything more to do with me, sending her off instead to his colleague Laurel Fay. It would seem that Ms Bernstein has been faithfully at their bidding ever since.

Presumably around the time, early in 1994, that her documentary was approaching its initial outline, Ms Bernstein learned that Elizabeth Wilson was about to publish *Shostakovich: A Life Remembered* later that year. It would appear that Ms Bernstein failed to secure a preview of the testimony on display in Wilson's book or she might have drawn back from the full-tilt anti-revisionist thesis she was planning. The fact, however, that she remains so fervently wedded to the Fay-Taruskin-Brown position suggests either that she is unable to comprehend Wilson's testimonials or that she is so docilely in thrall to her tutors that she cannot admit any documentary material in conflict with their opinions. (That Ms Bernstein twice refers, as if in awe, to F/T/B's "daring" in advancing their quaint theories, suggests that she accepts the notion that these academic heavyweights, along with their British cousins, are besieged victims of an overwhelming terror campaign waged by some hefty oppositional majority; whereas, until *Shostakovich Reconsidered* came out last year, the only voice raised consistently against anti-

revisionism in the English-speaking world was my own.) As for Taruskin, the probability is high that he saw proofs of Wilson's book before being interviewed for Ms Bernstein's documentary, for he is as uncharacteristically cautious in his comments to her as he is in his article "Who Was Shostakovich?" in *The Atlantic Monthly*, written shortly thereafter (and, by then, certainly having read *Shostakovich: A Life Remembered*). There is no reiteration of his "genocide" theory of *Lady Macbeth* in the documentary; indeed, Taruskin is silent for what seems like hours at a time. At this point, a summary of *In Search of Shostakovich* is in order.

The CBC Shostakovich documentary

Tamara Bernstein narrates her own script in a charmingly innocent-sounding voice. Her interviewees are: Richard Taruskin, Laurel Fay, Elizabeth Wilson, Rostislav Dubinsky, Oleg Prokofiev, Harlow Robinson, and Caryl Emerson, Professor of Slavic Languages and Literatures at Princeton (a specialist in both the 19th century and the literary criticism of Mikhail Bakhtin). Professor Emerson does a lot of the talking.

Ms Bernstein begins by stating that *Testimony* cannot be considered "authentic" and that it will consequently not be quoted. On the other hand, Shostakovich's similarly controversial "interview" with the *New York Times* in 1931 - with its toeing of the contemporary RAPM line that all music is ideological, etc - is quoted with neither caution nor qualification. (The Cultural Revolution goes all but unmentioned.) The presiding theme of the three programmes is that Shostakovich was, politically, an "idealist" and a "civic" artist sympathetic to the aims of Communism - until 1948, whereupon the penny finally dropped and he started to get "bitter". Taruskin kicks off the series by stating that "we" in the West cannot imagine the sort of conditions Shostakovich worked under; thus we shouldn't presume to do so. The fact that any comment on Shostakovich which goes beyond his scores entails imagining the sort of conditions he worked under - and that this is what Taruskin, like everyone else, does, when required - may or may not have occurred to him. The remark, like most of his pronouncements on Shostakovich, is meant, in effect, to stifle active thought along lines divergent from his. Later in the series, Taruskin makes his "there were no dissidents in Stalin's USSR" speech (almost a verbatim copy of the claims in his essay in *Shostakovich Studies*) and rehearses his fall-back position that "even if *Testimony* should turn out to be authentic, we shall never know if it's truthful".

In the first programme, the usual cornflake-packet view of Soviet life in the 1920s is trotted out: fervently idealistic artists work for the People for a stale roll and a cup of tea, creating colourful media-diversity in a mood of mad gaiety, subverting every socio-cultural convention, outraging the rotten bourgeoisie, etc. Of the Red Terror, Lenin's proto-Gulag, the ongoing Bolshevik campaign against the intelligentsia, the stigmatisation of class enemies, the destruction of the church, the rise of Stalin, and the horrors of the First Five-Year Plan, we are told nothing. The first crunch comes with *Lady Macbeth*. Instead of Taruskin's "genocide" version of the opera, we get Caryl Emerson's theory - which is that Katerina embodies the Russian archetype of a flawed soul redeemed through the consequences of

committing a great crime. Her intricate thesis assumes that archetypal issues of the "Russian soul" had currency in the militantly atheistic USSR of the 1930s. They did not. Emerson goes on to expand her "soul" thesis into an apolitical rationale for the banning of the opera in 1936: that Russians, with their "deep ambivalence about being accepted by the West", are prone to distance themselves from anything which becomes popular outside Russia, an ailment to which *Lady Macbeth* fell victim. That is: the opera was banned because "it was too well-received in the West". A recurring motif of these programmes is a studied downplaying of the role of Stalin, decisions usually being said to be taken by "the Soviet government"; Emerson's serpentine hypothesis may be bound up with this. Whatever the truth, it is difficult to determine whether she means that Stalin recoiled from the Western success of *Lady Macbeth* because he feared for the loss of the Russian soul or that he attacked the opera because he simply didn't like the fact that the West enjoyed it. (The latter is at least provisionally plausible - but, in that case, why the digression about soulful ambivalence? What the average Russian felt was irrelevant in 1936.) All we can be sure of is that Professor Emerson's conjecture is resolutely apolitical - another recurring motif of Ms Bernstein's series. There is, for example, no acknowledgement that the attack on Shostakovich at the start of 1936 was immediately linked to a general attack on Soviet music and followed by a succession of similar attacks on other areas of Soviet culture throughout the year. (Nor, disappointingly, is there any elaborate Emersonian speculation to the effect that *The Limpid Stream* was savaged by *Pravda* for being too popular in the West.)

Caryl Emerson's remarks throughout the series, while intelligent, are idiosyncratic and historically under-informed. One wonders why a specialist in the 19th century is asked to comment on conditions in Soviet society which bear no relation to those obtaining under Tsarism. At one point, she pooh-poohs Solomon Volkov's claim that Shostakovich's friends considered him to be a *yurodivy* because, she claims, if Shostakovich is to be called that, anyone with normal human contradictions could equally well be called the same. One has only to be familiar with the extraordinary variety of ways in which Shostakovich presented himself to different people, not to mention his pseudo-idiotic performances when reading official speeches, to realise that his behaviour far exceeds anything we might reasonably assimilate as "normal human contradictions". In another (amazing) passage, Emerson suggests that Soviet artists persecuted during the Terror welcomed martyrdom as ennobling, rejoicing in their victimhood. Quite simply, this commentator is working out of her jurisdiction and prone to howlers as a result. Like Laurel Fay, Emerson is basically insensitive to Shostakovich's irony and sarcasm - a handicap accentuated by her innocence of the Soviet context. One hesitates to roll out the phrase "ivory tower", since that is such an egregious cliché where certain academics are concerned; yet it applies in her case.

Taruskin reappears to discuss the Fifth Symphony: a very mild version of his essay in Fanning's book. He confines his comments entirely to the third movement, the implication, again ubiquitous in the series, being that "pure" music is insusceptible to "extra-musical" interpretation (i.e., movements I, II, and IV are "pure" music). He hears echoes of Orthodox funeral chant and of the finale of *Das Lied von der Erde* in III, and proposes that these echoes were designed to "trigger" grief. This takes him close to conceding that Shostakovich was making a dissident statement, since grief was then (1937: the height of the Terror) entirely appropriate but officially forbidden. Though his deductions are as uncertain as those in his

essay, Taruskin is quite clear that Shostakovich was "bearing witness" to the events which caused this grief. The implication is that by, in effect, musically saying "Grieve, Russia" without, in effect, musically adding "How vile, how stupid, and how unjust is the cause of this grief", Shostakovich fell short of dissidence, merely doing the duty of a "civic" idealistic. This is why, for Taruskin, such interpretation must be confined to the symphony's slow movement - for to concede comparable meanings in I, II, and IV might be to find, not just passive witness-bearing, but tragic bitterness and actively critical satire. While Taruskin never admits this, he comes close to it when he calls the allusions to Orthodox chant "generic" rather than specific textual quotations: "The composer maintains deniability through it all because there's nothing verifiable in what he's doing." (If maintaining deniability in the symphony's slow movement might fit the hypothesis of the civic idealist, the theory is stretched to breaking-point by the code found by Gerard McBurney in the work's finale.) The documentary contains a fair amount of associated talk about the Terror, some valid, some not. For example, one contributor, referring to Meyerhold's arrest and torture, states that, such was the fear abroad in 1936-9, that many "committed suicide or emigrated". (No one was allowed to emigrate that late into Stalin's reign, Soviet borders having been sealed in 1930.)

In her offerings, Laurel Fay presents her view of Shostakovich as a naive idealist who got burned by Stalinism, claiming that he was as gullible about the reality of Soviet Communism as its Western sympathisers were in the 1920s and 1930s, but that the latter caught on "quicker" than he did! "Shostakovich did not have that luxury", she adds, obscurely - presumably meaning that, being up close to the Soviet system, he did not have the Western luxury of a perspective wherefrom to discern that Stalin was a paranoid tyrant and his regime little better than a gang fiefdom. Students of views of Stalinism, inside and outside the USSR, will recognise that Fay is unacquainted with the historical actuality. In fact, the Soviet *intelligentsy* knew better than even the most perceptive Westerners what their country was. (Orwell's struggles to find a publisher for *Animal Farm* are an index of Western attitudes to Stalinism in the 1940s, while Nadezhda Mandel'stam's memoirs, together with the data on Soviet dissent in Sarah Davies's book, may here suffice to substantiate the corollary.) Fay represents Shostakovich as a noble "civic" servant - a patriot who, she assumes, must therefore have been a sympathiser with his country's political leadership. Maxim Shostakovich has specifically rebutted this assumption. Such wanton misconceptions (wanton because she makes a practice of taking no notice of what those close to Shostakovich say about him) lead Fay to fatally anodyne verdicts on the composer's work. For example, she hears the Ninth Symphony as a "light-hearted" jeu d'esprit, by definition devoid of any satirical intent. If such a judgement is merely aesthetically insensitive, her views elsewhere suggest deliberate evasion of the question of whether Shostakovich had an anti-Soviet agenda. For example, she accepts that the Eleventh Symphony harbours a "double" meaning but, rather than invoke the Hungarian Uprising, she offers parallels with Cambodia and Somalia. (Since I have placed my "political position" on public record, it seems fair to enquire what Laurel Fay's politics are. If she is strongly left-leaning, the public should know.)

Elsewhere in the documentary, Shostakovich's dryer remarks in his letters to Isaak Glikman are read without irony, as if they were meant seriously. Oleg Prokofiev protests that he can't believe that the Seventh Symphony included any intention to satirise Stalinism. (To her credit, Tamara Bernstein acknowledges Flora Litvinova's contrary contentions about the meaning of the symphony.) Elizabeth

Wilson is by far the best commentator, although she, too, is often surprisingly politically naive. (She believes Stalin is overrated, that he had no personal interest in Shostakovich, and that the latter's troubles were caused largely by rivals in the Composers' Union.) The Fourth Symphony is bypassed virtually without comment, although again Ms Bernstein does well by pointing out that it was the authorities, not Shostakovich, who ordained its withdrawal. In sum, CBC's *In Search of Shostakovich* proposes a sheltered, evasive, and ultimately obsolete Western academic anti-revisionist view of Shostakovich. Had Ms Bernstein troubled to take her tape-recorder any further east than London, she might have discovered a view of Shostakovich different from the one urged on her by Richard Taruskin and Laurel Fay. In Germany, for example, she would have discovered that revisionism is in the majority, while in Russia the truth would have been difficult to avoid, since there is a gathering agreement there that, contrary to Ms Bernstein's indignant presupposition, Shostakovich was indeed a secret dissident, as Mark Aranovsky's leading article in a recent all-Shostakovich issue of *Muzykal'naya Akademiya* (No. 4, 1997) asserts [tr. Feofanov/MacDonald]:

There is no secret why totalitarian regimes are satisfied with conservatism in the taste and artistic expectations of society: any advance in the social sphere carries the possibility of the development of free thought, and the arts have always been a strong catalyst of such processes, as the authorities understand well. A list of those who, while sometimes quite gifted, voluntarily trimmed their sails, could be very long - let us recall Roslavets, Mosolov, G. Popov, Polovinkin. On the other hand, to keep one's right to real artistic freedom required basic courage. Shostakovich's whole life took place under the "high voltage" line, in constant risk. He struggled unceasingly for this right to a real, rather than a false, art. The tactics of this struggle changed, but the strategy always remained the same. The unbending will of an artist was manifest in this struggle, an artist who survived everything that fate threw at him, and emerged victorious from this struggle.

Shostakovich's victory is even more amazing and extraordinary because, after all, it was his art (as we understand more clearly now) that, over the course of many years, remained practically the only artistic event which, socially and substantively, actively resisted the totalitarian regime. Without exaggerating, we can say that *dissidence was the unifying, integral feature of the entire artistic output of this great musician* [emphasis added]. And to understand this, we also must understand that the history of "dissidence" among the Soviet intelligentsia finds its roots decades ago, and in fact began long before the time when this term itself appeared.

Mark Aranovsky is a senior musicologist whose critical writings on Rachmaninov, Prokofiev, Salmanov, and other subjects have been published in Russia since 1960. If Tamara Bernstein had a deeper background in this subject, she would have been aware of the extent to which opinions contrary to those of Fay, Taruskin, and Brown thrive outside the Anglo-American orbit. Ms Bernstein's unwittingly insular denial of the conceivability of Shostakovich's secret dissidence ultimately derives from her ignorance of Soviet history. Were she wiser, she would not rebuke eminent Soviet specialists like Anthony Briggs for allegedly offering "simplistic" opinions, let alone for (as Briggs and Robert Conquest have done) warmly welcoming *Shostakovich Reconsidered*, a serious book which she scarcely had time to read before attacking.

"Perhaps Soviet Russia's most loyal musical son"?

The greatest indignation expressed by the anti-revisionist camp during 1998 arose over the revisionist use - or, as anti-revisionists would insist, the misappropriation out of context - of Professor Taruskin's description of Shostakovich as "perhaps Soviet Russia's most loyal musical son". This phrase was raised by Ho and Feofanov in October 1997 in reply to a challenge by Malcolm Brown (see "The Turning Point", DSCH 9, p. 54). Confronted with it, Brown responded: "Nowhere in the writings of [Fay, Taruskin, or myself] can be found the assertion that 'Shostakovich was Soviet Russia's most loyal musical son'." When Ho and Feofanov supplied cites for this phrase, Brown retired, making an obscure reference to its context, as though Ho and Feofanov had not taken proper account of this (ibid, p. 62, fn. 42). Clearly Brown's initial emphatic denial that such a phrase had ever appeared in any text by himself, Fay, or Taruskin stemmed from his wish not to be associated with it. This wish presumably arose in turn from the fact that, despite having called Shostakovich "a sometime collaborator" (DSCH 10, p. 28, fn. 23), he himself would never have risked such a candid assertion. Brown has made no further reference to the phrase. There the matter rested until, upon reading the proof of *Shostakovich Reconsidered* sent to him by its editor Martin Anderson, Vladimir Ashkenazy offered to write a foreword to the book. In the penultimate paragraph of this foreword, he wrote:

It is hard to believe that one [so-called "expert" on Shostakovich] writes that Shostakovich was ever "perhaps the Soviet Union's most loyal musical son" - and that in 1994! Is it still possible that this musicologist still cannot shed the skin of an agent of influence of the USSR (and there were thousands of them in the West) or that he simply does not possess enough intelligence for this matter? Neither conclusion is attractive or, indeed, palatable.

A year after the Brown tiff, David Fanning's review of *Shostakovich Reconsidered* appeared in *BBC Music Magazine* (courtesy of Ho and Feofanov, who had allowed Fanning, at his request, to read the book in proof in order to assist him with any necessary adjustments to his Shostakovich entry in the forthcoming revision of the *New Grove*). Initially, it seems, rather impressed by Ho and Feofanov's defence of *Testimony*, Fanning had adjusted his opinion by the time he came to review the book as a whole. One of a number of sore points for him was the use made in its pages of Taruskin's controversial phrase, the occurrences of which he totted up:

On at least seven occasions, including once as a section heading, Taruskin is quoted as referring to Shostakovich as "[perhaps] Soviet Russia's most loyal musical son" (the "perhaps" comes and goes). He did write those words, in a belligerent piece of journalism for the *New Republic*, but only with reference to Shostakovich's perceived political stance before the notorious *Pravda* "Muddle instead of Music" article of January 1936, not, as *Shostakovich Reconsidered* consistently implies, to the remaining 40 or so years of the composer's career. Sadly, Vladimir Ashkenazy is among those taken in.

In her own review, Tamara Bernstein dependably sings along with this theme:

[The phrase] is quoted derisively throughout the book - always out of context (Taruskin was talking about a specific period in the 1930s). And on page 542 MacDonald simply deletes the "perhaps" from the quotation. Clearly, these are not people from whom one would rush to purchase a used car.

Did, one wonders, Ms Bernstein bother to trace the phrase to its original context so as to ascertain whether *Shostakovich Reconsidered* quoted it "in" or "out" of this? This seems unlikely in that, like Fanning, she is apparently unaware that the phrase appears in two separate pieces by Taruskin separated by five years and differentiated by the interpolation, on the second occasion, of the qualifying words "till then". In Taruskin's "The Opera and the Dictator" (*New Republic*, 20th March 1989), there is no such qualification; yet in his "A Martyred Opera Reflects Its Abominable Time" (*New York Times*, 6th November 1994), the words "till then" are interpolated before the phrase "perhaps Soviet Russia's most loyal musical son" - logically indicating some change in Shostakovich's situation thereafter. But if "until then" was needed the second time Taruskin used the phrase, logic also dictates that it was (1) likewise needed or (2) never intended in his original article. Either the phrase, as used in the original article, is incompetently written, or it means exactly what it says. Here, the question of context arises. In both articles, Taruskin employs the phrase as part of his hypothesis that Shostakovich wrote *Lady Macbeth to kowtow to Stalin* by musically supporting the dictator's "collectivization" campaign of 1930-1: "The opera remains a profoundly inhumane work of art. Its chilling treatment of the victims amounts to a justification of genocide." Throughout both articles, Shostakovich is referred to in insulting terms, allegedly altering texts to facilitate his obsequious intentions and stupidly failing to realise that Stalin was not merely indifferent to his servility but, in the event, actively hostile to it. Choosing obsolete data, Taruskin ascribes Stalin's hostility to his supposed prudishness. Had he troubled to read anything up to date on Stalin, he'd know that today's consensus is that the dictator held no moral principles of any sort. Far from Stalin allowing Shostakovich's foes to pounce as a result of his allegedly scandalised reaction to *Lady Macbeth*, the dictator himself was the architect of the cultural crackdowns of 1936, for which he had merely been awaiting a pretext. Meanwhile, perorating on the *Pravda* attack, Taruskin arrives at his fateful phrase:

Thus was Dmitri Shostakovich, perhaps Soviet Russia's most loyal musical son, and certainly her most talented one, made a sacrificial lamb, precisely for his pre-eminence among Soviet artists of his generation. The real purpose of the *Pravda* editorial was to demonstrate how directly the arts were to be subject to Party controls in the wake of [the] action of the Central Committee of the Communist Party, taken on April 23, 1932, in accordance with which all existing Soviet arts associations were dissolved and replaced with "unions" of writers, artists, composers, etc, that were directly answerable to the Party bureaucracy...

(Taruskin here misconstrues Stalin's established motives, which had less to do with bureaucratic reform of the arts than with stifling all divergent thought, of whatever kind, during his 1936-8 purge of the

Communist Party following the Kirov murder.)

...Shostakovich, through his opera, was one of the first victims of this dispensation; and if, as things turned out, he was spared the ultimate Stalinist fate, he had to live for many years under the constant threat of "a bad end". That this unhappy man nevertheless continued to function as an artist and a citizen has lent his career a heroic luster. It is inevitably in that heroic light, a light made garish by Volkov, [Tony] Palmer, and others, that we now view *Lady Macbeth of Mtsensk*.

This is the context of the disputed phrase. But where is the mitigating allowance that, whereas Shostakovich was "perhaps Soviet Russia's most loyal musical son" till 28th January 1936, he thereupon changed into something else? And where is the indication of what this new identity might have been? There is no such indication *anywhere in the article* and the reason for this is simple: Taruskin ventures no such possibility. All he says is that the composer's passive feat of survival thereafter "lent his career a heroic luster", which, as is clear from his remarks about *Testimony* and Tony Palmer's film of the book elsewhere in the article, Taruskin regards as wholly bogus: an illusion of heroism projected onto Shostakovich by his successors. As in his views on Shostakovich voiced in other articles, Taruskin speaks of the composer as a supine line-toer whose memoirs, to the extent that a word of them is authentic, represent the retrospective self-exculpation of a talented conformist: "A great deal of evidence suggests that in his later years Shostakovich became desperately obsessed with his historical image, and with the theme of self-justification. For he *did* have a history of collaboration to live down." So concerned is Taruskin to emphasise the sorry continuity of Shostakovich's unheroic servility throughout his life that most of the article is taken up with debunking "what the book [*Testimony*] and the film [*Testimony*] portray as the turning point in Shostakovich's career: his opera *Lady Macbeth of the Mtsensk District*". It is manifest that Taruskin's denial of a turning point in the case of *Lady Macbeth* indicates that he accepts no change on the part of the composer then or thereafter, whether in moral status or (in Fanning's vague formula) "perceived political stance".

In short, the claims of Brown, Fanning, and Ms Bernstein - that Taruskin, in his 1989 article, meant to suggest that Shostakovich was Soviet Russia's most loyal musical son until circa 1936 - are absolutely without foundation. Taruskin's defenders have protested over a crime of "quotation out of context" for which there is no evidence. One must suppose that they have not read his piece or read it with insufficient attention to its argument. What, though, could have caused Taruskin to interpolate the words "until then" in his 1994 article (every bit as scathing about *Lady Macbeth* and Shostakovich's motives in composing it)? Presumably it was his encounter with Elizabeth Wilson's book *Shostakovich: A Life Remembered*, which is dense with affidavits refuting any notion of Shostakovich's "loyalty" and confirming the composer's secretly dissident heroism; i.e., Taruskin belatedly realised that it would be prudent to modify his original statement. As I have suggested, this would also explain why he decided not to recycle his "genocide" theory of *Lady Macbeth* in Tamara Bernstein's documentary, where it was replaced by Caryl Emerson's eccentric "Russian soul-crisis" hypothesis. Quite possibly, Ms Bernstein did not know about Taruskin's "genocide" theory until she found herself protesting that the infamous phrase associated with it was "quoted out of context".

Addressing the American Musicological Society's annual meeting in Boston on 31st October 1998, David Fanning, having by then learned of the second use of the phrase in the *New York Times* article of 1994, nevertheless persisted with his assertion that this made no difference, since the original context acquitted Taruskin of defamation:

I have already begged to differ from Professor Taruskin's views on Shostakovich's opera as expressed in this particular article [*New Republic*, 1989] and I don't approve his choice of words at this point, not least because the phrase in question echoes *Pravda's* official obituary notice. But from the context in which it appears, it's clear to me that this is no bald statement about Shostakovich's entire career, so to suggest that by adding the words "till then" Professor Taruskin was doing anything more than clarifying his point seems to me bizarre, and I'm alarmed to see a phrase held up for ridicule when it's been removed from context and had its meaning radically altered thereby.

Perhaps Fanning would care to justify, rather than merely assert, this casual claim with reference to the article(s) in question? Or has his "alarm" at the possibility that fellow Shostakovich "experts" may be held up to ridicule prompted him to read into Taruskin's piece something which is, in fact, not there (and not there for the simple reason that it would have confounded the whole thrust of Taruskin's argument)? I look forward to his exegesis. Fanning further observes (and Ms Bernstein, ever the faithful echo, chimes in after him) that, in *Shostakovich Reconsidered*, the word "perhaps" comes and goes among the book's seven references to the Fateful Phrase. This is true, and usually for reasons of grammatical elegance - but in any case what difference does it make? In the real world, if you say someone is perhaps not to be trusted, you mean he is not to be trusted, period. Taruskin's "perhaps" is merely an academic convention with which Fanning is "perhaps" familiar (see DSCH 9, p. 62, fn. 44). Let us now return to Vladimir Ashkenazy. Fanning claims that Ashkenazy was fooled by the authors of *Shostakovich Reconsidered* into misinterpreting what Taruskin meant by his Fateful Phrase. But read Ashkenazy's statement again. Like Ho, Feofanov, and myself, Ashkenazy is objecting to the notion that Shostakovich was *ever* the Soviet Union's most loyal musical son. As with Taruskin's article of 1989, Fanning has failed to read the text with adequate attention. Yet the death-blow to Taruskin's besieged defence-team is delivered by Taruskin himself. At the same AMS meeting, Taruskin likewise pleaded a violation of context vis-à-vis the Fateful Phrase, only this time based on a wholly new rationale: that the phrase was "ironic". The crime of context-violation was not, after all, a question of times and dates, but instead a matter of mistaken tone. Taruskin's Fateful Phrase is, it seems, some sort of joke. (And was Taruskin also being "ironic" when, having called Shostakovich "Soviet Russia's most loyal musical son", he went on to describe the composer as "certainly her most talented one"?) If Taruskin's claim is to be taken seriously, his "irony" has been lost on every participant in this tiresome affair. Brown, Fanning, and Ms Bernstein all imagined themselves to be defending something substantial. Having dutifully run errands for Taruskin to set up an entirely different alibi, they have been left high and dry. But who is gullible enough to accept Taruskin's feeble shrug of self-exoneration? And who would buy a used car from any of these people?

Other "crimes" and misdemeanours

David Fanning's inattention to detail in literary texts, illustrated by his vagaries in the case of the Fateful Phrase, clangs like a metallic *leitmotif* throughout his review of *Shostakovich Reconsidered*. For example, he claims that, in my essay "Naive Anti-Revisionism", I accuse Taruskin of "setting up an 'Aunt Sally' in seeking to distinguish between dissent and dissidence". On the contrary, I wrote as follows:

By choosing an expression ("dissidence") applicable only after 1956, Taruskin erects a meaningless Aunt Sally. No one who claims to detect signs of anti-Stalinism in Shostakovich's Fifth Symphony has ever referred to the composer as a "dissident" in post-1956 terms. My own preference is for the phrase "secret dissident", following (for example) Mstislav Rostropovich, who conceives Shostakovich's symphonies as "a secret history of Russia", and Nadezhda Mandel'stam, who documented what she called Russia's "secret intelligentsia" - those who *privately* dissented with the regime from the early days of the Revolution and continued to do so until the public idiom of dissidence emerged under the milder conditions of the 1960s.

In a related footnote, I further contradict Fanning's vague suggestion (referring to Taruskin's essay in his book *Shostakovich Studies*) that, in his claims for the non-existence of dissidence under Stalin, Taruskin "urges us, in effect, to distinguish between dissidence and non-conformism". This differentiation - which seems to have been coined as a conceptual division by Fanning himself, since there is no such standard demarcation in the literature on Soviet life and culture - appears in his review as "distinguish between dissent and dissidence". (Such semantic distinctions do not figure in Sarah Davies' book on dissent under Stalin during the 1930s, where "dissent" subsumes "non-conformism" and includes what I call "secret dissidence".)

Shostakovich was never a publicly-declared dissenter - a dissident - of the kind that only became possible after Khrushchev's repudiation of Stalin in 1956; had he been a declared dissident (the term was tautological in practical Soviet usage), we would not be arguing here. Taruskin's position - for the unequivocal clarity of which we must thank his characteristic bluntness - is that dissidents (public dissenters) did not exist in Stalin's Russia. In this claim, with the arguable exception of wild cards like Mandel'shtam and Meyerhold, he is correct. Where he is calamitously *incorrect* is in deducing from this premise that there were no *private* dissenters (secret dissidents) in Stalin's Russia either - instead, only "the forlorn and malcontented" who, being "silent", must (in Taruskin's hasty deduction) have been unable to formulate privately dissenting (secretly dissident) thoughts, feelings, and expressions. If we did not already know this assertion to be unequivocally false from *intelligent* memoirs and histories of the period, Sarah Davies's researches (*Popular Opinion in Stalin's Russia: Terror, Propaganda, and Dissent: 1934-41*) confirm it beyond dispute. Hence, Fanning's accusation that I have charged Taruskin with "setting up an 'Aunt Sally' in seeking to distinguish between dissent and dissidence" is (a) literally

incorrect, (b) conceptually incoherent, and (c) unjustifiable in terms of what Taruskin himself actually wrote (which is itself indefensible for the reasons I have given). Agitatedly seeking to score a point wherever he can, Fanning continues thus: "[MacDonald] admonishes Taruskin that 'to claim, on the basis of probability, to be privy to the minds of millions of people is a large claim indeed'. Quite." One gathers that this, in Fanning's mind, is some sort of trump. Perhaps it would be if my statement did not stand at the centre of an eight-page demonstration that, in the case of Stalin's Russia, we have a wealth of both direct and indirect evidence as to what was in the minds of its millions of citizens vis-à-vis the subject of dissent. That Fanning ignores this in his eagerness to register a cheap jibe is all the more invidious when a footnote to the book which destroys his point (Davies, op. cit.) exists at the bottom of the very page on which my quoted statement appears. Fanning represents himself as a "balanced" occupant of "the middle of the road", but it is not difficult to make opinions voiced from either side of one's own views appear self-cancelling if one simply ignores the evidence they marshal. Fanning's "moderation" is merely facile pseudo-centrism.

The foregoing matching pair of "misinterpretations" made by Fanning are, in his review, bookended around the suggestion that I am conducting a McCarthyite (as distinct, one presumes, from a Stalinist) inquisition into an allegedly obscure sect: the believers in "pure music". As usual, Fanning opts for the wrong end of the stick. However, since the same manoeuvre is chosen by the anonymous reviewer in *The Economist* and also by Stephen Johnson in *The Times Literary Supplement*, I must widen my frame of reference accordingly. Vladimir Ashkenazy has reproved *The Economist's* anonymous reviewer (what a noble calling!) via its letters page: "Your reviewer writes that 'Shostakovich rarely explained his pieces with a "programme", certainly not in rehearsal, where his interpretive hints were almost always strictly musical'. Did your reviewer really expect Shostakovich publicly to communicate the deep contempt he felt for the Soviet system - and go straight to the concentration camp as a result?" Additionally significant in this case is the anonymous reviewer's conditioned assumption that any compositional "programme" (whether explicit or hidden, concrete or abstract, pictorial or allusive, or any shade between any of these) is, by definition, unmusical. On the contrary, the idea that music and meaning are separate entities is a philosophical chimaera. Since space is limited (and since I have already argued this in Ho and Feofanov's book), I will not reiterate the propositions here. (Those with Internet access can find further suggestions along these lines in my interview at the DSCH Web-site.) Suffice to say here that it is in a *philosophical* spirit that I pursue the question of "pure music" in respect of Shostakovich: I seek to clear the ground so that we may think more accurately, and so more profitably, not only about the way "meaning" relates to "score" in his music, but about the whole subject of meaning in art at a time when meaning itself is beleaguered in our culture. This - the separation of musical fact from human value, of expressive technique from creative intention - is the "meta-subject" of the Shostakovich debate, and it is depressing that writers like Fanning and Stephen Johnson fail to understand it.

Stephen Johnson

In his review of *Shostakovich Reconsidered*, Johnson claims I display "contempt" for "the idea that the meaning of music resides merely in the notes" and implies that I view this idea as "a crime against

humanity". True, I believe that the meaning of music is merely *suggested* by the notes, and that there is a flaw in the concept of artistic universality which prevents critics from conceding the crucial importance of historical context in comprehending Shostakovich's music. As for "contempt", I do express this towards scholars who are demonstrably economical with the *actualité*, while "crimes against humanity" likewise figure in my contributions to Ho and Feofanov's book in connection with the activities of Josef Stalin. Neither, though, are in any way related to my remarks on universality. Johnson has muddled them up. Johnson is similarly muddled in his claim that Vladimir Ashkenazy and I are at odds in our views on Shostakovich in this respect. The observation which Johnson quotes from Ashkenazy - that "in the end it really doesn't matter what society and what injustices we are talking about, music like [Shostakovich's] communicates a message so powerful, so important and so direct that people everywhere understand it" - occurs, not in Ashkenazy's foreword to the book in question, but in one of my contributions to it, where I quote it approvingly before qualifying it by suggesting that artistic universality nevertheless grows out of local specificity and that we must hold both, inextricably related, truths in mind at the same time. I do not, as Stephen Johnson confusedly reports, regard "the belief in universality" as "a crime", still less imply that Ashkenazy is guilty of such a curious felony. In fact, Ashkenazy writes in his foreword as follows: "Some 'experts' on Shostakovich show an unacceptable lack of knowledge of Soviet reality, and I need hardly emphasise at this stage that, without profound (and, I repeat, *profound*) knowledge of what Shostakovich had to live through, it is virtually impossible to be a serious and credible analyst of his output". Far from contradicting each other, Ashkenazy and I share almost identical views on Shostakovich, a fact of which I am assured by personal communications from him.

In his remarks during two BBC discussions about *Shostakovich Reconsidered* (12th June, 16th August 1998), Stephen Johnson reiterated his baseless claim that Vladimir Ashkenazy's statement, quoted in the previous paragraph, conflicts with my views. Quoting VA's statement, Johnson remarked that "Ashkenazy makes a *sane* point", adding: "*Wrong*, says Ian MacDonald, who says you must refer it to a particular date or event. There is [says MacDonald] only one way to hear this music and it is the way I insist on and if you hear it in any other way you are guilty of fantasy or wish-fulfillment." Johnson subsequently developed this (false) claim in respect of my contentions about "pure music" (part of my wider argument about "extra-musicality", which he did not address). "MacDonald," declared Johnson, "believes there's no such thing as 'pure music'. So does anyone who's *sane*, don't they?" [My italics indicate derisive emphases.] How Johnson reconciles this gibe with his equally scornful attack on me for questioning "the idea that the meaning of music resides merely in the notes" is difficult to grasp. Perhaps he disbelieves in pure music during daylight hours, but believes in it at night? However, on this occasion, it is not his intellectual disarray to which I wish to draw attention, but his insinuation that the words he inserts in my mouth reveal me to be a sandwich short of the full picnic. Such comical desperation in attempting to discredit an opponent is both pitiful and revealing. Does it, perhaps, reflect Johnson's impatient Taruskinesque inclination to suppress, rather than address, a rival's opinions? Or does it stem from his inability to comprehend the arguments, uncomplicated as they are? The latter is suggested by Johnson's hapless mangling of Yuli Turovsky's opinions in his introduction to the BBC broadcast of 16th August 1998 (although conceivably that particular mess arose because Johnson's jocularly superficial engagement with the subject led him to imagine a non-existent difference of views between Shostakovich and Turovsky which he hoped might get his programme off with a suitable bang).

Since Johnson is an eloquent writer on other musical topics, his uncharacteristic confusions and spurious extrapolations in writing about Shostakovich must proceed mainly from unfamiliarity with context. Proof of this was supplied ten years ago by his review of *The New Shostakovich*, in which he dismissed as exaggeration my report that Boris Pasternak had been unable to sleep for a year after seeing the effects of Stalin's collectivisation in the Ukraine. In fact, the claim was not mine but Pasternak's - one of the most cited statements by a Soviet intellectual under Stalinism. Not to know this betrays a thin to non-existent comprehension of the background. My letter pointing this out was duly published by *The Independent*, to Stephen Johnson's considerable irritation, as I later heard from a colleague working as a sub-editor on the paper's letters page. To judge by his serial attacks on my contributions to *Shostakovich Reconsidered*, Johnson remains irate.

Pure music, impure criticism

Johnson's caricature of the "pure music" issue is echoed in David Fanning's review of *Shostakovich Reconsidered*, in which he complains that "anyone (like me) who views the ideological question as just one of many intersecting areas which make up the untranslatable and unconfined 'meaning' of Shostakovich's music, is declared a believer in Pure Music... If anyone can tell me where this arcane sect resides, I'll gladly keep my distance from it." It is regrettable that Fanning persists in describing revisionist interpretation as "ideological". Possibly he genuinely doesn't apprehend what is being proposed; perhaps he does, yet refuses to admit it. On the subject of "pure music", to judge by Fanning and Johnson, one might be forgiven for thinking that no one had ever used the term before, or that if they had, they meant nothing serious by it. It seems I must assist them. The term refers to what is thought of as a higher form of discourse: an abstract realm in which composers and musicologists may escape the maddening tribulations of the mundane world in contemplation of music's more spiritual propensities. As for the whereabouts of "the arcane sect of believers in Pure Music", I must again hasten to Professor Fanning's aid by referring him to the reviews he has contributed to *Gramophone* since 1987. Here he is, for instance, in *Gramophone* for July 1997, reviewing Shostakovich's recordings of the Opus 87 Preludes and Fugues: "The C major Prelude immediately takes us into the pure, sane world that betokens the composer's escape from mundaneness into the higher reality of music, probably the purest he had ever composed (the opening of the First String Quartet, also in C major, has something of the same feeling)." And here again in February 1998, this time referring to the C minor Prelude and Fugue: "It is the first movement of the Eleventh Symphony that beckons. This world of pure contrapuntal thought was one I feel Shostakovich stepped into with as much relief, gratitude and awe as other composers found in religious composition..."

While it is curious that Fanning fails to remember expressing such opinions, it is less surprising that, in discussing Shostakovich's most formally constrained work, he should deduce that it is "pure" (i.e., pure of "extra-musical" content), for the fugue is often held to be the epitome of "pure music". I do not propose to argue this point here; rather, I wish to draw attention to the way in which, owing to music's lack of internal frontiers, the "purity" some claim to detect in music's seemingly more mathematical moods has a tendency to drift out into the wider realm of musical endeavour, settling softeningly, like a

kind of exalted mist, over any music that is instrumental and doesn't come with a text or title inconveniently attached to it. Notice, for example, how the "purity" Fanning senses in Opus 87 drifts out from the cycle itself to settle softeningly over the opening of the First String Quartet and, further, to extend a beckoning finger at the Eleventh Symphony. It is almost as if the concept of "purity" has a will of its own - a will, perhaps, to turn organic expression into "musical architecture", observing sensibility into "inner landscape", thought into abstraction. The softening mist of purity can even settle on music we otherwise know to be expressive, observational, and brimming with thoughts about life and the world; but, insidiously, it does so without our noticing it because, once accepting the premise of "pure" music, we don't notice it infiltrating our assumptions and drawing us into incongruously elevated assessments of what we hear. It is this sort of thing, I would submit, that caused the author of the notes to Eduard Serov's 1979 recording of Shostakovich's dark and devious Fifteenth Symphony to call it "a work of great serenity, with a charm that has something of the innocence of Schubert".

One consequence of accepting the category of "pure music" is that it tends to detach music thus described from its context in worldly experience. In this sense, the idea of "pure music" is the predicate for the concept of "extra-musicality"; yet, while a score has a boundary - the paper on which it is written - music (partly score and partly meaning) does not. And since music has no boundary, nothing can be said to be "outside" it; hence the concept of "extra-musicality" falls by logic. As for "pure music", all that presently needs to be agreed is that some music is "purer" than other music in the sense of being *ostensibly* closer to abstract structural relationships than to, say, quasi-pictorial representation. What Fanning identifies in Shostakovich's Opus 87 is what he has been educated to identify as "pure music"; yet this is only relative "purity", a tendency towards the pure end of the spectrum. (It would be odd if he did not admit this since, in his remarks on *Shostakovich Reconsidered*, he appears to concede that "pure music" is an empty ideal.) The crucial consequence of this line of argument is that no part of a musical score can definitely be said to be purely structural, for such an ostensibly structural facet may actually signify something beyond itself. In other words, any motif, harmony, rhythm, or element of instrumentation is potentially significant, i.e., transcends the limits of *score* and enters the open realm of *meaning*.

Symphonic misconceptions

This theoretical argument becomes practical with Fanning's view of Shostakovich's Tenth Symphony, about which he has written a book. In *Gramophone* for July 1992, he calls the Tenth "Shostakovich's most symphonically conceived symphony". This formula usually carries the implication that music so described is structurally "pure" in the sense of being, in some sense, concerned solely with its own elements; and, of course, such a definition is ahistorical in that the symphonic genre came into being through the allegorical works of Dittersdorf, the *Sturm und drang* literary roots of Haydn's middle period, and the less-than-pure "tone-poetry" of Beethoven himself. Fanning has a slightly different conceptual agenda: "By 'symphonically conceived', I mean relying on large-scale musical argument rather than on imagery derived from what the Germans call 'applied music', *angewandte Musik* (for stage, film, circus, etc.); and, by extension, not dependent on overt reference to contemporary events."

By this definition, Mahler's symphonies, often regarded as the least "symphonically conceived" in the Western canon, would be assimilable to that category since they contain no episodes of "applied music" and no overt references to contemporary events. Fanning's quasi-"pure" idea of the "symphonically conceived" symphony is clearly questionable, but let us leave theory and see how it applies to Shostakovich.

Fanning contends that "what tends to distinguish one interpretation of the Tenth Symphony from another is not so much the moment-by-moment characterization as the pacing of the dramatic structure". The phrase "dramatic structure" implies the presence of a drama to which that structure pertains. Fanning, though, says nothing more about this dramatic aspect of the Tenth Symphony, instead using his frame of reference as a criterion for judging performances of the work on structural grounds, thus letting the concepts of "pure music" and "extra-musicality" in by the back door. For example, Claus Peter Flor (RCA Victor, June 1992) is reproached for a "structural miscalculation" in the Tenth Symphony's third movement. While Fanning does not explain what he means here, it cannot be a judgement based on strict fidelity to the score (whatever that means), since he chides Christoph von Dohnanyi (Decca, September 1992) for - in exactly the same place in the third movement - a "literal adherence to tempo markings towards the main climax [which] does not entirely convince". On the other hand, when Stanislaw Skrowacewski (IMP, October 1991) tries an *accelerando* - again in the third movement - he is rebuked for "awkward adjustments" in which "the timpanist lags behind". Though Fanning speaks as if referring to an objective scheme which these conductors have missed, his verdicts seem to contradict each other. One suspects that, despite his invocation of dramatic structure, he is really only expressing the way he feels the music should "go". This suspicion is increased by a remark attached to his criticism of Dohnanyi's literalism: "[In CvD's performance] the third movement seems to me slightly too present - its core needs a more exploratory seeking out." Whatever we or Dohnanyi are to make of this, there is one thing at least of which we can be sure. The third movement of the symphony, whether intrinsically or in performance, is somehow problematic to Fanning. Could it be that it is not, after all, "symphonically conceived" in the way he imagines; that, in fact, it refers to "contemporary events" - even if not "overtly"?

E-L-M-I-R-A

Of course, we now know that the third movement of Shostakovich's Tenth refers with some specificity to matters involved with the composer's life at that time. Its "purely" structural elements turn out to be anything but "pure", instead pertaining to the dimension of meaning which, ensouling the body of the score, turns dots on paper into music. There is indeed a "dramatic" structure to this movement of which Fanning had no inkling when he penned his reviews. Yet no one else had suspected this secret until Nelly Kravets revealed it at the University of Michigan in January 1994. Are we all, then, equally confounded by its discovery? It depends on what we had previously said about the movement. Such specific information may not only be assimilable into existing interpretations of the third movement of Shostakovich's Tenth Symphony but may actually enhance them. What, though, did Fanning make of all this? Since he did no more reviews of Shostakovich's Tenth in *Gramophone*, and made no mention of

Kravets' revelations in *Shostakovich Studies* (1995), this was effectively an unanswered question till Stephen Johnson asked him about it at the BBC on 16th August 1998. Fanning acknowledged the data on Elmira Nazirova unearthed by Kravets, the code in the third movement's horn call, and so forth. All this, he conceded, was true - but (in effect) so what? This is what he said next:

Does that [the E-L-M-I-R-A code revealed by Kravets] mean that is what the music "means"? If so, what did it mean before? Nothing? Of course, it meant something and now it means something... expanded. But, apart from that musical pun, it means what it always meant. Which is something strange, something which makes the music... explore itself. As I put it when I wrote a book on this, it's like a body in search of a soul. That hasn't changed. It's just that now we know a little more about what was on the composer's mind.

Even allowing for the fact that Fanning was here speaking off the cuff, the degree of evasive incoherence displayed in this response is worthy of Richard Taruskin himself. Fanning had criticised conductors for maltreating a "dramatic structure" which turned out to be other than what he could have envisaged. Would he, in so many words, acknowledge this? He would not. What, then, of alternative readings? On the same BBC broadcast, Elizabeth Wilson, clearly puzzled by Kravets' findings, doubted that the "Elmira" horn call is a conventional love theme, being instead, she thought, a mere mechanical reflection of the composer's "obsessiveness" (i.e., back to Christopher Norris and "the stoical limits of repetitive auto-suggestion"). I said nothing in *The New Shostakovich* about the E-L-M-I-R-A encryption, because, like everyone else in 1989, I knew nothing about it. My view then was that the third movement of the Tenth Symphony was programmatic, presenting Shostakovich's personal experience as a painful travesty wherein his real self is contrasted against the false, official self required of him by the nightmareish situation in which he was enmeshed. I suggested that the "Mahlerian horn call" is an admonitory voice from beyond the immediate horror, sounding forth to dispel evil or quell hysteria. How can this be reconciled with the information found by Nelly Kravets? Rather easily.

Far from a simple romantic love theme, the role played by the horn call, is symbolic: it stands for Love and, as such, serves as a reminder of something that transcends and potentially redeems the ghastliness which the Symphony's third movement, with mounting revulsion, portrays. The horn call puts this in perspective, showing that the backbiting nastiness and hysteria which the movement is "about" isn't the final reality; that love is deeper than any of this. For this to be true, Elmira Nazirova would have to have been less of a real lover to Shostakovich than an intrinsically symbolic distant ideal - which, according to Elizabeth Wilson (*Shostakovich: A Life Remembered*, p. 263) is exactly what she was for him. Presumably Elmira was joyful, vivacious, luminous - a "muse" archetype who reawoke the desperate ideal love which the young Shostakovich projected onto his heroine Katerina Ismailova at her moment of maximum vulnerability to betrayal in the finale of *Lady Macbeth of Mtsensk* (the "Seryozha!" motif quoted in the Eighth Quartet: IV). The symbolism is identical: love versus perfidy, love against constraint. Referring to *Lady Macbeth*, the Shostakovich of *Testimony* speaks sombrely: "It's about how love could have been if the world weren't full of vile things... the laws and properties and financial worries, and the police state." Mahler's art concerns the same perpetual grinding dissonance between spiritual idealism and mundane reality with its hurtful disappointments, unqualified horrors, and fits of bleak, sometimes even hysterical, despair. Which is where Stanislaw Skrowacewski's *accelerando* in the

closing crescendo of the Tenth Symphony's third movement - rejected by Fanning, whose "dramatic" conception presumably does not match Skrowacewski's - is so true to the spirit of the music.

I would suggest that David Fanning's inability to cope with Nelly Kravets' discovery of the symbolism of the horn call in the third movement of Shostakovich's Tenth Symphony is a consequence of his reflexive propensity for detaching music from context, analysing it as "argument" (as if it were a cerebral conversation in process at high table), and then, in effect, evolving randomly subjective "dramatic structures" to suit it. At any rate, his idea that, in the Tenth Symphony (III), the music "explores itself", strongly suggests that he conceives it self-sufficiently, in quasi-"pure" terms. This, in turn, suggests that Fanning's unstated conception of the music's "dramatic structure" is unrelated to the historical context and, consequently, "purely" personal.

Immense vagueness

In their *Gramophone* reviews, Fanning and Johnson often criticise performers for failing to penetrate "the inner world" (or "emotional hinterland") of a given piece. Whatever else this signifies, it encompasses a common misconception: that, insofar as a score means anything beyond its notes, this meaning will express its composer's emotions in self-communion or his sensory impressions in relation to the external world. Rarely is there any allowance that the composer might express what he may thoughtfully (let alone critically) *observe* in the external world. Prejudice against "descriptive", "concrete", or "programmatic" music effectively stops this perception developing; yet, arguably, that is precisely the sort of composer Shostakovich was. While Fanning has never suggested that Shostakovich's scores are meaningless abstract structures, his innate prejudice against the idea that music may be actively, even critically, engaged with the world - rather than merely subjectively reflective of its composer's "inner landscape" - renders him fatally susceptible to the creeping allure of "pure" abstraction. Presented with pieces like the Tenth Symphony or Opus 87, which are ostensibly "pure" in their degree of structural discipline, he assumes a corresponding thinness, or absence, of engagement with external reality. Yet, as [Rob Ainsley](#) has pointed out, the Preludes and Fugues, Opus 87, are no more abstract, inexpressive, or apolitical than anything else Shostakovich composed; they simply employ more rigorous forms within which to convey their content of observation, tragic reflection, and satire - as does the composer's Tenth Symphony.

So far as we presently know, the E-L-M-I-R-A code in the third movement of the Tenth Symphony is relatively unusual in presenting itself so clearly. We may not discover many more such categorical codes in Shostakovich's music. This, though, does not mean that we lack the wherewithal for deducing the character of certain passages in his work; indeed there are already identifiable lines of thought on this subject which we can confidently dismiss as objectively incongruous. For example, writing in *Gramophone* (November 1987) about the opening slow movement of Shostakovich's Sixth Symphony, Stephen Johnson quotes the religious philosopher Nikolai Berdyaev: "There is something in the Russian soul that corresponds to the immensity, the vagueness, the infinitude of the Russian land." In fact,

Berdyayev had more in common with the outlook of his own contemporaries, such as the novelist Fedor Sologub, than with Shostakovich. In *Testimony*, Shostakovich, following the debunking fashion of his generation, mocks Sologub's pretensions, and jokes about the "mysterious Slavic soul". The Shostakovich of the Glivenko letters is equally dry. In short, a Russian composer less likely to be caught in deep contemplation of any sort of immense vague "infinite" - of the Russian land or the Russian soul - would be hard to nominate. Johnson has mixed up his Russian generations. On the contrary: the evidence, musical and historical, indicates that Sixth Symphony's opening movement is instead a funeral oration for the dead *intelligenty* of 1935-39.

Stephen Johnson's ahistoricism, along with his personal inclination towards quasi-"pure" abstraction and the subjective reflection associated with this, blinds him to the engagement with the external world which marks Shostakovich's music more than that of almost any other composer. That this line of thought yields little but inapt pretension is borne out by remarks in David Fanning's *Gramophone* reviews of the 1980s. For example: his suggestion that Shostakovich's Sixth is "notoriously difficult to pace and characterize - it is his Symphony *quasi una fantasia*, perhaps"; or his allusion (March 1987) to "the emotional wasteland" of the Fifth's *Largo* with its "refusal to despair in the face of the void", as though Shostakovich was some sort of freedom-exploring existentialist faced with Sartreian "nausea". Such ahistoricism inevitably prevented Fanning from noticing, in his reviews, anything special about the year of the Fifth Symphony's composition (1937); indeed, I am unaware that he acknowledged that this Symphony was born of the Terror until 11th January 1999, when he cautiously ventured as much during a BBC Radio 3 programme. Even now he prefers to keep this vague, as if the work would instantly wither before our ears were we ever to be too frank about its origins. In the past, such reticence will have confused some of his readers - as, for example, in *Gramophone* for June 1988 where he perceptively reports the "uncouth jackbooted progress" of the Fifth Symphony's scherzo but, by declining to venture into specificity, leaves the general listener with the impression that this must be Shostakovich's evocation of Nazism. Similarly, in March 1989, he refers to "the terrifying essence" of the Ninth Symphony. While again perceptively, this insight would strike most *Gramophone* readers as bemusingly counterintuitive in that discerning this aspect of Shostakovich's Ninth Symphony usually depends on a provisional grasp of its context within Soviet post-war politics.

Tone, reactive and proactive

In a nutshell, Fanning hears Shostakovich's *reactive* tone: the horror (overt and implied), the grief, the bitterness, even the outer resonances of the irony; but misses Shostakovich's *proactive* tone: the satire, the mimicry, the macroscopic construction which often adds up to an accusatory pointing finger. (In this, he is at least ahead of Laurel Fay, who fails to detect any undertow to the Ninth Symphony, let alone the acerbity of its satirical attack on Soviet ceremonial hypocrisy.) Fanning can sense the resonances of irony, but will not take the final step and concede the attacking satire. Why? Three reasons: (1) he prefers his own private interpretations of the work; (2) he tends to hear it as, if not absolutely "pure", then biased in a world-excluding way which debar anything as directly engaged as satire; (3) he lacks an adequate grasp of the socio-historical context which might elucidate the causes and aims of that

satire. The first two reasons are mutually causal: each promotes the other. At worst, such subjectivism creates arbitrary criteria, as in Fanning's judgements on versions of the third movement of the Tenth Symphony and in his assessments of recordings of the Fifth Symphony (*Gramophone*, 1987-8), where his perspectives and verdicts change from review to review. At its most trivial, such subjectivism produces schoolboyish lapses, such as his description of the fugue in the opening movement of the Fourth Symphony as "an attack of killer bees" (BBC Radio 3, 16th August 1998). While more eloquent, Johnson is less punctilious than Fanning, often simply proclaiming "I like this, I dislike that" without revealing what concepts dictate his private dispositions.

Unlike Stephen Johnson, Fanning has an intellectual relationship with the issue of context, which he regards sceptically. While not ignoring the "small 't' testimony" of those in Shostakovich's milieu (as Laurel Fay does), Fanning nonetheless distrusts such material on the grounds that, since it emanates from a culture which cleaves to standards of truth different from those obtaining in the West, its reliability (indeed, its honesty) is, at best, provisional and, at worst, intrinsically doubtful. To this, he adds that the exigencies of life under Soviet Communism prevent us taking at face-value any statement made under that dispensation, whether official or personal. It is true that lying has a special place in Russian cultural life which it does not in ours; it is false to deduce from this that Russians have no concept of telling the truth. Truth is a precious commodity in a society where free public speech has, until the last few years, been proscribed on pain of imprisonment or death. Because of this, truth in Russia has often been retainable only in memory; hence the almost sacred act, so far as Russian culture is concerned, of decanting such unspeakable truth from the mind of the memoriser into the pages of that quintessentially Russian idiom, the memoir. The greatest example of this in our century is *The Gulag Archipelago*, wherein one man salvages the remembered truths of hundreds of his fellow Russians who have been prevented, usually by death, from voicing these truths in public. Some (those, invariably, who have not read this book) may protest a false conflation of truth and memory. The answer is: read first, ask questions later. Read the personal testimonies of Soviet history before speaking of "ideology" or "principles". Climb this mountain of testimony before assuming pseudo-centrist positions which have no basis in the experience of those who were most like Shostakovich: the anathematised; those of independent mind; those unable to say "Yea" with the obedient crowd. Read, too, the testimonies of other writers from the former Soviet bloc and compare the tone and content of their stories with those of Solzhenitsyn's hundreds of convicts, and with the fifty or so former friends and colleagues of Shostakovich who have spoken, in various ways, of his sentiments on this subject. Read the histories of the period. If, having read all this, you still consider that truth can never be known for certain, say *why*, based not on chary self-referential prejudice, but on knowledge of context.

The "blind eye" strategy

I have commented elsewhere on David Fanning's errors of political interpretation in respect of *The Golden Age*, *The Bolt*, the atmosphere of the Cultural Revolution, Maxim Gorky's beliefs, and so on. It is clear from his persistent strain of uncertainty about the background that, if he has investigated it at all, he has done so only very superficially; yet this slim knowledge of context calls into question his

scepticism about the reliability of the "small 't' testimony" on Shostakovich. Lacking familiarity with the background, how can he evaluate post-Soviet memoirs and commentaries about Shostakovich? How, in any case, does he explain their impressive congruity? Is this a case of unreliable witnesses intent, in comic parallel, on self-exculpation by attaching themselves to a false notion of the composer's moral anti-communism? Unlike Christopher Norris, Fanning knows enough not to invoke CIA plots. On the other hand, his scepticism, in relation to the sheer volume of testimony to the effect that Shostakovich was no communist, is staunch to an obstinate degree and suggests that he is turning a blind eye to the evidence in order to maintain pseudo-centrality.

Addressing the AMS meeting in Boston on this subject, Fanning spoke as follows:

Disentangling Shostakovich's "genuine" thoughts from his verbal evasions and cover-ups will always be, surely, a conjectural matter. Did he or did he not try to write music for the People; did he or did he not exonerate the Party from the victimisation he had to endure? The problem lies not with finding the right answers but with the simple-mindedness of the questions, their black-and-white, either/or mentality. And if you prefer to keep an open mind or answer in shades of grey, you risk being accused of "intellectual helplessness" by commentators who take an "if you're not for us, you're against us" line... Even *Rayok*, his most obviously satirical work, doesn't actually tell me that he wasn't a Communist. What it does do is to confirm his contempt for the dogmatic administration of Soviet artistic policy in the post-war era. And that's not quite the same thing, is it?... If I believe that [Shostakovich] was revolted by many manifestations of Stalinism and post-Stalinism, certainly from the mid-1930s and maybe from some time before that, do I have to equate that with anti-Communism? What evidence is there against the possibility that Shostakovich remained wedded to at least some of the communist ideals, to the point where he could regard many of the things that happened in its name as "distortions" rather than expressions of it?

To answer the last of Fanning's questions first: we have Flora Litvinova's journal entry for 27th October 1956 (the year in which Khrushchev denounced Stalin). Litvinova: "And you, too, Dmitri Dmitriyevich, are for the ideas of communism." Shostakovich: "No, communism is impossible." Lest this be dismissed as a report of a moment's disenchantment (or even as an unequivocal lie), we have the mutually confirmative statements of three separate witnesses to Shostakovich's reaction to being forced to enroll in the Communist Party at the age of 53 in 1960. Isaak Glikman records Shostakovich's "actual words" to him about this on 29th June 1960: "[P.N.] Pospelov [a Central Committee representative of the RSFSR deputed to enroll the composer] tried to persuade me by every means to join the Party, where one breathes so easily and freely under Nikita Sergeyeovich's leadership. Pospelov greatly admired Khrushchev, his youthful vigour, his grandiose plans, and said it was essential that I should enroll in the ranks of a Party headed not by Stalin, but by Khrushchev... I clutched at any straw, saying that I had never managed to master Marxism, that they should wait until I did. Then I pleaded my religion..." According to Glikman, these words were uttered by Shostakovich an hour after calming down from a state of such agitation that his teeth chattered when he drank a glass of water. ("He was quite hysterical.") Maxim Shostakovich independently confirms Glikman's report: "My father cried twice in

his life: when his mother died and when he came home to say 'They've made me join the Party'.... This was sobbing, not just tears, but sobbing... He was forced to join the Party. There was simply no other way for him at that time." Lev Lebedinsky likewise attests that Shostakovich wept over this humiliation: "He associated joining the Party with a moral death." Indeed, Lebedinsky claims that the Eighth Quartet, written during this period, was intended as a musical suicide note, so appalled was Shostakovich at the prospect of joining the Party that he intended to kill himself rather than do so. Lebedinsky: "As a true democrat, he deeply detested the communist system, which continuously threatened his very life... He hated and despised the Communist Party." Galina Vishnevskaya, who unequivocally describes Shostakovich as an anti-communist throughout the time she knew him, indicates the dissident motives behind his song-cycle *Satires* (written shortly before the Eighth Quartet) and portrays the composer as employing the standard *intelligenty* allusion to "them" ("them" being the Soviet communist *apparat*). *Satires* was the work Isaak Glikman believed he was about to discuss with Shostakovich when invited to visit him on 29th June 1960, only to find the composer "hysterical" over the Party issue.

Leaving aside testimony - from authorities like Vishnevskaya, Lebedinsky, Daniil Zhitomirsky, Mstislav Rostropovich, Rostislav Dubinsky, Maxim Shostakovich, Vladimir Ashkenzy, and Mark Aranovsky - that Shostakovich was anti-communist for the majority, if not the entirety, of his adult life, the evidence in the preceding paragraph flatly refutes David Fanning's belief in "the possibility that Shostakovich remained wedded to at least some of the communist ideals, to the point where he could regard many of the things that happened in its name as 'distortions' rather than expressions of it". Readers with a knowledge of Soviet political rhetoric will have recognised, in Shostakovich's conversation with Glikman on 29th June 1960, examples of the composer's ironic mimicry of this style (eg., "the Party, where one breathes so easily and freely under Nikita Sergeyeovich's leadership"). Shostakovich's letters to Glikman contain examples of this satirical mockery that date back to 1943. Indeed, Flora Litvinova's journal records Shostakovich telling her, at an undated meeting in December 1942, that "[my] Seventh Symphony, and for that matter the Fifth as well, were not just about Fascism, but about our system, or any form of totalitarian regime". When Shostakovich refers to "our system", those who wish to avoid concluding that he was anti-communist must interpret this as "our Stalinist system". Yet, while it eschewed mass purges, the USSR under Khrushchev was no less totalitarian than it had been under Stalin; and, in any case, we have triple-tiered testimony that Shostakovich made no distinction between the Stalinist system and the post-Stalinist system, being so convinced of this malignant continuity that his enforced enrollment into the Party in 1960 drove him to the verge of a breakdown.

Fanning's premise assumes that Shostakovich "remained" wedded to communist ideals of some description, yet only the most dutifully devoted students of Marxism among the Soviet *intelligenty*, such as Galina Serebryakova, managed to maintain such an allegiance throughout Stalin's reign (let alone beyond it), while the idea that Shostakovich ever had any such allegiance to begin with is supported by no positive evidence whatever. Fanning speaks vaguely of communist "ideals". The historical fact is that, by the 1950s, most thinking Communist Party members in the USSR lacked faith in Marxist-Leninist ideals to such an extent that they joked sardonically to each other about them. Intellectuals publicly affiliated with the Communist Party (Gorky till 1936, Fadeyev and Sholokhov later) were

privately contemptuous of it. If Fanning had a grounding in context - in this case, a familiarity with the writings of Czeslaw Milosz, Milovan Djilas, and Miklós Haraszti, and with the utter cynicism of everyday life in the Stalinist and post-Stalinist *apparatus* (Boris Kagarlitsky: "constant lying and toadying") - he would know that to retain a serious faith in communism after Stalin required either a basic lack of information, a wide-eyed naivety, a dogged stupidity, or a lifelong studious devotion to the "principles" of Marxism-Leninism. Shostakovich's plea to Pospelov that he had "never managed to master Marxism" is at one not only with his own views as expressed in his letters to Tatyana Glivenko, but also with testimony to his youthful beliefs deposed by his sister Zoya, his aunt Nadezhda Galli-Shohat and such acquaintances as Boris Lossky, Valerian Bogdanov-Berezovsky, Mikhail Druskin, and Nikolai Malko. The evidence at present indicates that Shostakovich was, in varying degrees, a non-Party apolitical moralist from his youth to his later years (when just such a description of him is supplied by observers like Boris Tishchenko, Edison Denisov, Nikolai Karetnikov, and Grigori Kozintsev).

Naive anti-revisionism: addendum

Fanning asks: "If I believe that [Shostakovich] was revolted by many manifestations of Stalinism and post-Stalinism, certainly from the mid-1930s and maybe from some time before that, do I have to equate that with anti-Communism?" On the basis of the evidence, the answer must clearly be "Yes". Certainly to propose otherwise puts the onus of proof on the proposer; yet such is Fanning's contextual inadequacy that it is possible that he does not understand this. Such a suspicion is confirmed by the "simple-minded" questions he ascribes to revisionist critics: "Did he [Shostakovich] or did he not try to write music for the People; did he or did he not exonerate the Party from the victimisation he had to endure?" Where, we are entitled to ask, are these painfully ingenuous questions posed in revisionist criticism? Certainly not in the writings of myself or of Allan Ho and Dmitry Feofanov. Neither of Fanning's pseudo-questions is answerable without defining the terms in which they are put; hence neither pseudo-question can be given a "black-and-white, either/or" response.

The second of Fanning's invented questions ironically illustrates the naivety of his assumptions. He seems to believe that the inconsistency of Shostakovich's reactions to the victimisation he had to endure (in public: thanking the Party for "teaching" him and for watching over Russia's *intelligentsia* so solicitously; in private: "shrieking" his hatred of the Party for forcing him to traduce himself) amounts to an imponderable, and thus insoluble, contradiction. "Disentangling Shostakovich's 'genuine' thoughts from his verbal evasions and cover-ups," writes Fanning, "will always be, surely, a conjectural matter." This, though, is to exclude the possibility of non-conjectural evidence ever appearing, a premise which both violates logic and turns a blind eye to testimony and evidence already before us. As to the idea that it is impossible to distinguish, in terms of reliability, between Shostakovich's public and private statements, the more dependable choice is indicated by context and common sense. Furthermore, contrary to Fanning, there is already ample testimony to the effect that "private" is strongly to be preferred over "public" in Shostakovich's case. Mstislav Rostropovich, Galina Vishnevskaya, Yuri Lyubimov, Sergei Slonimsky, and Edison Denisov all confirm Solomon Volkov's report that Shostakovich made a practice of signing official documents without reading them. Daniil Zhitomirsky

has spoken of ghost-writing an article "by" Shostakovich, indicating that this was a standard practice with respect to the majority of writings ascribed to the composer. Marina Sabinina has testified to Shostakovich's loathing of having to mouth the official speeches he was compelled to read; Zhitomirsky has confirmed that such readings were often openly caricatural. Shostakovich's own son Maxim has sat in front of Fanning himself and spoken viciously of Khentova's misrepresentation of his father's outlook: "I hate, I *khate* her book, and I told her so because she makes him look like a genuine son of the Communist Party [expletive deleted]." One is obliged to ask: how much [expletive deleted] testimony does David Fanning require?

In effect, Fanning tells us what he requires: he wants a signed - and presumably witnessed - affidavit from Shostakovich stating that he was never a communist:

Even *Rayok*, his most obviously satirical work, doesn't actually tell me that he wasn't a Communist. What it does do is to confirm his contempt for the dogmatic administration of Soviet artistic policy in the post-war era. And that's not quite the same thing, is it?

Here, we reach the issue of personal judgement. One can, as Fanning does, politely detach Shostakovich's scatological raging against the Soviet *apparatus* in *Rayok* from the possibility that, called upon to reflect on Marxist-Leninist "ideals", the composer might have abruptly swallowed his anger, put his hands prayerfully together and forgiven his persecutors - the people who jailed and killed his friends and family - in the saintly cause of communist revolution. Or one can suggest that only an idiot could hold in "contempt" the "dogmatic administration of Soviet artistic policy" (whether after the war or, as Mikhail Chulaki's account of the *apparatus* reception of the Fifth Symphony suggests, *before* the war as well) without grasping that those ordering him around were able to do so solely because the Soviet communist system had elevated them over the bullet-shattered heads of people who would otherwise have held those positions by virtue of their gifts of intellect and moral discernment. The overwhelming (almost the exclusive) trend of testimony and evidence to the effect that Shostakovich was a moral anti-communist is a matter of record; anyone asserting otherwise is obliged by such preponderance to propose reasons for rejecting this testimony and evidence, *item by item*. Under any other circumstance - in the biographical study of any other artist - these issues would be considered resolved. Fanning's claim that present testimony and evidence about Shostakovich obliges us "to keep an open mind or answer in shades of grey" on these issues amounts to a perpetual postponing of conclusions blatantly at odds with the balance of probability.

Having said this, it would be illogical to assert that testimony and evidence to the contrary (indicating that Shostakovich was pro-communist, or was somehow unable to decide what political beliefs, if any, he adhered to) can never appear in the future. No doubt there are yet unpublished reminiscences of Shostakovich which view him from perspectives other than those cited herein. Some of those who knew him - lacking the privileged view of events to which he had access through his contacts in the cultural and other spheres of Soviet life - will have been less aware than him, and others among his circle, of the unsavoury nature of "Soviet reality" behind the official façade. Some associated with him were, moreover, reporting on him to the NKVD or KGB, this being a standard arrangement in the case of prominent cultural figures in the USSR. We may yet be required to weigh memoirs or interviews with

representatives of one or other of these classes of witnesses. We may also be asked to judge materials, produced under conditions of censorship, which seem to show that Shostakovich was pro-communist. All of these categories of testimony and evidence must be provisionally admitted and each individual example assessed on its merits.

The case of Hans Jung

A rare example of material contradicting the predominant trend of testimony and evidence in Shostakovich studies was provided by David Fanning in his address to the AMS meeting in Boston on 31st October 1998. This takes the form of a record of a "private conversation" which occurred on 22nd March 1975 between Shostakovich and "an East German admirer of his music" during a visit to Moscow. The following passage retails the composer's attributed views on unjust criticism of his music, with particular reference to the censure he suffered during the Zhdanov affair in 1948:

I said then what I have always thought and what I still think today: I am a Soviet artist and was brought up in a socialist country. I always wanted and still want today to find the way to the heart of the People... At that time I spoke up several times, spoke up several times. I said unequivocally that it was painful for me to hear, to hear the Central Committee's judgements on my music. But I also said that I knew the Party was right, the Party wanted the best for me and that I had to seek out and find definite ways that would lead, would lead me to a socialist, realist, popular mode of creation - do you understand? I also said then that this would not be easy for me, would not be easy for me. But I promised the Party to find, to find the new path. And I did it! I have always tried honestly, tried honestly to write good music, music for my people, for man and woman, for man and woman... Not Socialism and certainly not my Party, the great Party of Lenin, is guilty! No, no! Those were distortions of the Party line and distortions of the politics of Socialism.

Fanning describes this as "one of Shostakovich's last reported conversations, off the record and so far as he was aware not for publication... a one-to-one, 90-to-95-minute meeting in Shostakovich's apartment with Hans Jung, an official in the Society for German-Soviet Friendship, a mass organisation in the German Democratic Republic with about eight million members... [a] meeting instigated by Shostakovich to thank Jung for a gift and to find out about the reactions to his music in East Germany". He concedes that this is an English translation of a German version of a conversation in Russian "remembered, transcribed, and edited for publication". Fanning concedes, too, that "if Shostakovich's true thoughts at the time were of the dissident kind, he would hardly have been likely to share them with an East German visiting him in a semi-official capacity", but adds: "Couldn't [Shostakovich] have made his points just as effectively without going out of his way to endorse the Communist Party, and without saying in the conversation, quite unprompted, 'I am a communist today'?"

Summing up before moving on to other related matters, Fanning makes his point:

Ultimately this remains an unwitnessed, untaped conversation, and it's up to us what we make of it. But I think it illustrates the kind of difficulty with reading oral history, particularly when it emanates from a climate of fear and disinformation as in the former Soviet Union, where there's no reason to think that written documents or tapes are necessarily any more reliable than hearsay. If you don't like the content of a particular document you can usually find ways of discrediting it. On the other hand, you can just as easily persuade yourself that views you concur with come from trustworthy sources. What's well nigh impossible is producing hard evidence with which to challenge someone with opposite convictions to your own.

The bedrock of Fanning's argument is his reference to the "climate of fear and disinformation in the former Soviet Union, where there's no reason to think that written documents or tapes are necessarily any more reliable than hearsay". To the layman, this may appear to be a persuasive argument: everyone in the USSR was so afraid and confused that nothing they ever said, whether in documents or on tape, is "necessarily" more reliable than hearsay. However, to anyone acquainted with the study of Soviet history - or, indeed, with the study of any area of history whatever - Fanning's contention will occasion amazement. Climates of fear and disinformation have existed at various times throughout history, raising "difficulties" of the kind to which Fanning refers. Yet historical research thrives on such difficulties, proceeding by a process of comparison and evaluation as between conflicting points of view and varying qualities of evidence (the basis of all historical assertion being probability). It appears that Fanning is aware neither of the level of detail in which the workings of the former USSR have been known to Western historians for the last forty years nor of the standard methods of comparison and evaluation employed to sort, assess, and classify this mass of official and unofficial documents and statistics. Precisely the same methodology applies in the case of Shostakovich (see below: Closing remarks).

Hans Jung's report appeared in the anthology *Shostakovich in Germany*, edited by Hilmar Schmalenberg and published by Ernest Kuhn in Berlin in 1998. Chairman of the German DSCH Society (and, according to DSCH's German correspondent Dr Michael Koball, "a strong revisionist"), Hilmar Schmalenberg came to know Jung during their days as musical residents of the former German Democratic Republic (GDR). Replying to a letter from Allan Ho about Jung's report, Schmalenberg wrote as follows of his motive in anthologising it: "My primary aim with the publication was to record views on Shostakovich in the GDR. (Jung's position is not identical with that of the editor.)" Jung was a full-time official in the Society for German-Russian Friendship (Gesellschaft für Deutsch-Sowjetische Freundschaft, or GDSF); as such (Ernest Kuhn confirms) Jung belonged to the *apparat*. The GDSF, as Fanning concedes, was a mass organisation. In fact, it was *the* mass organisation of the GDR, its eight million members comprising almost the entire working adult populace. Dr Koball: "Every factory, etc., had a branch of this society and the members had to meet in their free time, learning facts about the USSR and being, of course, forced to pay their membership rates. During your first job interview, you would be asked [by a representative of the GDSF]: 'You are a friend of the USSR, aren't you? So come and join us!' (A question that nobody could answer with 'No'.)" Membership of the GDSF was

effectively compulsory and indispensable to career advancement in East Germany. As such, it was financed through the Communist Party of the GDR, which controlled the way issues in the sphere of cultural exchange between GDR and USSR were "elucidated" in the society's publications and lectures. To depict Shostakovich as anything other than "a hero of Socialist labour" in the GDSF would have been as unthinkable as doing so in any other public forum or media-outlet in East Germany.

According to Schmalenberg, Shostakovich knew perfectly well what the GDSF was and that Hans Jung was a salaried official in that organisation, i.e., an *apparatchik*. ("It is possible that he might have met Jung in the 1960s in Berlin, when he was a guest in the central house of the GDSF, where he was photographed.") Are there any grounds for suspecting that Hans Jung was then attached to the security organs of the GDR (Stasi)? Schmalenberg: "I never had such suspicions myself, but this proves nothing." In March 1975, Shostakovich underwent medical tests and was, for some while, hospitalised. Does Schmalenberg believe that Hans Jung's conversation with Shostakovich took place in the way he reports and used the words and expressions he has supplied? "Jung wrote, as he told me, this report in the GDR. The meeting with Shostakovich did in all likelihood take place - I personally do not doubt this. As far as the truthfulness of his report is concerned, I consider it to be at least his own, i.e. HJ's, truth. At the very least, his text reflects a view about Shostakovich prevalent in the GDR." Schmalenberg further confirms that the conversation was conducted off the record, but believes it was instigated by Jung, not Shostakovich.

Knowing what we know of Shostakovich's deep distrust of *apparatchiki* and of his fear of being "reported" for unorthodox remarks by those he spoke to, it is extremely unlikely that he would have varied his public posture (as an endorser of Soviet Communist Party policy) whilst engaged in a private exchange with an *apparatchik* about such sensitive issues as his attitude to Party censure. No matter how friendly Hans Jung was, or seemed to be, he was a representative of a communist propaganda organisation whose visit to Shostakovich would certainly have been *on* the record so far as the Soviet and East German authorities were concerned, and who therefore was certain to write up (or be required to write up) his report once back in the GDR; which is what transpired. Though hitherto unaware of Shostakovich's statement to Jung (or of Jung personally), Solomon Volkov regards it merely as a characteristic example of Shostakovich's automatic statements in response to such enquiries from communist officialdom. Shostakovich, he says, would have had no doubt that the Society for German-Soviet Friendship was overseen by the Stasi, since everything in the GDR was. Hilmar Schmalenberg concurs: "Shostakovich's answers followed the 'rules' of the time. To tell a stranger that he was not [a communist] would make no sense whatever, because in those days he would have had to expect the question 'What then?'. With an answer like this he would have thrown Jung into a black hole, and his admirer would have been disappointed. What would Jung have said on his return to the GDR? It would have been tantamount to announcing [the substance] of Volkov's 'memoirs' [sic]. Shostakovich had his private confidants, but in public the line had to be toed. Whether, though, Shostakovich would have given the same answers in the era of Gorbachev can be doubted with some likelihood."

Hilmar Schmalenberg dismisses the erstwhile communist image of Shostakovich ostensibly adhered to

by Hans Jung. Yet the statements attributed to Shostakovich by Jung raise the question of whether the composer intended an Aesopian sub-text of which Jung may have been aware. The lacunae [...] in Shostakovich's statement, as transcribed in translation by Jung upon returning to the GDR, indicate brief pauses in the composer's address. Supposing Jung recalled the conversation accurately (and this may be supposing far too much), it is legitimate to point out certain arguably significant ambiguities in Shostakovich's statement, such the following passage: "I have always tried honestly, tried honestly to write good music, music for my people, for man and woman, for man and woman... Not Socialism and certainly not my Party, the great Party of Lenin, is guilty! No, no! Those were distortions of the Party line and distortions of the politics of Socialism." As elsewhere in Fanning's excerpt, Shostakovich invokes the prefabricated standard phraseology of public discourse within the Soviet bloc: "the great Party of Lenin", "distortions of the Party line and distortions of the politics of Socialism". We should recall Flora Litvinova's remark that Shostakovich "excelled at parodying the bureaucratic lingo" (a claim borne out by his letters to Glikman). We should also recall his use of significant repetition; as, for example, in this case, where his expressed wish to write popular music changes, on repetition, from the Soviet formula "music for the People" to the more general "music for my people, for man and woman" - then proceeding, via a brief pause, to: "Not Socialism and certainly not my Party, the great Party of Lenin, is guilty!" The grammatical structure of this second sentence would be less intriguing if it did not finish with an apparent *non sequitur* about "guilt". There is no preparation for this concept in the entire passage, which appears out of the blue. Are we to understand, then, that the sentences are linked? I.e., does Shostakovich here drop into Aesopian mode, indicating that he writes for ordinary men and women, not for Socialism and certainly not for the Party; and, furthermore, that "the great Party of Lenin is guilty"? Such, indeed, were the ways in which Aesopian speech was conducted under Soviet rule. Since Hans Jung was (so we are told) writing down Shostakovich's words from memory, the limit of speculation in this case has probably already been reached; yet the speculation itself is perfectly legitimate and the text certainly lends itself to this.

Whatever one makes of Hans Jung's reported conversation with Shostakovich, the fact remains that it is a report of a type known to be subject to strictly confined terms of expression under the rules then governing "public" or "official" pronouncements in the Soviet bloc. As such, like the spurious articles and statements extracted from Shostakovich for Soviet consumption, Jung's report is undeniably less dependable than statements intimated to his friends in private (e.g., his rejoinder to Litvinova, "No, communism is impossible"). Only by disregarding context and by avoiding any juxtaposition of Jung's report with the "small 't' testimony" about Shostakovich is it possible to pretend that what the composer said - "one-to-one", but effectively *in public* - to this visiting *apparatchik* whom he barely knew, can be treated as equal in evidential value to statements of a diametrically contrary kind confided in genuine privacy to those close to him. To take one example, Manashir Yakubov quotes the composer's third wife Irina's report that, when she asked him why he had joined the Party, he replied: "If you love me, never ask me about that. They blackmailed me." What kind of loyal communist has to be blackmailed to join the Communist Party? Hans Jung did not meet the real Shostakovich. Yet he is one of many in this respect.

David Fanning

As a responsible scholar, Hilmar Schmalenberg has published Hans Jung's report to illustrate the customary "elucidation" of Shostakovich's image within the former East Germany. However, Schmalenberg neither concurs with the assumptions about Shostakovich intrinsic to that image, nor believes, contrary to David Fanning, that a one-to-one conversation, however genial, between the composer and an *apparatchik* could possibly have been regarded by either of them as subject to the normal rules of privacy. Whether or not Jung took notes as they spoke, he was bound to report the conversation in some form (as he did, as soon as he returned to East Germany) and Shostakovich, with his fifty years of dealings with *apparatchiki*, would have known that. Accordingly, Jung's report must be regarded as yet another "public" statement made by Shostakovich in conformity with what was routinely required of him by the communist authorities and which therefore contradicts statements made by him to trusted friends in rare circumstances of genuine privacy. Fanning's casual attempt to suggest an equivalence of evidential value between such material and the mass of private testimony to the contrary is an extraordinary measure of his anxiety to cling to a pseudo-centrist position on Shostakovich. His method - to argue in generalities, hoping that this will deflect attention from the wealth of particulars which gainsay his assertions - is neither scholarly nor responsible. Fanning objects to being charged (by me) with "intellectual helplessness". Very well. On the strength of his review of *Shostakovich Reconsidered* and his address to the AMS meeting in Boston in 1998, I will revise the charge to one of "intellectual evasiveness". Nowhere in his review is there an admission that his remarks are in the nature of a riposte to criticisms of him made in the book, i.e., that he quotes selectively from the deposition of Galina Drubachevskaya in order to continue depicting Solomon Volkov in an unflattering light; that he casts illegitimate aspersions on Lev Lebedinsky and Daniil Zhitomirsky so as to make their affidavits seem equal in evidential value to that of Yury Levitin; that he misrepresents the position of Leo Mazel' with regard to the dispute between Lebedinsky and Levitin in order to neutralise the significance of the issues involved; and that he has commended, both explicitly and implicitly (by publishing), an essay on Shostakovich's Fifth Symphony by Richard Taruskin which - whether through unfamiliarity with the documentary materials or for the purpose of facilitating a more rousing polemic - ignores testimony contradicting Taruskin's interpretation of the Soviet reception of the work. Fanning's unwillingness to deal with this last charge presumably stems from the necessity of admitting that he was unaware of the materials ignored by Taruskin, with all that follows from this. (The materials are not obscure, having appeared in Wilson's *Shostakovich: A Life Remembered*, published in 1994, a year before *Shostakovich Studies*, which leads off with Taruskin's essay.)

Rather than address my various criticisms, Fanning prefers to dismiss as "an 81-page diatribe" the essay ("Naive Anti-Revisionism") in which they appear, venturing no comment on them whatever. While he has said little, if anything, in the past about *From Jewish Folk Poetry*, Fanning's similar failure to address my rebuttal of Laurel Fay's contentions about the work (in the same essay) provides further evidence of his habit of intellectual evasion. However, the most extraordinary instance of this tendency occurs in his interview with Rodion Shchedrin in the September 1997 of *Gramophone*, where he sarcastically recounts his attempts to "deflect" Shchedrin from "extra-musical generalities" and "get him onto the specifics of his music". The "extra-musical generalities" to which Fanning refers include Shchedrin's remarks on the political realities of working under totalitarian conditions and the following

observation on the experiential background to art created in this way: "Stalin killed 60 million people. Not one family was untouched. I lost two uncles, and both my father-in-law and mother-in-law were in prison." Fanning dismisses this statement with the dry comment that "[Shchedrin] rehearses Russia's tragedy yet again". From someone whose knowledge of the background is demonstrably as scant as his published references to it, Fanning's dismissal of Shchedrin's testimony constitutes both evasion on a grand scale and precisely the detachment of art from context upon which the concept of "pure music" is based (and which he elsewhere stoutly denies in theory and practice). There is no mystery to Fanning's Janus-faced attitude on this topic. Were he to do Rodion Shchedrin the honour of accepting the terms in which he sees his own music (as Fanning has often done with respect to the comparatively trifling terms in which Western modernists present their work), he would be faced with context at such a pitch of significance that he might never be able to escape into the score-limited "specifics" which are his natural milieu. In order to justify this act of evasion, Fanning adopts the position that the background influence on the music of Soviet composers is well-established and requires no further exegesis. He has told me that "everybody knows" about the Soviet background, implying that time spent on elucidating it is wasted and that Shostakovich criticism should now concentrate on technical analysis of the scores. "Surely," he declared at the Boston AMS meeting, "the battle for integrating cultural context into Shostakovich commentary has long since been won?" If this were the case, one would be entitled to ask: won by whom? Certainly not by Fanning, who has mentioned virtually nothing about such cultural context in anything he has written about Shostakovich during the last twelve years.

If David Fanning is so securely grounded in cultural context, how is it that he cannot properly assess the evidential value of Hans Jung's report? How can he accord equal significance to Jung's report and to the depositions of Maxim Shostakovich, Irina Shostakovich, Isaak Glikman, and Lev Lebedinsky vis-à-vis Shostakovich's attitudes to the Soviet Communist Party? How is it that he misunderstands the comparable attitudes of Maxim Gorky and misconstrues the very different sorts of "success" a work like *The Golden Age* could be said to have enjoyed under the circumstances of the Cultural Revolution? Why - to take just one example of misjudging motives by misapprehending context - does he suggest that Shostakovich regularly recycled the "Song of the Meeting" (*Counterplan*) because the composer was "pleased with its success", when the practical fact is that the song gave him a permanent passport to positive audience reaction, a transferable guarantee of virtuous populism in the eyes of the *apparat*, and a means of screwing extra performance cheques from the Union? And how can he seriously endorse an essay like Richard Taruskin's "Public lies and unspeakable truth" without seeing at once that it defies established knowledge of the cultural context of 1937, let alone without spotting that it fundamentally distorts the documentary record? Fanning, who professes himself "alarmed" that revisionists should reprove Taruskin for his improbable descriptions of Shostakovich, might be genuinely startled were he ever to acquire some substantial knowledge of Soviet history, rather than merely allowing his superficial prejudices about it to inform his judgements, such as they are. At the Boston meeting, he mocked his critics for being "dangerously armed with a little socio-political learning", a charge he seems under-qualified to make and which, in truth, would more deservedly be applied to himself.

Closing remarks

The essence of pseudo-centrism is vagueness - vagueness about the background and vagueness of assertion. It is a position which depends on general claims that Soviet reality is unsusceptible to rational interrogation and that all testimony and evidence emanating from it are equally suspect. The ultimate motive of pseudo-centrism is to reduce the role of context in Shostakovich criticism by making context itself appear unstable. A phenomenon which has been predictable for the last two or three years, pseudo-centrism will doubtless be the future sanctuary for pundits migrating from the extremity of anti-revisionism; as such, pseudo-centrist commentary will always, whether or not it admits this, implicitly favour anti-revisionist interpretations over revisionist ones. A major root of pseudo-centrism is a (vague) nostalgia for left-wing ideals in respect to the Soviet Union, as embodied in the Western liberal mindset of the 1960s and 1970s. This nostalgia - like the reflexive inclination towards "pure" or quasi-"pure" music - serves as a delusory soft-focus filter between the critic and any "Soviet" work under consideration. In the case of Shostakovich's music, this soft-focus confers a pretentiously generalised form of universality and a corresponding reluctance to address the context (which is indispensable to revealing that some of the composer's output is sharply satirical in ways so far barely understood). The subjectivism which underlies the pseudo-centrist view is simultaneously its origin and its destination: by keeping the meaning of Shostakovich's music vague, pseudo-centrists preserve their private responses to it. Born of an era when we knew far less about Shostakovich and his society than we do now, such private responses stand in direct contrast with the more shared (and hence more genuinely universal) responses proposed by revisionism. Ironically, some anti-revisionists have accused revisionism of claiming Shostakovich for "the conservative cause"; yet if anything can be said to be classically "bourgeois" in the Shostakovich debate it is the pseudo-centrist defence of the private response. To maintain the right to a private response in defiance of what we now know, and can therefore agree on, about Shostakovich's music - for example, that the Eighth Quartet is a form of suicide note - is, in effect, to reject what we might call the communalism of the truly universal response. (To put it simply: Shostakovich's art should unite us, not increase our egoistic isolation.)

On BBC Radio 3 on 16th August 1998, Stephen Johnson disclosed that he first heard Shostakovich's Fourth Symphony at the age of 14 and was so overwhelmed by the impression it made on him that he cannot now forgo that conception for anything even generally appropriate to the symphony's meaning as deduced through context, since that would negate his private response to the music. I, too, first heard the work when I was 14 and was similarly overwhelmed. In my young mind, it summoned frenetic and nightmareish images which had very little connection with each other; for example, the coda of the third movement evoked a vast subterranean cave hung with dripping stalactites. In short, my response to the music, while enthusiastic, was inchoately subjective. By the time it came to considering the Fourth Symphony for *The New Shostakovich*, I had evolved more maturely sophisticated associations for the music, albeit that these were inconsistent when examined together, being, in effect, a private world evoked by Shostakovich's music. When, however, I examined the Symphony in context, it became obvious to me that my private response was a self-indulgent ahistorical fantasy. Albeit with reluctance, I dropped it and rethought my conception of the work from the ground up, reasoning that to do anything less was self-centred. (I should add that Volkov, to whom Johnson confided his 14-year-old secret, gave him his blessing without enquiring what his "interpretation" was.) Johnson has since demanded to know, with reference to John Eliot Gardiner's claim that Beethoven's Fifth is "saturated with echoes of French

Revolutionary songs", if I am in the habit of taking the context of Beethoven's symphonies into account when I listen to them. I'm familiar with Gardiner's intriguing conjecture, which, could it be proved, would be so indispensable to comprehending Beethoven that to ignore it in the interests of preserving one's private interpretations would be dishonest and cowardly. Indeed, such is the ferment of context-recovery in cultural criticism over the last thirty years that one could multiply such examples till the cows come home. We have opened that door; we can only close it now by shutting out the world itself. In any case, are we not crying out for new great music? By rendering Beethoven new to our minds, we acquire his music afresh, as though we have never heard it before.

The commonest intellectual confusion to stem from the subjective vagueness of pseudo-centrism is the idea that *Testimony* stands alone as a key to Shostakovich's music, and that if this key can be shown to be faultily cast, the lock will not turn and the door to a deeper understanding of the composer's music will not open. In DSCH 10, George Holley, with admirable honesty, concedes that, having read *Shostakovich Reconsidered*, he now sees *Testimony* as "a sort of Rosetta Stone for Shostakovich and for Soviet intellectual history". As for Soviet intellectual history - about which we now know a great deal - *Testimony* can fairly be regarded as one Rosetta Stone among many; yet Holley is correct in his general sentiment, and the metaphor of the Rosetta Stone is instructive up to a point. The Rosetta Stone was a fragment of a text written in parallel in three ancient scripts. The rest of the tablet was missing, but the parallel texts allowed Champollion to read the hitherto indecipherable hieroglyphics of ancient Egypt. *Testimony*, by contrast, is more accurately regarded as one part of a tablet broken in four, of which we have - not wholly distinct, yet sufficiently clear to be largely decipherable - all four pieces. The other three pieces of the "Shostakovich tablet" are: the "small 't' testimony"; the general Soviet background; and his music. Used together (comparing their points of commonality and mutual confirmation), these four aspects of the full picture constitute a formidable means of dispelling the defeatist claims of permanent irredeemable irresolution voiced by the proponents of comfortable vagueness in the pseudo-centre of the Shostakovich debate.

Allan Ho and Dmitry Feofanov have accomplished considerable advances in factually cross-comparing *Testimony* with all three other fragments of the tablet. In doing so, they have repeatedly discovered that details in *Testimony* "check out" in ways of which Solomon Volkov could not have been aware; indeed, they are still discovering such independently confirmative details. As for comparing *Testimony* with the "small 't' testimony", they and I have done an equal amount of work; whereas it has largely fallen to me thus far to relate *Testimony* to its context in the Soviet background. As for the music - which, in the end, is what we are interested in - cross-comparison between it and the other three aspects of the picture have been productive and can be expected to proceed more quickly as findings like Raymond Clarke's are brought forward. Clarke's find, in fact, suggests a fifth fragment to the "Shostakovich tablet": Western music itself, which, like the composer's allusions to Russian and Soviet literature (here subsumed for convenience under "the general Soviet background"), seems to have been employed by him as a source of ready code-material for use in significant "collage" passages. In other words, *Testimony* is merely part of a pattern which must be judged overall, rather than by isolating its separate manifestations in order to relegate their potential significance, as David Fanning clearly wishes to do.

Louis Blois is vexed that *Testimony* is not scholastically irreproachable. We should count ourselves lucky that we have it; indeed, Solomon Volkov is fortunate that he and the book escaped the USSR intact. I agree with David Fanning that the loss of the original transcript is, to say the least, regrettable. However, while very important to the process of reconsidering Shostakovich, *Testimony* is not strictly crucial. Even if all we possessed were the other three (or four) parts of the puzzle, the enquiry into Shostakovich's true artistic identity would still be proceeding. As to my position on *Testimony*, I have outlined this in *Shostakovich Reconsidered* (p. 117, fn. 8; p. 295) and in an interview with DSCH accessible at the [DSCH Web-site](#).

I would like to thank Martin Klopstock and Dr Michael Koball for their generous assistance with the German sources quoted in this article. Thanks also to Dr Koball and Hilmar Schmalenberg for permission to quote their remarks herein.

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THE NEW SHOSTAKOVICH

by Ian MacDonald

(Fourth Estate, 1990; Northeastern University Press, 1990; Oxford University Press, 1991)

"I highly recommend Ian MacDonald's book *The New Shostakovich*. It is one of the best biographies of Dmitri Shostakovich I have read."

Maxim Shostakovich

"Dear Mr MacDonald, thank you for your wonderful book on DDS..."

Note to the author from Vladimir Ashkenazy

"I have read your excellent book *The New Shostakovich*... My dear friend Maxim Shostakovich reminded me about the book by saying: 'It is the best book written about my father...'"

Letter to the author from Seppo Heikinheimo

"Remarkable ... gets under the skin of Shostakovich and understands the perversity of the Soviet system and what it has inflicted on humanity."

Letter to the author from Semyon Bychkov

"The best biography of the composer available. A formal lesson to Western writers on post-1917 Russia, whether their subject is music or life itself."

Andrei Navrozov

"Brilliant."

Marina Ledin

"Compelling ... a portrait of a creative artist tormented and harried by the random assaults of Stalinism."

Andrew Clements

"Superb ... This compassionate and very knowledgeable book is humbling in its understanding of how far an individual can be pushed by the coercive forces of a grotesque, perhaps insane, authority."

Sydney Morning Herald

"Persuasively argued and forceful ...

A valid, politically driven reconsideration of the composer's works."

Harlow Robinson, New York Times Review of Books

"A monumental achievement

... impressive evidence that the authentic Shostakovich

is not the same composer described by official Soviet propaganda."

Steve Martland

"A fine reassessment and excellent biography ... Not only a good read but also about as objective as it is possible to be now. A remarkable achievement."

Manchester Evening News

"Fascinating ... Manages, better than any previous publication, to make connections between Shostakovich's work and the works of other Soviet artists whom he admired and was influenced by."

Times Educational Supplement

"Breathes new life into the story ... The underlying thesis, that an understanding of Shostakovich's music is impossible without a proper appreciation of its social and historical context, is incontrovertible."

New Statesman

"Anyone concerned with Soviet music, twentieth-century music, arts in politics, and politics in art, will be interested in this book."

Gunther Schuller

"The most thorough study of this enigmatic figure yet undertaken in English (or Russian, for that matter)."

Richard Dyer, Boston Sunday Globe

"Mr MacDonald has gone some way to solving what could be described as the Enigma Variations of Russian music."

Liverpool Daily Post

"A considerable tour de force of musical and social analysis which will hold its own for some time to come."

Norman Lebrecht

"A work of great energy and passion ... a crusading book."

Tempo

"Riveting... harrowing... superb."

Classic CD

"Clearly organized and superbly written ... If you really want to hear Shostakovich's music and understand what is going on beyond the notes, you must read *The New Shostakovich*."

American Record Guide

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[Another book by Ian MacDonald](#).

SHOSTAKOVICH RECONSIDERED

Allan B. Ho and Dmitry Feofanov, editors

(ISBN 0 907689 56 6; London: [Toccata Press](#), 1998)

"International Book of the Year" Robert Conquest, *TLS*

"This book settles the issue once and for all. I am sure that no one in his sane mind, having read the evidence presented by the authors, will ever ask the question of whether *Testimony* is authentic Shostakovich or not. The answer is that it most definitely is."

Vladimir Ashkenazy

"'Reply to an Unjust Criticism' sheds valuable new light not only on the authenticity of Shostakovich's memoirs, but also on the efforts of Soviet and some Western sources to mute the truth. Adopting the format of a trial, Ho and Feofanov weigh the evidence and persuasively refute earlier claims that *Testimony* is inaccurate and a forgery. Their arguments are amply supported, sources are thoroughly documented and text is engagingly written for musician and non-musician alike. What makes 'Reply' unique among Shostakovich studies is that it provides detailed answers to the many criticisms leveled at *Testimony* and its editor, Solomon Volkov, during the past seventeen years. At the same time, it raises disturbing new questions about the integrity, expertise and motivations of the critics of these memoirs, who, contrary to the evidence, continue to besmirch Shostakovich as 'perhaps Soviet Russia's most loyal musical son'."

Judge Alex Kozinski

"I have read 'Reply to an Unjust Criticism' and find it admirable, convincing and totally solid in its approach and reasoning. It is riveting reading and reveals human nature in the whole span of the worst and the best and how they fit into each other and how in a certain way the one provokes the other and may even be dependent on each other. It is a wonderful guide to Shostakovich's music."

Lord Menuhin

"[Ho and Feofanov's defense of *Testimony* is] couched deliberately in courtroom terms, cross-examining and painstakingly discrediting objections one by one. This is so thoroughly done it surely puts the onus on *Testimony*'s detractors to return to the stand... [I] will be putting references to Volkov's dishonesty on ice until that happens... By all means read their book and enjoy the frisson of its TV-courtroom-drama-style presentation."

David Fanning, BBC Music Magazine

"The 'Terrible Trio' - namely Fay, Brown and Taruskin (but not necessarily in that order) are about to have the wind taken out of their academic sails, are about to see their respective ivory towers crumble to nought: but above all are about to acquiesce - Volkov wasn't at all a 'liar' and what's more he and Shostakovich did indeed meet more than three times over a glass or two of kvas, and all those unpleasant things about Prokofiev and others might well have come from Dmitri Dmitrievich's own lips... One thing is crystal clear: [*Shostakovich Reconsidered*] will be one of those 'indispensable' books on your shelf - like *Testimony*, like *Shostakovich: A Life Remembered* (by Elizabeth Wilson) and *Letters to a Friend* (Glikman, in French) and Derek Hulme's *Second Catalogue*... In this Trial by Jury, only one course of action is possible, Ladies and Gentlemen - read Ho and Feofanov's determined tome, it will add to your perception of the Shostakovich debate and may well lead to a moral, if not a circumstantial acquittal."

Nigel Papworth, DSCH Journal

"Ashkenazy has contributed the introduction to a retaliatory missile by Allan B. Ho and Dmitry Feofanov, titled *Shostakovich Reconsidered* and published this week by Toccata Press. Bulky but absorbing, this devastating counter-attack exposes levels of academic self-delusion that might be condonable under North Korean water torture but seem a tad contorted in the cathedra of Ivy League colleges and the columns of the *New Grove Dictionary*."

Norman Lebrecht, The Daily Telegraph

"For 20 years the composer's memoirs, *Testimony*, have been attacked as fraudulent, and the composer maligned as a man who gave in to Soviet pressure and compromised his art. The present authors wish to defend Shostakovich's reputation, conducting, in an entertaining trial format, a passionate defence of the book. There are also numerous other musicological and cultural essays - a splendid celebration of this sublime musician."

Stephen Poole, The Guardian

"It's very rare to come across a book that's so readable... What it does set up, without much doubt, is Solomon Volkov's essential probity - that he's done what he's done honourably. I think he comes out of this very well all round, I have to say."

Stephen Johnson, BBC

"Shostakovich's suffering is over, and Volkov's suffering is over, but I suspect that Professor Taruskin's suffering is just beginning."

Anthony Briggs, BBC

"Taking all such indicators together [the evidence presented in *Shostakovich Reconsidered*], I think it is fair to conclude that *Testimony* is authentic as an expression of the composer's views and should probably also be thought of as verbatim."

John Shand, *Tempo*

"The book, organised like a court case where the memoirs stand on trial, is extremely easy to read, set in a language that is readily understood by those who are invited to act as jury. The footnotes and cross references are thorough to the point of providing substantial commentary on the side, allowing one to follow the logic of the cross examination and defence. There is extensive rebuttal of the studies of the anti-revisionists that leaves the misleading claims of these scholars bare to ridicule, warranted as they are by such preposterous papers such as Laurel Fay's on Shostakovich's song-cycle *From Jewish Folk Poetry*. In short it is ruthless, but deservedly so in light of such published scholastic deceptions that revolve around selective representation and deliberate misinterpretation of material, dependency on outdated material and on splitting hairs with Volkov and MacDonald. The climax of this intensive trial and the ultimate test of the strength of this book lies in the treatment of *Testimony's* biggest riddle: the 8 passages from the memoirs allegedly plagiarised from near-identical sources previously published in the Soviet Union. While at first encounter this evidence looks to be Volkov's undoing, Ho and Feofanov in masterly fashion make a convincing case for the composer's well-documented capacity for self-quotation. Backed by well-rounded in-depth research, it is the centrepiece of an exhaustive defence that will leave little doubt in the readers' minds of the authenticity of *Testimony* and the portrait within... *Shostakovich Reconsidered* thus acts like a ray of sunshine through the stormy clouds of these past decades of controversy over who the real Shostakovich was. More than just closing the case on *Testimony*, as one must after going through the book, it provides the much needed all-round perspective of a composer who was not only a commentator and a critic of his times, but also a sharp and colourful satirist whose outlook on life and music far exceeded what we thought we knew of him."

C. H. Loh (composer, classical music columnist), *The Sun, KL* (Singapore)

"Is there still someone in Finland suspecting that Solomon Volkov, editor of 'The Memoirs of Dmitri Shostakovich', distorted the words of the composer? Suspicions can now be discarded. Allan Ho and Dmitri Feofanov testify in their new book called *Shostakovich Reconsidered*, with an immense torrent of facts, that the memoirs are, in all essential parts, discourse which the composer had partly related to people other than Volkov, too... One almost feels sorry for the scholars who mocked Volkov - such as Malcolm Brown, Richard Taruskin, and Laurel Fay. Ho and Feofanov show with direct quotations that these scholars, opponents of Volkov, separated sentences from their factual

context when they judged the book to be a forgery. They also show that these scholars do not know or at least have not commented upon the latest research which supports the authenticity of Volkov's book."

Vesa Sirén, *Helsingin Sanomat* (Finland); tr. Markus Lång

"From the moment the memoirs appeared in the West (they have yet to be published in Russian), they have been violently attacked and vigorously defended, dismissed as a forgery and hailed as a revelation. Now, with the opening of some Soviet archives and the accumulated testimony of those who knew the composer, the debate has reopened with a vengeance, most strikingly with the publication of *Shostakovich Reconsidered*, by an American musicologist, Allan B. Ho, and an émigré pianist and lawyer, Dmitry Feofanov. The two take up arms against those who have questioned the authenticity of the memoirs, calling *Testimony*, which has appeared in more than a dozen languages, 'one of the most important and influential books in the history of music.'"

Edward Rothstein, *The New York Times*

"This intriguing book tackles one of the hottest musico-political controversies of the past 20 years: a web of alleged deceit involving musical masterworks, top-of-the-range academic reputations and cold-war politics. Was *Testimony*, purportedly the authorised memoir of a great Soviet composer, Dmitri Shostakovich, 'as related to and edited by Solomon Volkov', a fake? ... Some western musicologists accused Mr Volkov of rewriting parts of *Testimony* from press cuttings, of tricking Shostakovich into signing the first page of each chapter and of getting his wife to put him in the front row at Shostakovich's funeral for a photograph. Most seriously, Shostakovich's political disavowals in *Testimony* were challenged. Now the author-editors of *Shostakovich Reconsidered*, a useful collection of essays and documents, have mounted a forensic rebuttal of all these charges against the Volkov book (Dimitry Feofanov is both a musician and a lawyer). Despite the book's relentless courtroom tone, a good case is made out, built on Russian sources."

The Economist

"... the variety of opinions and styles is one of the things that make this thick volume so readable. In their 300-page defence of *Testimony*, Ho and Feofanov adopt something close to a courtroom style, which holds the attention to the end, and makes the case for the memoirs seem virtually unassailable... Read *Shostakovich Reconsidered* by all means; marvel at its breadth of reference, the force of the writing, and ultimately at the power of this music to stir up such intensity of feeling, such aggression."

Stephen Johnson, *Times Literary Supplement*

"It has taken nearly 20 years of close collaboration for Allan B. Ho, also a musicologist, and Dmitry Feofanov, a music-loving bilingual attorney, to accumulate the formidable wealth of data that jampacks the 787 pages of their new book *Shostakovich Reconsidered* (Toccata Press, London; with an 'overture' by Vladimir Ashkenazy). They energetically set out to do to Brown, Fay, & Taruskin what a sledge-hammer customarily does to a tent-

stake. They conclude by issuing not only Shostakovich but also Solomon Volkov - who has for years suffered in dignified silence - an unconditionally clean bill of political, ethical, and moral health... Rarely have musicologists - ordinarily rather mild-mannered denizens of the groves of Academe - come in for such an all-out demolition job as is delivered by this book."

Paul Moor, *American Record Guide*

"*Shostakovich Reconsidered* is a collection of articles, essays and interviews - with the composer's son, Maxim, and Mstislav Rostropovich, among others - compiled, written and edited by Allan B. Ho and Dmitry Feofanov. The main thrust of the book is to prove that Shostakovich did write *Testimony* in collaboration with Solomon Volkov. There are those who believe the memoir to be a fake, and that the composer was a Soviet stooge. It is clear from his chamber music alone that he was nothing of the sort. There is an impassioned Overture from Vladimir Ashkenazy, condemning the doubters who cannot hear anguish when it is hitting them."

Paul Bailey, *The Daily Telegraph*

"Other contenders [as probably the most significant strictly classical music book to have surfaced in this country all year] include *Shostakovich Reconsidered* by Allan B. Ho and Dmitry Feofanov: a polemical book that sets out to prove the validity of the *Testimony*-line on Shostakovich. In other words it marshals the arguments for Shostakovich *not* being a Soviet lackey but a secret dissident whose music censures rather than celebrates the regime he was obliged to serve. In doing so it sells a message that most of us have already bought, although the sell is certainly persuasive for any who haven't."

Michael White, *The Independent*

"Arguments for and against Volkov's authenticity (but overwhelmingly in his favor) have been masterfully assembled in *Shostakovich Reconsidered*, written and edited by Allan B. Ho and Dmitri Feofanov, encompassing the work of many authorities and published in London by the Toccata Press. This book is essential reading for anyone interested in Shostakovich."

Joseph McLellan, *The Washington Post*

"This huge uneven book took me months to read, even omitting the professionally musicological parts. But this is only to say that, to some extent, its themes can be taken seriatim. A fine preface by Vladimir Ashkenazy is followed by an exhaustive demolition of the arguments against Solomon Volkov's "Memoirs of Dmitry Shostakovich." A steam hammer to crush a bug, you may say, but much emerges, as it does later, on the particular horror of the composer's experience. Elsewhere, the book pursues the theme of if, and how, the actual music can be interpreted in terms of rebellion. Hard enough, even with literature; but I found the arguments fascinating."

Robert Conquest, *The Times Literary Supplement*

"Essential, indispensable, profoundly illuminating, magnificent, superbly documented... [*Shostakovich Reconsidered*] is a very important book. While I personally felt from the moment it was published that *Testimony* was true to the Shostakovich I already knew through his music, every aspect of the vituperation to which Solomon Volkov's volume has been subjected in the intervening years has been comprehensively and impartially examined and refuted by Allan Ho's and Dmitry Feofanov's impressive new book. Not only has Volkov been completely exonerated as an honest transcriber; but the Shostakovich whom Shostakovich wished us to know comes more vividly alive than ever through these pages."

Christopher Lyndon-Gee, conductor

"Don't be afraid of picking up this book - even if you know little or nothing about the music of Dmitri Shostakovich. It is very informative and does not fall into the trap, so commonplace in similar 'academic' writings, of either patronising the reader, or indeed of blinding him with musicological science. The arguments are clearly presented and well-documented - *Shostakovich Reconsidered* should prove to be a valuable companion to any music lover's bookshelf."

Jean Mésan, *Musique en Suisse*

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Press comment on Ian MacDonald's [The New Shostakovich](#).

Veniamin Basner with DDS and Irina



"YOU MUST REMEMBER!"

Shostakovich's alleged interrogation by the NKVD in 1937

The most remarkable story recently told in connection with Shostakovich's Fifth Symphony is composer Veniamin Basner's account (received from the composer) of Shostakovich's interrogation by an officer of the NKVD in 1937. This interrogation allegedly took place at the time of the mass-arrest of 80,000 Soviet military, including Shostakovich's protector Marshal Mikhail Tukhachevsky. In the second part of *Soviet Echoes*, Channel 4's 1995 documentary series on Soviet music, Basner (b. 1925) recalled "word for word" the composer's account of this interrogation:

"I was given a [security] pass and went to the [NKVD] office. The investigator got up when I came in and greeted me. He was very friendly and asked me to sit down. He started asking questions about my health, my family, the work I was doing - all kinds of questions. He spoke in a very friendly, welcoming and polite way. Then suddenly he asked me: 'So, tell me. Do you know Tukhachevsky?' I said yes, and he said 'How?'. So then I said: 'At one of my concerts. After the concert, Tukhachevsky came backstage to congratulate me. He said he liked my music, that he was an admirer. He said he'd like to meet me when he came to Leningrad to talk about music. He said it would be a pleasure to discuss music with me. He said if I came to Moscow he'd be happy to see me.'

"'And how often did you meet?' 'Only when Tukhachevsky came here. He usually invited me for dinner.' - 'Who else was at the table?' 'Just his family. His family and relatives.' - 'And what did you discuss?' 'Mostly music.' - 'Not politics?' 'No, we never talked politics. I knew how things were.' - 'Dmitri Dmitryevich, this is very serious. You must *remember*. Today is Saturday. I'll sign your pass and you can go home. But on Monday noon, you must be here. Don't forget now. This is very serious, very important.'

"I understood this was the end. Those two days until Monday were a nightmare. I told my wife I probably wouldn't return. She even prepared a bag for me - the kind prepared for people who were taken away. She put in warm underwear. She knew I wouldn't be back. I went back there at noon [on Monday] and reported to reception. There was a soldier there. I gave him my [internal] passport. I told him I'd been summoned. He looked for my name: first, second, third list. He said: 'Who summoned you?' I said: 'Inspector Zakovsky.' He said: 'He won't be able to see you today. Go home. We'll notify you.' He returned my passport and I went home. It was only later that evening that I learned that the inspector had been arrested."

Summing up, Basner commented: "That's how it was. But because of that we have Shostakovich's Fifth

Symphony - and everything he wrote after that."

Basner's claim that he recalled Shostakovich's narrative "word for word" must be taken with a pinch of salt, if only because the version he gave to Elizabeth Wilson ([*Shostakovich: A Life Remembered*](#), pp. 123-5) departs from it in several details. There, the NKVD inspector's name appears as Zanchevsky; also the passage following the injunction "You must *remember*" (Wilson: "You must shake your memory") includes the words "It cannot be that you were at [Tukhachevsky's] home and that you did not talk about politics. For instance, the plot to assassinate Comrade Stalin? What did you hear about that?". Moreover in the Wilson version, Shostakovich is represented as refusing to answer further questions, which prompts the investigator to add that, by Monday, "you [Shostakovich] will without fail remember everything. You must recall every detail of the discussion regarding the plot against Stalin of which you were a witness." This is an explicit threat that Shostakovich must "inform" on Tukhachevsky or face the consequences. (In other respects, Basner's two versions of the story are more or less identical.)

Basner adds that the non-appearance of this story in *Testimony* leads him to believe that the book is "a falsified account", since Shostakovich is certain to have included it in any complete memoir of his career around this time. There are, though, reasons to doubt this. Firstly, Shostakovich made no mention of this story to his close friend Isaak Glikman. Secondly, he *did* tell it to Krzysztof Meyer, who includes it in his biography of the composer (*Dimitri Chostakovitch*, Fayard 1994, p. 211); however, Meyer gives the name of the interrogating officer as Zakrevsky. It is understood that Solomon Volkov, too, was aware of the story while compiling *Testimony*, but that he did not trust its provenance, partly because the interrogating officer's name changes from version to version. (The Commissioner of State Security in Leningrad for the period in question was one Leonid Zakovsky, a colleague of Zhdanov who survived the fall of Yagoda but not of Yezhov. He directed the Terror in Leningrad throughout 1937 only to be arrested and shot in 1938. Clearly he cannot have been the officer in question.)

Stalin's NKVD plot against Tukhachevsky was carefully planned. Supposing the composer's story to be true, he might have been speculatively detained in late April when orders were going out to obtain "evidence" against Tukhachevsky. By mid-May, though, the mass-arrest of high-ranking officers was in full swing and, under torture, these men were providing all the "corroboration" the State Prosecutor could have needed. By the time it came to arresting Tukhachevsky himself, all niceties were dispensed with. Picked up on 26th or 27th May, he was interrogated by Yezhov in person and tortured severely enough to have "confessed" after only two days. In the aftermath of his closed trial and summary execution, one of his sisters and both his brothers were also shot. Three more sisters, two former wives, and his young daughter were sent to the camps. His wife Nina went mad. Even Tukhachevsky's mother was done away with. If Shostakovich was directly entangled with this very nasty business in the way his interrogation story suggests, he was lucky to escape with his life, let alone to finish the Fifth Symphony.

Yet there are reasons to doubt his story. Tales like it (the feared arrest averted by the arrest of the interrogator) were part of Soviet folklore. This was not because such things didn't happen; on the contrary, they often did. However, it seems extremely unlikely that a figure as prominent as Shostakovich could have been arrested on the sole initiative of an NKVD officer. With a high-profile person, such a thing would have been sanctioned and monitored at the highest level. For this reason, it is hard to see why such an operation would be aborted (a) so rapidly and (b) by arresting the officer charged with pursuing the interrogation. (There was a violent purge of the Communist Party in Leningrad in May 1937 and the local NKVD would have needed all the interrogators it could keep on its staff. The Terror only turned on the NKVD itself in a major way in 1938.)

If Shostakovich's story of his interrogation is not to be taken at face value, nor is it to be dismissed as a wanton fiction. Several of his relatives and many of his colleagues were "purged" during this period. In 1936, his former companion Elena Konstantinovskaya and a Shostakovich family friend, the novelist Galina Serebryakova, were arrested. In 1937, his mother-in-law Sofia Varzar, brother-in-law Vsevolod Frederiks, and uncle Maxim Kostrikin were arrested, and his sister Maria exiled to Frunze. Soon after Tukhachevsky was eliminated, the musicologist Nikolai Zhilyayev was arrested and executed. During 1938, Boris Kornilov, author of words to "Song of the Meeting" from *Counterplan*, was arrested and later done away with, as was Adrian Piotrovsky, author of *Rule Britannia* and librettist of *The Limpid Stream*. In 1939, Meyerhold was arrested, tortured, and executed.

An intensely sensitive man, Shostakovich may have so feared his imminent demise that he lost his ability to discriminate between what happened in fact and what only occurred in his tormented imagination. (This, again, was a common syndrome under the Terror.) Despite his presumably terrible fear after Tukhachevsky's arrest - a time when, as Maxim assures us, the composer sat up at night with a suitcase waiting for the NKVD to come for him - he still managed to go on composing the symphony: specifically, the Largo and the Finale. (According to Grigori Fried, Shostakovich - on his way back to Leningrad from a journey to the south - brought the first two movements to Zhilyayev's communal flat in Moscow soon after finishing them. Zhilyayev thought what he had seen "quite wonderful". If Shostakovich composed the Largo in June after Tukhachevsky's death, Zhilyayev, himself arrested around this time, could have seen no more of the score.)

Of the Largo, Israel Nestyev, often allied with Shostakovich's enemies in the Composers' Union, has recently said: "Even now I perceive this music as a requiem for the millions of innocent victims of Stalin's regime." He also acknowledges Shostakovich's unique and heroic achievement: "Not a single other artist - no painter, dramatist, or film-maker - could think of using their art as a means of expressing protest against Stalin's Terror. Only instrumental music was able to express the terrible truth of that time." The violist Fyodor Druzhinin of the Beethoven Quartet adds (with reference to the Fifth Symphony): "People who lived in Shostakovich's epoch have no need to dig in the archives or to marvel at the evidence of repressions and executions and murders. It is all there in his music."

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Interview with *DSCH*

Ian MacDonald speaks (Summer 1998).

This is a shortened version of an interview which formerly appeared at the DSCH site.

It's ten years since *The New Shostakovich* was published. What are your thoughts?

I hope we're all grown-up enough now to see things clearly for what they are. Of course, there'll always be diehards who refuse to face the truth and prefer their prejudice to the *actualité* about Shostakovich. The types who complain about "counter-intuitive" concepts but know nothing and won't educate themselves. The ones who invoke Shostakovich's alleged reverence for revolutionary myth and blather about Marxist principles as if they knew the faintest thing about them. Meanwhile the rest of us can get on with the fascinating task of documenting the "new" Shostakovich in detail. One thing we must start on is a Shostakovich Concordance: an index-database of all the musical cross-references, quotations, parodies, codes, and recurrent motifs--further cross-referencing that to the work of his contemporaries, such as Vainberg, and to Soviet history. That'll take another decade, as will the definitive biography.

Are you a candidate for that?

Well, I pointed out quite a few musical cross-references in *The New Shostakovich* which no one had noticed before and no one

has looked at since. There are more like that. But as for a definitive biography, that's a committee job. There are so many specialisations involved. Shostakovich's work emerged from probably the most eventful period of history any composer ever had the misfortune to live through. The Chinese curse: "May you live in interesting times." He was involved in so many things, knew so many people from different occupational backgrounds, lived in a vast society with a huge historical *dramatis personae*. It's an epic, it really is. *The New Shostakovich* is just a preliminary sketch, although it's still the only game in town in the sense of both setting up a framework and getting in deep. Of course, some will balk at that statement, but the fact is that they really don't know what it is I'm claiming. I'd like to read you a couple of sentences from a review of *The New Shostakovich* by the emigré scholar Andrei Navrozov in July 1990: "Ian MacDonald is reckless enough to append a postscript to his book entitled 'Stalinism and *Nineteen Eighty-four*'. Such prodigality is evidence of total immersion in the subject, and without it any study of the artist's life under totalitarianism is hopelessly superficial and ultimately false. That *The New Shostakovich* is the best biography of the composer available is less important than the fact that Mr MacDonald has broken new ground by fusing biography with political analysis." That's an expert on Soviet culture speaking. What he's essentially saying is what Ashkenazy says in the "Overture" to *Shostakovich Reconsidered*: that just rushing in and learning a line of historical facts won't give you a reliable handle on the subject. You need to get down into it: live with it. I've often said that no one who hasn't read *The Gulag Archipelago* should write about Shostakovich, but even that's just a start. One can tell from the things even interested people say that they're on the surface of the subject, on

the outside. To get a truly reliable line on his world, you have to really sink into it. You can't just read a couple of history books, that only gives the framework. You need to feel you're almost living in that world, to know it that intricately. So I'd now add that no one who hasn't read Nadezhda Mandelstam's books, too, and followed up all the clues and cross-references they contain, can truly claim to be "immersed" in this subject in the way that Navrozov and Ashkenazy urge.--And that really is crucial to understanding the tiniest thing about it. In short, the road to the definitive Shostakovich biography is as deep as it's broad and long.

But how can ordinary listeners be expected to cope with that depth of research?

I'm not talking about ordinary listeners. I'm talking about people who plan to write about Shostakovich--people who want to interpret Shostakovich for the rest of us. Though, of course, ordinary listeners can follow that road, too, if they wish. I did.

You've attacked Laurel Fay for her historical claims about *From Jewish Folk Poetry*, yet, in *The New Shostakovich*, you accepted her claims about *Testimony*--claims which Allan Ho and Dmitry Feofanov have since vigorously contested.

Someone else once put the same point to me. "Why," they asked me, "didn't you put a team of researchers onto this and solve the question before you wrote your book?" The answer is that I had a short deadline and an advance so tiny that I couldn't afford to stop doing journalism and other work while I was writing the book, let alone hire anyone else to work for me. In fact, I did my own picture research, paid the picture fees, and did the layout

and captions for the book's picture section at the publisher. Plus I paid out of my own pocket for permissions to quote published materials. The book was a labour of love done in my spare time, often at weekends between sessions in a recording studio. It took Allan and Dmitry six years to research and compile their case against Fay. From commissioning to return of final proofs, my book took just eighteen months. I trust that answers the question.

How much have you co-operated with Solomon Volkov?

If you mean "connived" with, not at all. I didn't speak to him until after my book was published, and I can tell you he was not best pleased with my acceptance of Fay's "exposé". If you mean how much have I "communicated" with him, I can tell you that we write to each other a couple of times a year and have had two or three phone conversations. Solomon agrees with some parts of what I write, disagrees with other parts. The trouble is, he never tells me which is which! He's very cynical about the West's naivety towards the USSR. He even calls me "naive" from time to time. He's pretty tough--but he's had to be. By the way, there's lots more he knows concerning Shostakovich that isn't in *Testimony*, including things about certain stories in the book. One, in particular, is quite shocking, but I'm not going to tell you, so don't ask.

Talking of cryptic references, who is D. S. Korotchenko, the dedicatee of the piece you wrote with Dmitry Feofanov about anti-communism in the Glikman letters?

Look at the end of the second list of Soviet *apparatchiki* in the Odessa letter. Faceless yes-men like D. S. Korotchenko came and went regularly in the Soviet government, sometimes

disappearing for reasons of state beyond the compass of ordinary mortals to comprehend, i.e., they were dragged off and shot. Korotchenko was promoted to the Politburo while Shostakovich was in Odessa, writing to Glikman. It's a typical touch of Shostakovichian verisimilitude. See? Universal because specific. [Laughs.]

How closely did you work with Ho and Feofanov on *Shostakovich Reconsidered*?

I helped. It's their book. Long, isn't it? Here and there, though, there are places that are a bit short. It would be very valuable to have the comrades' opinion on this.

Joking aside, are you pleased with it?

It does the job. Flattens the anti-revisionists. Drives a tank through Fay's "scholarship", exposes Taruskin for the blustering fraud he is, sticks up for the man they travesty. Yes, it worked out well. Hats off to Martin Anderson for rescuing it.

Didn't the original publisher bail out?

Bottled out. As did every other publisher Allan and Dmitry tried it on. Only Martin had the balls. He was a vital member of the team and I'm sure we're all grateful for his editorial tolerance and easygoing attitude. Just kidding.

The book extensively attacks academics like Richard Taruskin, Laurel Fay, Malcolm Hamrick Brown, Christopher Norris, David Fanning, and so forth, in connection with *Testimony*. And you personally have been

attacking them for years in DSCH. Why? Surely the music is more important than pursuing these *ad hominem* tiffs?

Well, for a start they've attacked me extensively and continue to do so--and, what's more, often in very insulting *ad hominem* terms, if we must use that weaseling academic formula, which seems to be trundled out like a piece of stage scenery for them to hide behind whenever their own personal attacks get turned back at them. The situation is that, in my book, I threw down a gauntlet to the Western academic community by proposing a paradigm-shift in Shostakovich studies. They came back at me, as they're entitled to, and we've been at it ever since. It's not up to me to call a halt. Real issues are involved--and, besides, the paradigm-shift hasn't gone through yet for the simple reason that the other side is holding it back. In any case, others are now involved on "my" side of the debate, most notably Allan and Dmitry. And, of course, Solomon Volkov is still around and may yet come out and join in the fight. When perspectives in any given subject are shifting like this, individual viewpoints have to be voiced and voiced clearly--which usually means robustly. I don't mind Richard Taruskin calling me a Stalinist or a McCarthyite. It makes me laugh. He says more about himself there than about me. But ultimately neither of us matters. Only the truth matters, and the truth in this case logically entails a paradigm-shift.

Of course, the debate may never be resolved.

It's already resolved, actually. It's mainly a question of people waking up to that.

Assuming that's true, how long do you expect this process to

take?

Another ten years at least. After all, at the moment most folk in the West who are interested in this subject still don't understand the issues. Even, or rather *especially*, the leading academic anti-revisionists don't understand the issues. And they're so egoistically committed to their positions that they'll never try to learn more about these issues, just go on defensively reiterating their prejudices. It'll take a whole new generation of musicologists to grow up and replace them before the new paradigm is finally established. That's always the way it is in situations like this, even in the hard sciences. The old guard can't adapt but won't abdicate, so much of the changeover process amounts to simply waiting for them to die out. The rest, though, consists of exposing the indefensibility of their position in order to hasten things through. This is what I do, and what Allan and Dmitry have done in their work on *Testimony*.

Isn't it arrogant to claim that your opponents don't understand the issues?

This affair entails historical facts. We've shown, over and over again, that the other side doesn't know the facts. But that's just the beginning. Even when they do know the facts, they're unable to interpret them correctly because they're unfamiliar with the background. Worse, some of the more self-admiring among them are under a delusion that, on the contrary, they *are* familiar with the background, which makes their pronouncements about it even more pernicious.

Your conviction about the importance of the Stalinist background isn't shared by many Shostakovich fans, who

maintain that the music should speak for itself.

They don't understand the background either--but there's no reason to expect them to, so there's no blame. As for whether music should "speak for itself", as they say, that's another issue. But I want to go back to the academic anti-revisionists, who *do* have a responsibility to know the facts. When I think of these people, I get a Chagall-like image of men and women floating dreamily about, a few feet off the ground, in effect talking in their sleep. Though they're supposed to be experts in their subject, which one would have thought entailed being in touch with the realities of Soviet history and cultural life, they don't grasp the most basic things about it. Look at their assumptions. Laurel Fay thinks *Pravda* will tell her the truth about Stalin's policies on the Soviet nationalities. Eric Roseberry imagines that Shostakovich could have come out at the première of the Fifth Symphony and told his audience it contained a hidden agenda. They're intelligent people, but they're living in cloud cuckoo land. Unlike the usual figures in Chagall pictures, their feet aren't off the ground because they're dreaming but--how shall I put this?--because they're held up in mid-air by bunches of faded balloons they're clinging to. These are their tired illusions about the USSR. Until those illusions are punctured, they'll never get down to earth--and without getting down to earth they'll never begin to understand what Shostakovich and others like him had to live through. The only way to puncture those illusions is to set about disillusioning oneself, educating oneself--by reading, reflecting, talking to people who actually know something about it. In *The New Shostakovich*, I quote George Jonas's preface to Sandor Kopacsi's account of the Hungarian Uprising where he says that it's "next to fraudulent" to hold any opinions about the

nature of the Soviet system without knowing certain facts--and that this knowledge can either be acquired through first-hand experience or, less painfully, by reading a dozen or so seminal books. That happens to be true and it's a pity that those who take so angrily against *The New Shostakovich* were unable to focus sufficiently on what it says to absorb that passage, among many other similar passages.

How can you be so sure your opponents haven't read these seminal books?

It's manifestly obvious they haven't. Taruskin alludes to a few of these titles in his usual dismissive way, but he clearly hasn't read any of them. If he had, his general tone would be very different--more chastened, more circumspect--and his grasp of the facts would be far tighter. And he'd never do anything as flagrantly daft as claim that revisionism is "as destructive of values" as Stalinism--which, among other things, is what he says in Fanning's *Shostakovich Studies*. That really is a give-away.

That's a very sweeping judgement, surely? Taruskin is an established authority.

Not on everything. Perhaps he's infallible on Glinka, Mussorgsky, and Stravinsky--I wouldn't know. But I do know about the Soviet context and take it from me: he doesn't. But don't take my word for it if you think I'm biased. Vladimir Ashkenazy not only thinks the anti-revisionists are ignorant about the Soviet background, but actually uses the phrase "agents of influence of the USSR". Solomon Volkov says the same about them--thinks they're more or less puppets of the KGB. Rodion Shchedrin told Martin Anderson [the publisher of

Shostakovich Reconsidered] that the anti-revisionists "know nothing" about the Soviet background. I corresponded with Robert Conquest about this sort of Western academic ignorance. His exact words were: "idiocy and misrepresentation". Oh and he gave *Shostakovich Reconsidered* the thumbs-up: "I never doubted that *Testimony* was authentic." If you want an "established authority", who better than Robert Conquest? And Harold Shukman, head of the Russian and East European Centre in Oxford, was amazed at Laurel Fay's article on *From Jewish Folk Poetry*. It may be hard to accept, but it's true. The anti-revisionists just don't know. They simply make it up as they potter along.

But what difference does it make?

The obvious example is the Fifth Symphony. If you don't know anything about what was going on outside the concert hall in the USSR while it was being written--for example, Shaporina's diary--you won't have the option of deciding whether that background relates in some way to the music. While reading the Shostakovich literature in preparation for my book, I found not one statement that 1937, when the Fifth was written, was also the peak of the Great Terror.--Total silence about it. In fact, there was almost no correlation between Shostakovich's output and the Soviet background in anything published in English about him, either in book form or in reviews. Mostly it was just the usual tosh about him being "bewildered" at the 1948 congress--that was about it. Now if, on the other hand, you *do* know something about what was going on outside the concert hall at any given time, you gain all sorts of perceptions about the music. For instance, I saw that the Eighth Quartet was about Shostakovich

being forced to become a communist. That was confirmed after my book came out. And there are other comparable "test-cases" in *The New Shostakovich*--the guess about the Twelfth Symphony, for instance. What sort of difference does it make? *That sort.*

If you had to defend *The New Shostakovich*, what would you pick out about it?

Well, it was the first book to set Shostakovich systematically in Soviet context. The historical narrative which Elizabeth Wilson uses to link her witnesses' testimonies in *Shostakovich: A Life Remembered* is quite precisely prefigured in my book. If she worked that out without reading *The New Shostakovich*--and she told Allan Ho she hasn't--then that makes our concurrence on this narrative impressive. *The New Shostakovich*, though, goes a lot further than her in characterising the context and suggesting an intellectual apparatus for assessing it. That stuff was missed by hostile reviewers and was consequently overlooked even by friendly readers. Contemporary writers on Shostakovich would save themselves a lot of unnecessary blundering about if they read those passages with a little more care. And there are still swathes of factual material which no one else has taken on board, let alone looked at in a different way--the stuff about the Cultural Revolution in Chapter 2, for instance. But the most significant new thing *The New Shostakovich* did was to propose that Shostakovich's musical language, rather than representing his "traits" or nervous habits, is actually quite calculated and purposive: that *intention* has to be taken into consideration here, that his apparent simplicities and naiveties and crudities have to be heard as various sorts of assumed "tones of voice"--and that

his more complex music is a guarantee of the controlled intelligence this would call for. This argument had to be set within a sustained case for his moral anti-communism, which was the final point of it all: the motive driving this very knowing, very calculated musical expression. And that in turn required provisionally vindicating *Testimony*. QED.

You say in *The New Shostakovich* that "*Testimony* is a realistic picture of Dmitri Shostakovich--it just isn't a genuine one". Do you stand by that?

No. Allan [Ho] and Dmitry [Feofanov] have blown that one to smithereens.

You accept their verdict that *Testimony* is authentic?

They've destroyed Fay's case against it. Many people have seen the manuscript. Nina Bouis confirms there's nothing suspect about it in terms of different typefaces. It's all one source--not a mixture of old pages and new ones. And Shostakovich signed it. As Galina says, he would never have signed anything that big without reading it.

You're convinced about their argument on the question of the signed pages?

Well, think it through. Suppose Volkov had wanted to cheat, he could have typed up copies of the eight articles, taken them to Shostakovich, and said "These are to be anthologised, I've retyped them, please check them and initial them". Shostakovich says "OK, I sign anything put in front of me, here's my signature". Leave aside what Irina and Tishchenko say about

Volkov never being close to Shostakovich. Perhaps he didn't have to be close to Shostakovich to get away with it--just some guy from *Sovetskaya Muzyka* who Shostakovich wanted to get out of his hair. Leave aside Tishchenko's further claim that Shostakovich was so suspicious of Volkov that he asked him [Tishchenko] to be present at their meeting, their "one" meeting. Perhaps Shostakovich couldn't see, even though he suspected something, that there was an ulterior motive behind this guy asking him to sign these articles. It's stretching it to breaking point, but let's just suppose Shostakovich was suspicious yet also trusting enough to believe the cunning Volkov. Volkov goes away with the signed pages he needs, throws away the unsigned pages, and types in hundreds of pages he makes up himself. Meanwhile he's telling Drubachevskaya and Dubinsky and Lubotsky and Korev that he's interviewing Shostakovich who's "telling all". This is to lend an air of verisimilitude to his cunning forgery. Leave aside the risk of exposure this would entail--that, at any minute, Shostakovich might hear of this and say "What? This is a lie, Volkov must be faking my memoirs!" After all Volkov only has to keep this fiction going for four or five years. Leave aside, too, that Irina knew of the work on the memoirs, as she told VAAP in 1978. Perhaps she heard the story going around and she believed it, but luckily never asked her husband about it, thus alerting him to the forgery. Wildly unlikely? Leave it aside. Even leave aside Litvinova's story that Shostakovich told her that this young Leningrad musicologist was recording his memoirs. Perhaps she's in Volkov's pay--part of the plot. What I want to know is where Volkov got the signatures on the two signed pages that weren't from articles. In particular the one about the "mountains of corpses". Leave aside that it was, as Ho and Feofanov point out, too inflammatory to have escaped the

Soviet censor. Where did Volkov get it? Shostakovich wrote "Read" on it. Did he sign it without looking at it? Well, perhaps he did--but what an insane risk Volkov must have run at that moment. What if Shostakovich had glanced at that first sentence: "These are not memoirs about myself." "Memoirs? Myself? What the hell is this, Mr Volkov?" I mean, it's like a scene from a Hitchcock thriller, isn't it? The suspense! If Solomon Volkov pulled that off, he deserves an Oscar, let alone the Nobel Prize for forgery. If, on the other hand, Shostakovich was engaged with Volkov specifically on a memoir project--and how else can one explain the signed frontispiece of *Testimony*?--then he would have read everything very carefully indeed before signing it, including the page with the "mountains of corpses". Here it is: "Others will write about us. And naturally they'll lie through their teeth--but that's their business. One must speak the truth about the past or not at all. It's very hard to reminisce and it's worth doing only in the name of truth. Looking back, I see nothing but ruins, only mountains of corpses. And I do not wish to build new Potemkin villages on those ruins. Let's try to tell only the truth." He must have read that. It's radical stuff. In fact, it's exactly the sort of opening page one would expect for a radical book like *Testimony*--not for a few anodyne recollections of some famous people he'd once known, conveyed to a man he scarcely knew over the course of a couple of interviews.--And he signed it.

So you'll change what you originally wrote if you revise *The New Shostakovich*?

I say as much in *Shostakovich Reconsidered*. Yes, I will.

Change it to what?

Something similar to what I say in *Shostakovich Reconsidered*. I'll try to revise *The New Shostakovich* soon. My publisher, Cape, wants it but it needs a lot of updating.

What about the disputed musical codes--the two-versus-three stuff and so on?

I'll supply an annexe of musical examples this time. Stiffen it up. Make it clearer.

You've been severely criticised for all that.

Some say those codes are too simple. But they'd have to be in order to be audible to a lay audience. We know Shostakovich was no snob, wanted to reach ordinary people, be understood by them. Whenever possible, he preferred foreign language recitals of his vocal music to be done in translation so people could get it viscerally rather than sit there with their heads buried in the score or a lyric sheet. In any case, such very simple material *was* used in just this way by Soviet composers. Alexander Ivashkin says as much. I quote: "Symbolism of the simplest kind... An interval, sound, or rhythm became a symbol which the listener could identify." Not that different from Beethoven, is it? And then other critics say my way of talking about the music is too detailed. "Absurdly detailed", one or two have said. But that's silly for two reasons. First, musicologists habitually discuss music in even finer detail, the only difference being that their detail is usually purely formal, while mine includes meaning. All they're really saying is that they're used to listening to music as form rather than as meaning. It's never occurred to them to listen for meaning at that level of intensity because they've been

educated to regard what they vaguely refer to as the "extra-musical" in very generalised terms--this movement is sombre in mood, this theme is the hero, and so on. Plus, of course, they accept all this passively from writers just like them. So meaning, for them, has to be advertised on the packet. If the composer didn't actually spell out the programme, there's no programme--that sort of thing.

And the second reason?

The second reason is that so many composers *have* written music with such highly detailed meaning. Most 20th century ballet scores, for example. Strauss's tone poems. Almost all of opera... I gather a leading St Petersburg musicologist called Rein Laul has written about the middle symphonies in a way quite similar to mine. I've yet to read this, but Dmitry [Feofanov] told me Solomon [Volkov] says "It's just like Ian!" See, Shostakovich wanted to get to his listeners directly. From the heart to the heart, as Beethoven said--who, please note, called himself a tone-poet. As Shostakovich puts it in *Testimony*: "So what if I inform you that in my Eighth Symphony, in the fourth movement, in the fourth variation, in measures four through seven, the theme is harmonized with seven descending minor triads? Who cares?" What he means is that, yes, he's in total technical control, but it's the meaning that matters.

Going back to *The New Shostakovich*, what about the musical judgements that annoyed some readers--the section on the Preludes and Fugues, for example?

I'll change what I wrote about Opus 87. That was the only thing I regretted about the book at the time--its miserly verdict on the

Preludes and Fugues. The galling thing was that I'd been quite possessively into those pieces since 1980, having then bought Nikolayeva's 1962 set on Melodiya, the best of her three versions. And just after *The New Shostakovich* appeared, her third version, the one on Hyperion, came out and all these critics, who in my view knew nothing about Shostakovich, went ape about it when, in fact, it was relatively disappointing as a performance and rather poorly recorded. If they'd known about Nikolayeva's 1962 version, or even the second one she did in 1987, they wouldn't have gone over the top like that. But, of course, they didn't know about those recordings and thought the Hyperion set was the first time she'd ever done them all together. And that meant, of course, that they'd probably never heard Opus 87 before, so those rave reviews were as much for the music as for the playing. They discovered the Preludes and Fugues as a complete work through that issue. And there was I, who'd been listening to the complete cycle for ten years by then, saying in *The New Shostakovich* that it wasn't that great. Very annoying.

So why did you say that?

I had a sort of deal with myself to be authentic: to say what I thought at the time of writing. I was unwell while doing the book and was afraid I'd die before I finished it. You have to remember, too, that the USSR was still firmly in place then, so for all I knew, if I didn't weigh in on the side of *Testimony* no one else would and things would never change in terms of the way Westerners heard Shostakovich. So I was writing under a lot of personal pressure, worried every day that I wouldn't be there the next day to go on with it and that my mission wouldn't be accomplished. This put me into a very "existential" frame of

mind and I decided I had to be true to my feelings about each piece of music as I reviewed it when it came to writing about it... and I guess I wasn't feeling too bright when it came to reviewing Opus 87. At any rate, it evidently didn't seem great to me that day, so that's what I said. Big mistake. There you go--how books get written. Or how books get written under pressure.

Was that pressure mainly intellectual or emotional? Were you out to prove a point or did you feel a need to say what you experienced in the music?

Both. Intellectually, I knew for certain that almost everything being written or said about Shostakovich during the late 1980s was hideously wrong. In particular, the disdainfully dismissive attitude to *Testimony* which was fashionable then. I knew someone had to weigh in and expose the twits who were coming out with this crap, and eventually I realised it would have to be me, since no one else seemed to have the combined interest in the music and the historical context. But the pressure was also emotional. Once I started to get to grips with what Shostakovich was really about--which was in 1978-9, after reading *The Gulag Archipelago* and before I'd even heard of *Testimony*--I began to find much of his music enormously upsetting. Before then, when I'd been listening only to the surface of the music without realising it, I'd been moved and thrilled by it, but never devastated, never broken up by it. Once the context began to come into focus behind the surface, I was regularly in tears listening to Shostakovich. I remember once being very distraught after a great performance of the Fourth Symphony at the Festival Hall--yet the audience was full of appalled Mozartians muttering "What *is* this awful chaotic racket?" Total incomprehension.

They were on the outside, I was on the inside. I hope there are more "insiders" in the West nowadays. Because we *should* be shaken up by a piece like the Fourth Symphony, or we aren't truly alive.

How do you respond to anti-revisionist views of works like the Fourth Symphony?

Well, most anti-revisionists don't seem to feel that strongly about Shostakovich's music. In fact, some of them--Fay, Taruskin--actually seem to dislike it. Others, though, are, I'm sure, thrilled and moved by it in their private way. But not shattered by it, not *changed* by it. Not that I can detect, anyway.

You seem to have a chip on your shoulder about academics.

Not in the least. Most of the ones I know are genial types and interesting company. Some are very nice people indeed--fully-rounded human beings who just happen to spend their lives on campus, which is to say not quite in the real world. But there are also lots of emotionally stunted academics, extremely clever people who never really grew up--just went from being coddled children to being coddled professors, rarely if ever stepping outside some form of educational institution. And it's that sort that becomes the classic "gowned fool", as Norman Lebrecht recently referred to them vis-à-vis *Shostakovich Reconsidered*--the high-table prattler who thinks it vulgar to commit to a definite judgement. It reminds me of one of Ronald Searle's schoolmaster caricatures in *Down With Skool!* This character's chortling: "And when I asked him the supine stem of confiteor the fool didn't know!" Laughing aside, one might point out that it's one thing to know the supine stem of confiteor or, say, to be

equipped to apply Schenkerian analytical marks to an orchestral score, but it's an entirely different matter to know how a police state works. The latter sort of knowledge depends at least as much on knowing life on the streets as of knowing certain books in the college library. What's more, there's a big difference between being cautious or sceptical because there's good reason to be, and being cautious or sceptical because you don't actually know much about a particular aspect of a subject.

You mean the academic reluctance to concede anything definite about Shostakovich beyond the music--

Beyond the score, I'd say. The music is more than the score.

OK, beyond the score. You're saying this reluctance is glorified incomprehension?

Precisely. But the strange thing is how *incautious* academic musicologists can be in venturing opinions on contextual issues-- as if history can be understood in a glance and that their superficial views on it are somehow valid and to be taken seriously. Fay and Taruskin are obvious examples. Norris is another one, with his absolutely naive assertion that if Russia hadn't succumbed to the Bolsheviks, it would have reverted to a "minimally liberalised Tsarist autocracy". How can you write on the "politics of culture" if you don't know any political history? It's unreal, a lot of what goes on in academia. A game--and a jealous, mean-minded game at that. It's all about reputations and tenures and getting published and how many monographs one has on one's curriculum vitae. Not about truth.

Do you hate Taruskin?

Give me a break. I don't even hate Stalin, who was a mass-murdering sadist. Why waste one's spirit on hatred? If Taruskin turned round tomorrow and said "Okay, I admit it, I was wrong about Shostakovich, let's forget what I've said", I'd be the first to shake his hand. As I say, neither he nor I, nor any of the rest of us bickering here in the echo of Shostakovich's life, ultimately matter a damn. Only the truth matters. Hating people must be very tiring, very hard to keep up. Life's hard enough as it is.

So you don't write Taruskin off entirely? He could still redeem himself?

Well, I'm no great believer in porcine aviation, if that's what you're asking. But, in theory, yes. If he could ever come to distinguish the truth, let alone tell it, he's got all the technical qualifications. But that's not nearly enough. After all, he's hardly the world's most sympathetic man and you do need some insight, some delicacy, in this subject.--And, of course, some historical comprehension, some sort of basic feel for the background. For instance, David Fanning's always writing about Shostakovich's supposed iconoclastic delight in sabotaging musical conventions--sending things up, "circumventing Soviet taboos", and so on--in his music of the late Twenties and early Thirties. "Delight" is a word Fanning keeps returning to, as if Shostakovich never stopped laughing in those days. In fact, that time--the Soviet Cultural Revolution--was horribly oppressive and sinister. A lot of Shostakovich's works were banned then. Russian music was in deep crisis. Boris Pilnyak told Victor Serge around 1930 that there wasn't single thinking adult in the country who hadn't considered that he might get shot. I think we can call Shostakovich a thinking adult. See, it's that sort of thing--

the seizing on contingent details or foreground elements at the expense of any grasp of the deeper background--that compromises everything the anti-revisionists write when they leave off talking purely about the scores. How can they change that? By stopping and doing the research. Yet even if they decided to do it, and I don't believe they will, it'll take them years, mainly because it's an extremely slippery subject. But without that research, all their "background" will be shallow, naive, or just plain wrong. They're in a serious fix.

So you think it's black and white--there's absolutely nothing of value the anti-revisionists can tell us about Shostakovich?

They can tell us things of value and have done so--but chiefly by accident, or when they're off their hobbyhorses about *Testimony*, or are temporarily conceding that Shostakovich might have had a bit of trouble with the Soviet authorities now and then. As for the rest, every tiny decision they make about how to "read" this bar or that motif is completely perverted and compromised by their ignorance of the context. I might add that, so far as I know, there are no anti-revisionists in mainland Europe. I guess they understand enough about living under totalitarianism to grasp the truth of the music. German musicology includes many academics who lived in the former DDR. Anti-revisionism is an Anglo-American problem--a problem of political naivety.

But elsewhere you've said that the issue is moral not political.

I mean that Anglo-American musicologists never lived in a politically repressive society, and that's the difference between them and their colleagues in continental Europe. In effect, they don't have the background to understand the background. But

then many of them can't even think straight. Intellectual standards in academia are starting to disintegrate quite badly if Taruskin's peers can't discern the glaring logical inconsistencies in his writings on Shostakovich, let alone the misinterpretations and the general postmodern pretentiousness. They all talk like that now, of course.

You can't accuse Laurel Fay of that.

True. When she's operating as a nose-to-the-grindstone scholar, as in her piece on *Lady Macbeth in Shostakovich Studies*, she's thoroughly efficient, even if the results are innately dull. Away from the drudgery, though, she's hopelessly unreliable--and there she has lots in common with Taruskin, in that they're both effectively deaf. They can read the music, but they can't hear it.

Surely there's room for different ways of hearing the music?

That doesn't stop some of them being *wrong*. Fay's view of Shostakovich as a man is fundamentally wrong. And ultimately that must derive from the way she hears, or rather doesn't hear, the music. She's the classic "stupid Shostakovich" theorist. She hears the "crudity" as straightforward crudity. No irony--or at least nowhere near the amount of irony that's actually there in the music. Which is why, I suppose, she refuses to take any notice of what Shostakovich's friends say about him. Were they to tell her--as they almost all would--that Shostakovich was just about the most ironic man they ever met, it would blow her theory of him. She wouldn't be able to write articles claiming he was so stupid that he didn't notice official Soviet anti-semitism before November 1948, even though most of his close friends were Jewish and he had some of the best-placed politico-cultural

contacts of anyone in the USSR.

Has Fay responded to your criticisms of her piece on *From Jewish Folk Poetry*?

No, and I can't see how she can. Look, I respect her "up close" scholarship. She does the work, even though her judgements about it are often skewed. What she has to understand is that, without a knowledge of the background which she plainly lacks, she has no right to move from the clerical level to making general deductions about Shostakovich and his relationship with the Soviet state. As that piece demonstrates, she doesn't have a clue beyond the immediate detail. There's no way to avoid this, it's a matter of record. All that matters now is that she's honest enough to take it on board. Is she? I doubt it. Her prejudices are too deeply rooted. She really does think Shostakovich was dumb--it's the only way to justify what she's written about him. So she spins things to fit. In her *Lady Macbeth* piece, she quotes Shostakovich from a letter he wrote to Balanchivadze in 1936: "I am slow-witted and very honest in my work." Certainly sounds dumb, doesn't it? But what Shostakovich wrote is: "Ya ved' tiazhelodum i ochen' chesten v svoem tvorchestve". Literally: "I'm a ponderous thinker and very honest in my art." It's a paraphrase of his motto "Thinking slowly, writing fast". In other words, he's concerned with the integrity--interesting word--of his music. But, given the Soviet context, where one often had to lie in order to survive, "honest" isn't a sharp enough translation. "Scrupulous" or "conscientious" would be more faithful to the sense. He means he wants his music to be completely under his control in terms not only of technique but also of meaning. Which is why the process of composition, which he mostly

carried out in his head, was a slow, or "ponderous", one... followed by an unusually rapid process of simply writing it down, or, in effect, transcribing it. But Fay wants him to be a bewildered blunderer, so she makes him say he's "slow-witted and very honest"--insinuating "dumb and guileless". This is straightforward misrepresentation and it just won't wash. If we couldn't already tell this from Shostakovich's music, let alone from *Testimony*, we have all those witnesses in Elizabeth Wilson's book assuring us how extremely intelligent he was. It beats me why Wilson is so impressed by Fay. Like Taruskin, Fay goes out of her way to treat *Shostakovich: A Life Remembered* as if it doesn't exist.

But Fay's done a great deal of primary research of her own. It's a fair presumption that she must have good reasons for making these judgements about Shostakovich.

Presumably she imagines that the views of Shostakovich's friends are politically distorted--that they've all lied about him in order to make him retrospectively into something he wasn't. I guess that's Taruskin's justification, too. But even allowing for the social acceptability of lying in Russian culture, it's still a mad theory. It would also have to apply across the board to all other Soviet artists whose friends have said similar things of them--and there are stacks of these. In any other circumstance, Fay and Taruskin would be obliged to justify such a far-fetched assumption by proving their case witness by witness. But neither of them--and [Malcolm Hamrick] Brown's another--have ever offered such a justification. What's all the more outlandish in Fay's case is that she quite explicitly refuses to allow her preconception of Shostakovich to be affected by contrary

evidence. She's actually said, of Shostakovich's friends, that she doesn't want "to become compromised by having them tell me their stories and then being obliged somehow to retell them". Not only does she take no notice of those who actually knew Shostakovich, but she won't condescend to tell us why she regards herself as more reliable than them. A unique biographical method, so far as I know.

Where does she say this?

AMS national meeting, 1995. The cite's given in *Shostakovich Reconsidered*. And her attitude to *Testimony* is almost pathological. She calls it "the deathbed memoirs of a sick and embittered old man which poses only a very slight impediment, really nothing more than a nuisance". An "impediment" to what? To her prejudices about Shostakovich. She actually regards *Testimony* as an ignorable minor inconvenience to her own, hopelessly misconceived, picture of Shostakovich.--Which begs the question: who the hell does she think she is? I suppose we could ask her friends.--Fay thinks Shostakovich was an innocent abroad, stumbling into situations he had no reason to anticipate and, in any case, lacked the brain-power to grasp--the "stupid Shostakovich". But he wasn't stupid and he wasn't innocent. The 1936 affair may have been a local shock to him--to be personally denounced in *Pravda* would have shaken anyone--but that doesn't mean he was surprised in a more general way. We know that Tukhachevsky wasn't surprised when they came for him in 1937. He knew what was going on--what had been going on for years. The same was true of Shostakovich. He'd gone through the Cultural Revolution when he was attacked by the Proletkult/RAPM axis. He lived in Leningrad which had been hit by huge

waves of intelligentsia arrests throughout 1935. Yet Fay claims there was "no reason to anticipate the coming catastrophe"--that no "specifically political motives could have preoccupied him" prior to the 1936 denunciation. You only have to listen to the Fourth Symphony to know that's false. But Fay can't hear it. As for Shostakovich staying innocent after 1936-7--innocent enough to have been shocked again in 1948 (twice!)--how can that be reconciled with the colleagues he lost during the Terror, with his relations who were arrested?

He does sound innocent in some of his letters of the time.

You'd prefer him to have sounded guilty? You have to realise how careful people--particularly important people--had to be in what they said, even in what seemed like private communications. Solzhenitsyn was sent to the camps for something he wrote in a letter. When Tatiana Okunyevskaia was interrogated, she found they'd been reading her letters for years. It happened all the time. *Nineteen Eighty-four*...

Prokofiev was innocent.

No, he wasn't. Read Daniel Jaffé's book, or my article [Prokofiev, Prisoner of the State](#). Nor was Myaskovsky innocent. And especially not the generation born around 1930--Schnittke, Gubaidulina, Shchedrin, Denisov, and so on. By 1950, any Soviet intellectual who was still innocent really would have been stupid. Was the man who composed the Preludes and Fugues Opus 87 stupid?

It's possible to be very clever at one thing--particularly an intensively technical task like composing--and yet remain

unworldly in other ways. Bruckner, for instance.

But if Shostakovich had been a Soviet Bruckner, don't you think his friends would have told us? And how could a Soviet Bruckner write *Rayok*--or any of the many manifestly satirical passages he wrote before and after *Rayok*? These things have to be seen in perspective. If not, one risks arriving at ludicrous misjudgements. For instance, Fay tries to extend the innocent stupidity she sees in Shostakovich to 1955-6--the first attempt to get *Lady Macbeth* revived. She suggests that his motive for making changes to the opera arose more from private concerns than from external considerations. But it's obvious he hoped the relative relaxation after Stalin's death might allow his banned work back into the repertoire. This isn't just my opinion--Krzysztof Meyer thinks so too, not that it's a controversial view. Fay suggests that Shostakovich tried to avoid confronting the authorities because all he really wanted was to change the "tasteless" bits he'd let through when he'd been a 25-year-old bad boy--not to push the opera against the will of the *apparat*. But we know he always avoided those people. If he was loath to press his case, it would have been for fear of having to endure "a pleasant chat" with officials. His reaction to the committee review was despair, not shock. He must have expected it all along, which is why he didn't want to take it to them to start with. Yet the first time Fay allows "her" Shostakovich to express a non-innocent, non-stupid attitude toward the Soviet regime is in the last bars of the 1963 version of the opera--in other words after the Thirteenth Symphony, which she clearly can't get round. It's worth quoting: "What it suggests strongly is that Shostakovich is explicitly identifying here with the Old Convict, appropriating his voice to convey his own misgivings about the

all-too-real adversity and tragedy that exists outside the confines of the theatre." Finally! But Fay still makes sure it's generalised stuff about "the universality of suffering", nothing too cynically specific. Because, otherwise, bang goes her prized prejudice about him. [For more on Fay's interpretation of Shostakovich, see the [review](#) of her biography.]

Some will say all this is too black and white.

No doubt. But those who now call revisionism "one-dimensional" used to subscribe to a truly crass one-dimensional view of Shostakovich from the opposite side. Once we realise the importance of the background--and the real nature of it--the logical course is to plot our way through the various possibilities, favouring the simplest, most commonsensical explanation for each set of events. If that story then makes sense overall, it's very likely to be the truth, especially if witnesses give accounts of Shostakovich which accord with it. The crucial point to grasp is that Shostakovich's actions and ostensible character only seem enigmatic when you don't understand the background. When you do understand that, he ceases to be an enigma.

Many DSCH readers still don't see what all this has to do with the music.

Well, both revisionists and anti-revisionists refer to context, so there's agreement that it bears on the music. Take David Fanning's interview with Rodion Shchedrin in *Gramophone*. Shchedrin got angry with Fanning for insinuating he has a "past" under the Soviet dispensation which he's anxious to deflect attention away from by justifying himself and talking up the horrors of Stalinism. Taruskin, Fay and Brown have made

similar insinuations about Shostakovich. They think that's legitimate in theory, and I agree. It's how you do it in practice that counts. But those who see the music as identical with the score will regard all this, from either side, as irrelevant. What have the ethics, or the sex life, or the political beliefs of a composer to do with his scores? The answer is nothing, since nothing matters to the score but the score itself and other scores that bear on it in the same, limited, music-as-score way. But music is more than the score. The score is almost always only a detailed *map* of the music. It's the detail, the precision, the self-sufficient logic of the score which lead people to confuse the map with the landscape it represents. Neville Cardus said that to urge us to listen to music "*qua* music" is equivalent to urging a young lover "to look at a starlit sky *qua* astronomy, or at his beloved *qua* anatomy". In other words, music-as-score--or music-as-music, as the more confused would have it--omits the realm of expression. It's illogical to observe expression marks if you're a music-as-score buff because expression isn't there on paper like the notational hieroglyphs are. It's *implied* by the hieroglyphs. And the expression marks are there, as Mahler used to joke, only for those who need them: the literalists who find it hard to perceive that music is expression, not score--not formal relationship but implied meaning.

But some music--Bach, for instance--is pure formal relationship.

I'm afraid it isn't--for two linked reasons, one logical, the other contingent. The logical reason is that Bach *designed* his pieces. They didn't arise spontaneously from the laws of equal temperament. This process of design entailed many decisions--

the decisions we call composition. And since these decisions were made by a human mind, the mathematical "purity" of those formal relationships is compromised. In fact, some would say it's this very violation of the purity of relationship in musical structure which makes it, as they would say, "interesting". Of course, this assumes a qualitative rather than a quantitative spin on purity, and the obvious riposte is that, mathematically, such violations are no less "pure" than the conformities. But that ignores the *motives* for the violations, which is where music gets more than just "interesting"--where it becomes moving, disturbing, exhilarating. And this links to the second reason why Bach's formal designs aren't pure: he was a feeling human being--in fact, a devout man. His music was designed to glorify God, which means, even when it appears to verge on pure form, it's always still "about" something.

Which is?

Spiritual states. "Repentance", "the absence of God", "redemption", "joy"... that sort of thing. Bach's music is highly formalised but, like Shostakovich's Opus 87, it's also, and *necessarily*, expressive at the same time. It's actually impossible for it not to be.

So, in your view, all music is in some sense programme music?

All music not composed by robots is in some sense, from the obvious to the most refined, programme music, yes--in the sense of having an expressive scheme which may be explicitly illustrative or enigmatically allusive, and/or almost anything in between. On this argument, one sustainable definition of bad

music would be music written by composers whose expressive schemes are superficial or incoherent. Or who may not even be aware of that inner dimension of composition, such as the Minimalists. Yet the programmatic dimension is always there, if only by default, by virtue of the very nature of artistic endeavour. It still can't be reduced to notes on paper. It's always more than that. But this is only the beginning of the argument. In the score-centred era, the post-Darmstadt era, the relationship of expression to form has got so thin as to virtually exclude expression as a factor at all. All that gets "expressed" is the artist's personal relationship to form. Ultimately this relates to the loss of the spiritual dimension which inspired men like Bach. Today's artists live in a scientific ethos ruled by theories of evolution and relativity and so forth, so they inevitably identify their activity as artists with natural processes. Thus you get Anthony Payne writing a piece on the Big Bang, or Robert Simpson's energy worship, or Birtwistle's pessimistic elementalism. You also get young composers talking about their music as if it's some organic entity with a life of its own which they relate to as scientists--experimenting on it, almost. They'll say the music "vegetates", "evolves", "takes on complexity". As it gets more independent of them, as they see it, it becomes active--it "pounces", it "pincers out", it "piles up", and so on. The language is materialistic, reductive. Fine. Form generates form in the natural world. But form in the artistic world, however logical, is generated by human minds--by human *will*. And will implies intention, which implies meaning. In the artistic world, meaning--through the agency of human will and intention--generates form. Intentionality is the key.

But why should musical value be conditional on anything

other than itself?

Because, unlike "score", "music" has no precise boundary. Music exists, is formed, within the compass of meaning and intentionality. The material score *indicates* the music, *stands for* the music. But the actual music is immaterial--is in the mind. Look at Krzysztof Meyer's story about Shostakovich telling him that he should have "finished" his piano sonata somewhere in the blank pages at the end of the score. It's a *yurodivy* statement. It indicates the invisible, the supra-formal, realm of meaning.

But surely music is, or should be, sufficient unto itself--independent of motive?

The score is independent of motive, being inanimate. The music, being alive, isn't. OK, here's a way of thinking about it. Musicians are fond of saying that there's only good music and bad music. But this ignores--among many other things--irony. Which is to say: if there's good and bad music, there's also "good" and "bad" music. Take music which looks or sounds stupid. Say, the march-theme in the Seventh Symphony. Is it, as Bartok assumed, truly stupid--or actually ironically "stupid"? In other words, what's the *intention* behind it? If, for some reason, we were unable to take intention into account, we could only conclude that something like Mozart's *Musical Joke* is stupid music--instead of a joke about stupid music. A robot or a naive human would make the first conclusion. An intelligent human would make the second. We discern the joke through the medium of mind, not from the realm of form. Mozart is laughing at bad music by writing "bad" music. So one might say the score of *A Musical Joke* is "stupid", but the music is intelligent. What makes it different for Shostakovich is that, unlike Mozart, he

can't say what he's doing in his title, which means the listener has to be more alert to the composer's intention. The march-theme in the Seventh Symphony is an ironic statement about stupid music, but here stupid music stands further for a stupid and evil social order. "Bad" music translates into "bad music" in an ethical sense. Stalin's society is Stalin's bad music. Shostakovich's whole thrust as a composer is to make us think and feel beyond our normal capacity--and if music was nothing more than the score he couldn't do that.

But what if music is genuinely banal and uninteresting?

"Banal and uninteresting" is an inert subjective judgement. Should composers wish to mimic uninteresting banality--which they've been doing for centuries, although it only becomes central in the Western tradition after Mahler--one has to take a step back and be aware of this "ironising" process. Which means placing the artwork in context and engaging with it in a way which outflanks one's initial inert subjective response. And that's equivalent to recognising that score and music aren't the same thing. To take another example, most Western critics regard the finale of Prokofiev's Sixth Symphony as a trivial travesty. But if one steps back, includes irony, and adds context to the equation, it becomes possible to see that this movement is actually "a trivial travesty". That is: the triviality is mimicked, the aim of the music is satirical, and the overall effect, in the context of the work as a whole, is wrenchingly tragic.

And if there's no contextual evidence?

The evidence can never be *solely* contextual. It must be justifiable by reference to the score. A composer has many ways

of indicating irony. A common one is to write for instruments against the grain of the music or outside their natural tessitura. The famous example of the cello playing arco instead of pizzicato at the beginning of the Third Quartet. Shostakovich said "Pizzicato would be *better*, but please play arco", meaning "I want it to sound ugly and clumsy because I have an ulterior motive--a hidden intention". For a similar reason, Mahler uses a double-bass in the third movement of his First Symphony where a cello would be better. But he didn't want it "better", he wanted character: the ironic quality of using the wrong instrument for the tessitura. It has to sound effortful--like the bassoon at the beginning of *The Rite of Spring*. Benjamin Zander says that when Stravinsky conducted *The Rite* with the Eastman School Orchestra, he auditioned to find the worst bassoonist, someone who'd strain to make the high C, because that was the effect he wanted. He wanted it "bad" because that would make it atavistic. Speaking of which, I think Shostakovich must have found the trombone solo in the first movement of Mahler's Third meat-and-drink to his dramatic temperament, not to mention his sense of humour. It's music in inverted commas: "sentimentality", "self-pity", "pathos". It suggests some great lump of a troll discovering emotion: his tears roll down and plop onto the rock he's sitting on while he declaims grandiloquently like some primeval Bottom. It's many things at once: touching, ludicrous, funny, poignant, thought-provoking. And music can only do all this--let alone at once--because it's more than just the score.

That's just your own subjective interpretation.

Up to a point. Mahler's Third has a perfectly intelligible programmatic scheme based on Theosophical principles, which

he'd studied. But, yes, the context isn't as precise as it is in Shostakovich's case. Don't get me wrong. I'm not saying we can't "hear" a given piece of music until we understand the context, or that we aren't free to use intuition and imagination to endow music with meaning. I'm saying that meaning should, wherever possible, be *appropriate*. That it should be justifiable by reference to the particular context of its formation. That we'll better understand a given piece of music if we stop regarding it as some sort of Platonic Ideal floating outside time and space. The truth is we're always in a developing relationship with music, with art, with life, with everything. The idea that we hold a definitive view of anything at any given time is an illusion. As we learn, our perspectives shift. What we know about a piece of music--about anything at all--changes the way we experience it. In the end, context is relevant to the extent that one can't judge a thing properly until one sees what it's for. Most critics of *Nineteen Eighty-four*, for example, misjudge it by mistaking it for a gloomy science-fictional prediction, whereas it's very largely a grimly funny satire on Stalinism in 1948 which merely happens to be couched in predictive terms. And if Shostakovich is sometimes ironically "crude" or "stupid" or "bad" in order to satirise, we'd better be aware of this or we'll make the sort of misjudgements Western critics have often made about his music... About him, too.

In "Naive Anti-Revisionism", you say Shostakovich's music "can fairly be said to be more universal than other great music". How can you possibly justify that?

The justification's in another piece called "Writing About Shostakovich", which is also in *Shostakovich Reconsidered*.

Unfortunately the footnote cross-reference isn't correct. The passage is actually on page 582. Sorry--you'll have to go and buy a copy.

What, in your opinion, are the worthwhile books in English on Shostakovich?

Testimony is the only one you can't do without. If you haven't read that, you're completely in the dark. Then three commentary books: *The New Shostakovich*, *Shostakovich: A Life Remembered*, and *Shostakovich Reconsidered*. Those are the essentials so far. Glikman's letters are an optional extra, as is Derek Hulme's book.

Nothing else?

Maybe Dubinsky's *Stormy Applause*. Nothing else specifically on Shostakovich.

What about *Shostakovich: The Man and His Music* or *Shostakovich Studies*?

Low priorities. There's some decent stuff in amongst the tripe and the mediocrity, but Norris's editorial line is miles "off message" and Fanning's book doesn't justify its price. You know: solemn examinations of modal theory which end up admitting that modal theory is "too reductive and not sufficiently explanatory". Who needs it? As for earlier books, there's so much bewildered rubbish in them--writers doggedly quoting these dumb articles Shostakovich never wrote or buying Soviet propoganda about Stalin being a deep thinker, someone who actually gave a damn about Soviet culture. Primitive stuff. And

the methodological assumptions are just hopeless. Eric Roseberry's claim that Shostakovich used dialectic in his symphonies, for example.

You sound angry about all this.

Occasionally. Because it travesties Shostakovich, stops us from seeing who he really was. Mostly I don't think about it. Thankfully I'll never have to read all that rubbish again. And most of it's truly awful phoney rubbish. Any Russian will tell you that.

OK, what about recordings?

That's more a matter of opinion. We hear things differently. Solomon Volkov, for example, respects Haitink in the symphonies. For me, Haitink's all right with some other composers, if a bit stolid, but I can't abide his Shostakovich, which smoothes over all the rough edges and solemnises the irony and takes what is often essentially theatrical music--"symphony-theatre", I've called it--and presents it instead as "symphonic architecture". Inanimate structure, in other words. I never trust critics who bang on about "architecture". Music is organic, alive, sensate... Another must-to-avoid is Eliahu Inbal, who does everything in soft focus and doesn't have a clue what's going on in the music. Same goes for Keith Jarrett in Opus 87. He boasted that he ignored contextual questions so as to avoid being influenced by them--shades of Laurel Fay. Not unconnected with the slick vacuity of his performances, I'd suggest. I like the composer's Russian and East European contemporaries. They knew him, he worked with them, their recordings have the smell and energy of the times. There's a

dynamic there which isn't present in modern recordings, whether by Westerners or Easterners. You can almost feel Shostakovich's personal presence in, for example, Nikolayeva's 1962 Opus 87-- and he was in the studio for those recordings, of course. But people must simply use their ears. Keeping the background in mind, though.

Must we *always* "keep the background in mind" when we listen to Shostakovich? Can't we just listen innocently sometimes?

We can hardly unlearn what we know. "Somehow I don't feel like a virgin," as Shostakovich says in *Testimony* vis-à-vis his "rehabilitation" in 1958. We can't just revert to innocence intacta. We're learning more and more of what the music is about, and what we know about music changes the way we hear it. There's no going back. As for whether we must now always think about Shostakovich being forced into the Communist Party when we listen to the Eighth Quartet, I'd say not. That's the background, that's what formed the music--its materials, their structures, and the overall expression of the piece--but we don't have to have a literal picture in our minds of the composer weeping or collecting sleeping pills to kill himself with. All that's vital is that those who perform the Eighth Quartet are aware of all of this and let it infuse their feeling when they play--produce the appropriate intensity, the right dynamics and relationships, the dramatic specificity that creates universality. They don't have to have particular images in mind whilst playing, although this is often a very good way of maintaining a line through a piece of music, as Nikolaus Harnoncourt has pointed out. Musicians do respond to imagery and find it much

more useful as a guide to performance than a list of abstract markings which the conductor dictates to them without explaining why. But as soon as any performer gets hold of the music, however much they know about its background, it becomes theirs--they internalise it, relating it to what they know and feel, making it a part of *them*. Maybe a relation tried to kill themselves, so one can identify with that. Or even something quite general, like a beloved pet dying. Whatever connects with intense feeling for you. That then becomes your personal means of getting in touch with the grief and anger in the music--although, it has to be said, understanding the wit and sarcasm, which in Shostakovich is primarily satirical, is a very different matter, far harder to relate to one's own experience, especially if one happens to be a soft-living Western democrat. Getting to grips with the satire makes knowledge of the context completely indispensable. The rest is a question of sympathy. Musical performance shouldn't be "singing like a nightingale" but more like acting: performing a role. Or, if a unit, performing like the cast of a play. Anyway, this is how the specifics ought to ramify naturally out into the universal, how universality is rooted in specifics. And there's room, if one's interested enough in history, to extrapolate quite literally. For example, in the march in the Seventh Symphony, it's legitimate to see, parading along behind the banners of Nazi Germany and the Stalinist USSR, the flags of Red China, North Korea, Communist Ethiopia, the Khmer Rouge, Saddam's Ba'athists, Republika Serbska, the fascistic religious fundamentalists of East and West... and so forth. A "universal image of evil", as Mazel' says--a grotesque progression from the risible to the terrible which holds true, even if only potentially, for all societies at all times... But we can't go back to simply hearing the march as a propagandist portrayal of

Operation Barbarossa. That sort of naive innocence is gone. And good riddance.

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Prokofiev

Born 1891
Sontsovka
Died 1953
Moscow



Click the hammer-and-sickle...



Prokofiev, Prisoner of the State

An interpretation of the composer's relationship with the Soviet state

Part One: The Gambler



Prokofiev, Prisoner of the State

An interpretation of the composer's relationship with the Soviet state

Part Two: ...Into the Fire



Prokofiev, Prisoner of the State

An interpretation of the composer's relationship with the Soviet state

Part Three: The Protest Music



Opus List - Part 1

Prokofiev's works 1907 - 1932



Opus List - Part 2

Prokofiev's works 1933 - 1952



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The Serge Prokofiev Association

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HUMOUR: A SERIOUS BUSINESS...

...especially in the Preludes and Fugues, Opus 87

by Rob Ainsley

This article can also be found at [ClassicalNet](#).

The Six Paradoxes of Communism:

1. Everyone has a job, but no one actually does any work.
2. No one actually does any work, but production targets are always reached.
3. Production targets are always reached, but the shops are always empty.
4. The shops are always empty, but everyone has all they need.
5. Everyone has all they need, but no one is happy.
6. No one is happy, but they always vote the Communists back in.

(Russian joke)

"How can music be funny?" a bemused friend once asked me. If you don't believe music can have meaning, it's a fair question: telephone numbers, for example, are short on subtext and so rarely raise a laugh. Yet even numbers can be humorous to some people. Mathematicians say that numbers take on meanings, and some combinations can be genuinely funny. For most of us, though, such humour will seem arbitrary and personal - and isn't looking for humour in music an equally subjective pursuit? Of course not; it just takes a little understanding of the language of music, and Shostakovich was surely the great master at communicating through that language, with all the associations, nuances and references that music has.

Let's say that the three "primary colours" of humour are slapstick, exaggeration, and juxtaposition (of two incongruous situations). Just as red, green and blue combine to make any colour discernible to the eye, intensified by qualities such as brightness, context and texture, so all jokes, whatever their colour, are essentially a mixture of these, perhaps intensified by motivational and referential elements such as satire, puns, or in-jokes. Man slips on banana skin: slapstick. It's funnier if he's our boss: in-joke. Mimic does impersonation of someone dwelling on all their worst qualities: exaggeration. It's funnier because the impersonated is a politician: satire. When is a door not a door? When it's ajar: juxtaposition of the

double entendre. It's meaningless unless you appreciate the double meaning involved: pun.

Context is vital too; we all know how humour and terror can each strengthen the force of the other. The gateman's speech on the problems of brewer's droop in *Macbeth* occurs just before the murder of Duncan, making the deed seem all the more terrifying. Conversely, humour in the form of black jokes is an effective catharsis in times of crisis: Russian jokes about bread queues and political incompetents are about the one item they do traditionally have in unlimited supply. (The stark six-point joke above seems to me characteristically Russian, with the sort of elements Shostakovich put in his music: satirical black humour, stark contrast to the extent of contradiction, and a tight, almost schematic, form to it.)

Do these primary colours of joke also occur in music? Of course. Take the above three examples. The banana-skin joke occurs all over the place in music: Haydn's bassoon that farts in an unexpected silence in the last movement of his Symphony No. 93; Mozart's horn players in the not particularly funny Musical Joke playing horrifically out-of-tune notes because the clot writing it didn't know how to write for their instruments; or Shostakovich's pianist in the first piano concerto who - while silently and obediently watching the "drunken trumpeter" lurch his way cheerily through the simplest of tunes - apparently falls asleep, crashing out onto the length of the keyboard and startling everyone. And is there an in-joke here, with the pianist as Shostakovich, the trumpet as some clownish party member spouting simplistic cant?

Exaggeration? You can't get much more inflated than asking for the same witless tune to be repeated twelve times in succession, but Shostakovich does that in the Seventh Symphony. The satirical element makes the joke, though: it's remarkably easy to picture the cheery tune as part of a whistle-while-you-work propaganda message which gets sung with progressively more gritted teeth over, and over, and over again, as the clouds of conflict and terror around it gather. It ends up looking utterly stupid and hollow, and whether you think it represents the Nazis moving in on Leningrad, Stalin's Terror, or just man's extraordinary talent for tolerating the rise of tyranny, the effect is the same. Like much, perhaps even most, of Shostakovich's musical humour, this is the sort where you either laugh or cry.

Grotesque juxtapositions occur so frequently in Shostakovich, from the "wrong-note" piano music of his earlier years to his references-within-quotes of his later works, that it's seen as a trademark of his. Take the cardboard cutout William Tell figure that unexpectedly appears in the middle of the first movement of the deeply three-dimensional Fifteenth Symphony. It never fails to get audiences smiling. (But I've never seen them laughing - was there a law passed about not laughing at concerts? Beethoven's First was played with cuts at its second performance because the conductor feared the audience would laugh, so they must have done it then. Still, that's a matter for another article.) But there's more to the quote than a Pythonesque surreality. Shostakovich, according to Ian MacDonald's *The New Shostakovich*, was known not as the "Soviet Beethoven" in the USSR, but the "Soviet Rossini", a purveyor of light but disposable music to order. The interpretation of it is endless, but one meaning is clear: whatever your achievements, you can't escape your past or your reputation.

So what of the Twenty-Four Preludes and Fugues? Like any great work of art, they are steeped (however consciously or unconsciously on the part of the composer) in the political, artistic, and personal climate of their time - and humour. There is also the whole gamut of human emotion - deep tragedy (Prelude No. 14), gritty war-film heroism (Prelude No. 6), wistful pathos (Prelude No. 5), relaxation (Prelude No. 23), springlike optimism (Prelude and Fugue No. 7), carefree cheeriness (Prelude and Fugue No. 17), inebriated merrymaking (Fugue No. 11) and crazy high spirits (Fugue No. 2) to take a few examples almost at random. But, as ever with Shostakovich, the key to understanding the meaning of the pieces - and therefore their artistic whole - is not merely in the "overall feeling" of any prelude and/or fugue. In any case, the "feelings" in one prelude or fugue can be contradictory. It is in the tension between conflicting ideas, which generates that extraordinarily dynamic feel of Shostakovich's music - the feeling that something's going on, that there are several forces battling to manipulate the music to their own ends as the piece progresses. That tension is so often revealed and sharpened up by the use of humour that recognising the "funny bits" in the Preludes and Fugues is often the first step to knowing what they mean.

Take the slapstick first of all. It's already shown up in the second fugue: after the (literally) pure whiteness of the first fugue in C major - which, astonishingly, doesn't contain a single accidental and therefore not a single black note - the second A minor fugue careers about all over the place, slipping on tonal banana skins everywhere and blundering into and out of unrelated keys with the crazy energy of a Keystone Cop chase (the sort Shostakovich must have accompanied dozens of times in the Bright Reel cinema as an impoverished student). A simple joke, but one heightened by the context (the purity of the opening fugue) and the in-joke (Shostakovich's life). Prelude No. 21 is similarly hilarious.

Exaggeration? What about the cheery fugal motif in the A flat Fugue, No. 17, which insists on introducing itself into every part of the keyboard it can - even down in the very bottom register, where conditions are so murky it sounds as if it has to pull a comically long face as it peers through the mud at us. Keep smiling at all costs, the piece seems to say: it brings to mind Shostakovich's purported comment in *Testimony* that he just kept saying "eighty-eight" repeatedly when photographed meeting people on official visits, because it made him look as if he was smiling and talking without having to go through the charade of small talk.

Exaggeration also shows up in the toyshop silliness of the wrong-note Prelude No. 8 in F sharp - the key of suffering and pain: this is music worked by strings. But the fugue following it is obsessive, anguished and nightmarish - definitely not kids' stuff at all. If the piece isn't saying anything, it's musical nonsense to have such disjoint moods next to each other. So what is the piece saying? Is it a statement on how some people are casually manipulated like puppets - following almost exactly the same pattern as the first two movements of the Fifteenth Symphony nearly twenty years later? If so, it's the funniness (in both senses of the word) of the Prelude that alert us to the message.

And dislocation? Take the Prelude No. 19 in E flat, Beethoven's heroic key. The opening is a solemn,

thundering series of chords that sets us up for a grandly heroic theme over an E flat pedal - but instead of a fanfare celebrating the liberation of the people by socialism, all we get in response is a mocking little snigger that keeps coming back to nag at the fanfare-blowers whenever they try again, all the way through to the fadeaway end. The mechanics of the joke are simple juxtaposition, but it's a pretty thin joke unless you believe there are politically motivated characters behind the two musical adversaries. Once you've heard the Prelude that way, it's very difficult to believe that Op. 87 is Shostakovich's "least political work", an assertion I read to my dismay the other day. (Even more to my dismay, it had my name at the top of it.)

But if one Prelude and Fugue sums up what I'm trying to say about the set, it's No. 15, at 488 bars (206 +282) by far the longest in the set. It is, arguably, more significant a statement than the 379-bar grand D minor Prelude and Fugue that finishes the work. When I first heard No. 15 (played by Barry Douglas on television in 1987) I burst out laughing. The "obviously funny" bits are a sarcastic prelude of overblown pomposity (exaggeration), some blatantly wrong notes at the end of the prelude (slapstick), a fugue of crazy intensity (exaggeration), and the bizarre ending of a very complicated piece plonking itself back into a very simple ending (dislocation). The more you look at the score, the funnier it gets, though somehow the effect of all the primary colours of humour together gets blacker and blacker. And as you identify the humour in the piece it seems to reveal a very clear message - a meaning - in the music.

When the prelude starts we're deep into the heart of the Twenty-four Preludes and Fugues, five flats and about an hour and a half away from our idealistic, almost innocent departure back in C major. A harshly metronomic minor third suggests the beating of a teacher's cane on a desk - is this some kind of lesson? If so it's clear we're required to sing along, and the bass duly obliges. (The first seven notes of the tune, bizarrely to Western ears, are those which open "We Wish You a Merry Christmas". Tatiana Nikolaeva, the dedicatee of Op. 87, doesn't know whether the resemblance was intentional - Shostakovich deliberately put several well-known Russian tunes elsewhere into the set, so it wouldn't be surprising, even though Christmas is not a Russian festival. However, the Prelude was written between Christmas and 30th December 1950 with the ground covered in snow, so the resemblance is appropriate if unconscious.)

The enforced, strident, but completely emotionless, nature of the first part of the Prelude No. 15 is disquieting. On goes the tune, stomping along in its brutal staccato triple time, with some witless nodding from a yes-man bass in shape of repeated G flat-F sequences. After forty bars or so of sound and fury that really signifies nothing at all we abruptly move into a lullaby, which even though phrased smoothly still manages to be quite empty of feeling. It's all a bit beyond the bass, which is still stuck in staccato yes-sir mode and can't really keep up. By the end of lullaby it's plodding up and down almost at random, and seems desperately grateful when the staccato opening stick-rhythm returns: now that's a tune I do know, it says, and gets carried away as we crash on to a grand conclusion - except that in the final three triumphant cadences, the half-wit bass is given his chance to stand up and do a brief solo in front of the class. He gets three chances but, of course, gets it completely wrong each time, blurting out an A natural, G natural, and then, worst howler of all, a D natural, all in a solidly tonal D flat - the

flattest key imaginable. If you thought the prelude was serious all along, those three notes must convince you that in fact it was a totally sarcastic view of things.

If the prelude is in the classroom, the fugue is in the madhouse: the sheer demonic energy has brought most listeners to the same conclusion. After the prelude left us firmly in D flat major, in comes the voice of dissent: an overexcited, shouted, "mad" sequence of notes. It is in fact a curiously wedge-shaped tune that starts out as a twelve-tone row, but never quite makes it: ten or so notes into the sequence it begins to lose track of itself, and by the time its companion has taken up the same line excitedly, it is wandering aimlessly off, tripping and stumbling into nowhere. But the idea has taken hold, and voice after voice takes the idea up, so that we have a grimly comic bedlam - like scene of crazy soapboxers all haranguing each other in a furiously atonal fugue. (Fortissimo marcatissimo sempre al fine, the direction reads at the beginning.)

But suddenly, something extraordinary, and funny in both senses of the word, happens: the prelude interrupts (it happens nowhere else in the set) in the shape of that stick-beating staccato rhythm, as if the teacher had just burst unexpectedly into the room to quell the rabble. The mob's shocked silence lasts just two bars, however, before they all start again. But now they know they are being watched, and throw around "proper" cadential finishes to contrive to end the piece as if it were a straightforward tonal one, as if to please their superior. They manage it, eventually, but it's far from convincing - in fact, the bizarre juxtaposition of this unchained, spiky four-part fugue with the squat, glued-on ending is decidedly funny.

But the humour alerts us to the message. Some of the sanest people around can be found in lunatic asylums (that has been especially so in Soviet institutions, where political dissent was seen as a mental illness). On one level, the Prelude and Fugue No. 15 is about two irreconcilable systems - atonal and tonal music. That is undeniable; it is in the music. On another, it could well be about the treatment of dissidence. In the Prelude, the half-wit survives despite - in fact, is almost rewarded because of - his profoundly comical inability to do anything except clumsily repeat what he's heard. In the fugue, the dissenters are bullied into doing much the same. And that's not very funny at all.

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Witnesses for the Defence

Testimonies concerning Shostakovich's attitudes to the Soviet regime

by Ian MacDonald

I: Fear and Resistance

During the Rumanian revolution of 1989, the BBC's John Simpson reported that, as people left their houses to join the crowds flooding through the streets of Bucharest, the most overwhelming impression to strike the senses of Western onlookers was the smell of shit. Their nervous systems conditioned by thirty years of state terror, the marchers, even as they advanced to cast down a dictator, were soiling their pants in mortal fear. In 1991, press reports of Saddam Hussein's "torture palaces" provided more than enough data to account for the Rumanian phenomenon, and no doubt the same stench pervaded the streets of Basra and Kirkuk during the abortive Shi'ite and Kurdish uprisings in March of that year. "The new Hitler" was what Western journalists and democratic politicians were then calling the author of those horrors; yet, as with Ceausescu, a more accurate comparison for Saddam is not Hitler - who, notwithstanding the Holocaust, mostly slaughtered foreigners - but Stalin, whose gigantically larger toll of human life was taken almost entirely from his own people.

"Death to the Russians!" was, claimed Stalin's Politburo crony Anastas Mikoyan, the brooding Georgian's customary toast during the late Forties. How many deaths did the old monster chalk up in pursuit of this edifying philosophy? About fifty million, hazards Zenon Poznyak, leader of the Byelorussian Popular Front and excavator of the Stalin era mass-graves found at Kuropaty in 1988. Poznyak's guess (in line with those of *Nedelya's* Igor Bestuzhev-lada[1] and *Ogonyok's* Vitaly Vitaliev [2]) appears in *The New Russians* (1990) by Hedrick Smith, a reporter who won a Pulitzer for his work as Moscow correspondent of *The New York Times* during the Seventies. Such claims of vast numbers of deaths under Stalin are inevitably controversial and some Western scholars have proposed figures between a tenth[3] and a hundredth as high.[4] These low estimates, though, depend on falsified census figures and KGB statistics compiled in the 1960s which have recently been dismissed as cosmetic by no less an authority than the current head of the secret police ministry archives. The struggle among Western scholars over the internal death-rate under Soviet Communism continues.[5] Meanwhile Russian researchers, still discovering unsuspected mass-graves, have yet to arrive at anything approaching a dependable final figure. (Galina Klokova, one of several teams of historians rewriting Soviet history textbooks, has grimly observed[6] that "even forty million may be short of the mark", implying that such an estimate would exclude, among others, the victims of the Civil War, now generally agreed to have been fomented by Lenin in order to consolidate power.[7])

State-created death on a scale indicated by figures like these is impossible to imagine; the mind, reeling

before such enormity, gives up trying to grasp it, turning instead to things more easily comprehended in size and rationale. Yet even if the volume of "excess mortality" under Soviet Communism is beyond our power to conceive, we can surely at least begin to understand the fear which this phenomenon must have disseminated - indeed was intended to disseminate - throughout the society upon which it was imposed. Supposing, for example, that, during a period of many years in which our media harped on the necessity of maintaining "vigilance" against spies and renegades, one person from every twenty households in our land was arrested and subsequently disappeared? Such a frightful state of affairs - similar to the vision of a totalitarian Britain invoked by George Orwell in his black satire on Stalinism, *Nineteen Eighty-Four* - would clearly cause a profound upheaval in the national psyche, spreading fear so intense that most people would avoid or deny opinions inimical to the regime and betray even their closest relatives in order not to be taken away to the torture chambers^[8] or death camps.

This is precisely what happened in Stalin's Russia and we now have a colossal amount of written testimony from those who were victims of Stalinist terror as to what, in fact and experience, it was like. To begin to discover this literature and the extraordinary, almost insane, reality which inspired it, Westerners have merely to visit their local libraries, pick up books like Solzhenitsyn's *The Gulag Archipelago*, Roy Medvedev's *Let History Judge*, Eugenia Ginzburg's *Into the Whirlwind*, Nadezhda Mandelstam's *Hope Against Hope*, or Robert Conquest's *The Great Terror*, read them attentively, and follow the references supplied in their bibliographies. They will find a terrible consistency to the hundreds of individual testimonies retailed in these books - and, through encountering what amounts to the same personal story related over and over again in different voices and from different perspectives, they will acquire a three-dimensional grasp of life under the Soviet regime which, apart from its inherent benefits in conferring a deeper understanding of the 20th century, will open their ears in ways they may not expect to the nuances of meaning and expression in the best music of Shostakovich.

While it is obviously impossible to distill this enormous, multitudinous story into a single life, something of the sort is required here since most of those reading this will not have read the five books listed above and will therefore be somewhat at a loss as to what is being proposed. Let us, then, take "for example" the life of the former Soviet film star Tatiana Okunyevskaia, born in Saratov in 1915. Tata, as she is known to her friends, now lives in a one-room cooperative apartment in Moscow with access to a decrepit summer-house on the edge of the city acquired for her by Memorial, the organisation dedicated to the rights, well-being, and commemoration of victims of Stalinism. This house, she told writer Jo Durden-Smith, once belonged to a scientist shot during Stalin's purge of Jewish doctors in 1953. Okunyevskaia has recently published her memoirs and, taking this as an opportunity, Durden-Smith interviewed her for *The Sunday Telegraph*, from which article^[9] the following facts are taken.

Like Shostakovich, Tata lost her father in her teens. Kyril Okunyevisky, along with Tata's grandmother, was among hundreds of thousands shot at the peak of the Terror in 1937. Memorial traced their remains to a mass grave at Butovo near Moscow and arranged for Tata to examine her father's file in the Lubianka. The final entry states: "Arrested 26th August 1937; 6th October, shot with no investigation."

Tata discovered that her grandmother had been shot five days later. "There wasn't any room," she explains. "Stalin said: 'Smash all the intelligentsia.' And there just wasn't room for them all in the Lubyanka."^[10] Her father had been denounced by several of his neighbours, including an old alcoholic who used to sing lullabies to her daughter, Inga. Later, Tata would be denounced to Stalin by her second husband.

Such betrayals, which rarely had any substantial basis, were intrinsic to Soviet life - institutionalised by state terror and coerced out of people by secret police agents and informers (although many denouncers acted without immediate duress so as to gain social advantages, such as the denounced one's post at work or his or her room in the communal flat). The late Sir Isaiah Berlin, who served as a diplomat in Moscow after the war and famously met the poetess Anna Akhmatova in November 1945, recalled of Stalin's USSR: "It was the most frightful regime I have ever lived under. Nobody knew who was friend and who was foe."^[11] Under such circumstances, few of the normal bonds of human relationship remained intact. Of her Soviet rulers, Tata Okunyevskaia told Durden-Smith: "They were beasts. They killed everything: family, love, trust, loyalty. But I've outlived them; I'm a witness. And I'm so old that I can remember *decent* people!"

After being raped twice by Lavrenti Beria, the head of the NKVD, Tata was eventually arrested in 1948 and incarcerated for a year in the Lubyanka. She found that her interrogators, following standard secret police practice, "knew everything" about her life in immense detail: her conversations, her parties, the remarks she had risked, believing herself to be among friends (such as, referring to Stalin's cult, "Not even Nicholas II put up such big statues to himself"). Charged with espionage, betraying the motherland, wanting to escape abroad, and anti-Soviet agitation, she was found guilty of saying Soviet songs were awful and for anti-Soviet conversations. For these crimes, she was awarded the statutory ten years hard labour in the Gulag.

Sent to a brick-making camp in Kazakhstan, Tata rashly wrote a letter of complaint to Stalin, for which she received 14 months' solitary confinement and a return visit to the Lubyanka where Beria's deputy Viktor Abakumov informed her that she would die like a dog. She was despatched back into the Gulag, this time to a logging camp in the Arctic circle where most prisoners soon perished. She, though, survived, finally being released in 1954 after Khrushchev's accession. Every veteran of the Gulag seems to have had an epiphanal moment and Tatyana Okunyevskaia's happened at the Sverdlovsk transit camp, through which every prisoner passed. "I was," she recalls, "very sick with a raging fever, lying on a stretcher on the ground. There was a wire fence, with women on one side and men on the other; and suddenly I looked up through the wire and saw my first love, a boy I'd grown up with and played games with, for kisses. He saw me too. 'Tatushka! Tatushka!' he said, putting his face right up against the fence. It was the last I ever saw of him."

Although few Soviet citizens had the displeasure of knowing Stalin personally, life stories like Okunyevskaia's are legion in the still-shattered domain of the former USSR, and ubiquitous in the epic

literature of memoirs and histories of that time and place (into which world the five books mentioned above are merely the most imposing gateways). The dominant note in such narratives, tolling insistently like a funeral bell behind every experience and every sensation, is that of fear - paralysing, all-pervading fear. Nadezhda Mandelstam writes with engrossing eloquence of the intense fear she and Akhmatova felt at certain periods during Stalin's purges - a fear that made physical movement difficult, tapered voices down to shivering whispers, and turned nights into hypersensitive vigils feverish with the anticipation of arrest. Fear is likewise the subject of their mutual friend Lydia Chukovskaya's novel of the time of the Terror *Sofya Petrovna*, as it is the title both of a contemporary play by Alexander Afinogenov and of the sequel to Anatoli Rybakov's novel of Soviet life in the Thirties, *Children of the Arbat*.[\[12\]](#)

Not only did the Soviet regime deliberately inspire fear of its agencies as a means of social control,[\[13\]](#) but it also fomented fear of the outside world so as to motivate efforts of national will - such as the Five-Year Plans - and drummed up fear of so-called "alien" elements within the USSR - such as "wreckers", "spies", "Trotskyites", "counter-revolutionaries", minor racial groups known as "nationalities", and in particular Soviet Jews - in order to muster support for purges expedient to the machinations of Stalin and the crew of self-cannibalising human sewer-rats referred to in *Pravda* as his politburo. Apart from anything else, this institutionalised fear worked, hand in hand with the transparent falsehoods disseminated in government propaganda, to destroy any notion of dependable truth. Hence rumour had to stand in for reliable news, while the inadvisability of speaking plainly in public - and often at home, especially in front of one's children - caused a boom in "Aesopian" discourse, whereby what a person said in so many words was often to be interpreted euphemistically or even in precisely the opposite sense.

Fear, then, was a constant factor in Soviet life, albeit that the intensity of its effects varied from period to period and also between different segments of the populace. During the times of severely applied state terror in 1935-1939 and 1948-53, fear was generally felt across all social groupings, though invariably with more than average intensity among the intelligentsia, and more intensely still among certain "centres" within the intelligentsia, such as: those in the main cities of Leningrad, Moscow, and Kiev; those old enough to have remembered significantly different conditions in earlier phases of Soviet history or pre-history (e.g., the senior generation of engineers and artistic intellectuals, and the Old Bolsheviks of Lenin's generation); those younger *intelligenty* in key contemporary posts in science and culture; and racial "aliens", viewed either as outsiders innately disposed to subversion or as potential scapegoats.

Outside the peak periods of terror - and, among certain strata of the Soviet populace, even within these peak periods - the social control of state-generated fear slackened, creating temporal, geographical, and social pockets of comparative relaxation within which another more or less constant factor of Soviet life found limited room for expression: resistance. Such resistance took many forms, from simple street cynicism concerning government announcements about the availability of toothbrushes to sophisticated

principled dissent against the political system of the USSR in general. Yet, since the USSR was a police state, such resistance during local relaxations in the otherwise prevailing rule of fear always entailed an element of calculated risk - a risk which rose according to the articulacy and publicity with which such resistance was expressed.

One of the lesser risks (depending on the time, place, and company in which the risk was taken) was the political joke, a genre elaborated to unprecedented lengths under the Soviet regime. For example, during 1930-6 (i.e., between the peak periods of fear associated with the Cultural Revolution and the Great Terror), special outlets in the cities, called Torgsin (commercial) shops, sold "luxury" goods for gold and hard currency. A political joke was soon doing the rounds whereby "Torgsin" was mutated into an acronym (itself a joke at the expense of the Soviet bureaucracy's acronym-fetish): "Tovarishchi Opomnites', Rossiia Gibnet, Stalin Istrebliat Narod" ("Comrades Remember, Russia is Perishing, Stalin is Exterminating the People"). Such jokes - not a few of which were circulated in anonymous dissenting leaflets - provide evidence of popular resistance to Stalin in the period before and after his crackdown following the assassination of Kirov at the end of 1934.

At other times, political resistance within the intelligentsia was able to manifest in public via stage productions, such as Mayakovsky's *The Bedbug* (an Aesopian attack on collectivism) and *The Suicide* by Shostakovich's friend^[14] Nikolai Erdman, in which Semyon, the jobless hero, announces that he will commit suicide at 12 o'clock the next day and finds himself besieged by people asking him to champion their causes in the arts or business before he dies, on the grounds that only a suicide, having nothing to lose, can safely speak out in such a society. "There are 200 million people in the USSR," proclaims Semyon, "and all of them are scared. All except me. I fear nobody." These plays by Mayakovsky and Erdman date from 1928-9 - the onset of Stalin's first major attack on the Soviet intelligentsia as a social bloc. As that onslaught turned into the Cultural Revolution, non-Party artists were restrained or eliminated, and Aesopian satire became, for the duration, impossible. Yet this sort of oblique artistic resistance revived once conditions again became relatively relaxed (e.g., Nikolai Akimov's satirical production of *Hamlet* in 1932, for which Shostakovich wrote the music, as he had for Mayakovsky's *The Bedbug*), while resistance among other social groups - workers, peasants, young *intelligenty*, those in small towns or provincial cities - meanwhile continued to find voice at various levels of overtness and articulacy.

In *Nineteen Eighty-Four*, Orwell draws a broad distinction between the Party (which in Oceania includes all of the intelligentsia, whether resistant or not) and the proles, "those swarming, disregarded masses, 85 per cent of the population" whom the Party - or rather the politically active Inner Party, equivalent to the Soviet *apparatus*, or, in some parts of the novel, the *nomenklatura* - controls with a mind-quietening diet of sport and pornography. Something akin to this broad distinction existed in the USSR in that Stalin concentrated his efforts at control by fear, or straightforward elimination, upon the intelligentsia, a class long skilled at formulating sophisticated opinions and generating subversive political jokes of the sort given above. Yet, in the interludes of relative relaxation - and more or less constantly among the Soviet "proles" and the younger (and hence less cautious) *intelligenty* - such expressions of resistance

were common, and sedulously gathered by secret police agents and their informers.

A recent book (Sarah Davies, *Popular Opinion in Stalin's Russia: Terror, Propaganda and Dissent, 1934-1941*, Cambridge University Press, 1997) examines this ongoing expression of popular resistance by means of such NKVD and Party reports, showing widespread scepticism, and even open contempt, for official accounts of the Kirov murder and the show-trials which followed it (albeit that the most functional strata of the populace, their lives dominated by thought-excluding drudgery, took no serious notice of what they saw as a remote internecine quarrel among their new Communist bosses, confining their resistance to grumbles about bread-shortages[15]). Above the level of the archetypal "proles", from thinking urban workers upwards, dissent was common, sharpening into more articulate resistance as the intelligence of those involved rose. For example, Davies notes a rumour in the mid-Thirties that the USSR's population had declined from 175 million to 135 million as a result of Soviet state terror. Such rumours were reported in police files as originating among the *intelligenty*, especially Soviet Jews.

Davies also publishes excerpts from overtly resistant leaflets ("suggesting intelligentsia authorship") which appeared during the Terror, calling for revolt against the "bloody" tyranny of Bolshevik dictatorship. But her most fascinating chapter[16] describes the growth of resistance to the Stalin cult as it inflated to "gigantomaniac" proportions during 1935-7[17], an account which makes it clear that antipathy to Stalin was widely felt and voiced. To give a single example, Davies records that, in 1934, among young people, it was popular to decipher SSSR [USSR] as "Smert' Stalina Spaset Rossiю" ["Stalin's Death will Save Russia"].[18] It should be noted that, in 1934, Shostakovich, then 27, was among these young people.

Such, in general terms, is the socio-political background against which Shostakovich lived and worked. On the face of it, it would be surprising if he and his music had remained unaffected by any of this, and more surprising still if he had, during his life, formed no opinions whatever about it, whether pro- or anti-Soviet. Yet pundits in the West who espouse the "anti-revisionist" position on Shostakovich - i.e., will not concede that *Testimony* is a fair representation of his outlook and do not accept that he was anti-communist; or suspect that he may, in some sense, have been anti-communist, but held this conviction weakly, or arrived at it late and attempted to back-date it through *Testimony* - are united in neither professing nor demonstrating anything much beyond a pitifully superficial acquaintance with this background.

For example, Richard Taruskin, in his purported discussion of the Soviet reception of Shostakovich's Fifth Symphony in Fanning's *Shostakovich Studies*, and Laurel Fay, in her article on the alleged provenance of *From Jewish Folk Poetry* in *The New York Times*, have both ventured some general opinions on the Soviet background which, for the most part, are factually wrong and interpretively obtuse or gullible.[19] Christopher Norris, a professed expert on "the politics of culture", has said almost nothing about the socio-political background to Shostakovich's music; what little he has said is, again, inaccurate or dimly credulous.[20] As for other anti-revisionists, like Malcolm Brown and David

Fanning (who may place himself on neither side of the controversy), they have, to my knowledge, scarcely spoken of this background at all.

It is worth remembering why such pundits are called "anti-revisionists". Before the publication of *Testimony* in 1979, the view among Western music critics was that Shostakovich was a distinguished, if occasionally puzzling, alumnus of the Soviet system and ideology who was, in some sense, a communist and in no sense at odds with the policies and practices of the Soviet regime (under which he had received many honours and for which he had written occasional works, propagandist film scores, ostensibly conformist symphonies, and a multitude of orthodox articles and speeches whose political views he reiterated in interviews given to journalists). In terms of his music, these assumptions about him were, for the most part, accepted, and, in rudimentary conceptual ways, integrated into the technical analyses to which Western musicologists routinely subjected his music. For the sake of identification, I propose to call this position on Shostakovich the Naive Approach. After *Testimony*, the Naive Approach to Shostakovich, while by no means unviable in very general terms,[\[21\]](#) was less easily justifiable in the rudimentary conceptual ways established hitherto.

As a result, certain puzzling aspects of Shostakovich began to come to the fore and, rather than a straightforward communist laureate, he began to be seen as a troubled, contradictory introvert, much traumatised by Russia's gargantuan war-losses and yet, for some reason, unworried (or only retrospectively worried) by the comparably gargantuan internal losses inflicted on the USSR by its rulers from 1917 onwards. With the appearance of Bernard Haitink's recorded cycle of Shostakovich's symphonies, the composer started to be viewed less as an heroic Soviet artist with the occasional inscrutable hiatus, and more as a tragic neo-Mahlerian figure, flawed by incongruous outbursts of apparent vulgarity, but otherwise transparently sincere. The feeling, for example, among *Gramophone* reviewers during the six or seven years after *Testimony* was, in effect, that Haitink's Decca cycle had raised the whole tone of Shostakovich symphony recordings, if not of Shostakovich symphonies *per se*.

Where the likes of the Ninth and Eleventh had previously been sniffed at, they now became works to take seriously (or at least not to dismiss as casually as before). Whenever a new Shostakovich symphony disc came out, reviewers adopted the reverential manner formerly reserved for new recordings of symphonies by Beethoven and Bruckner. Shostakovich symphonies were now seen as "tragic" works of "great intensity"; reviewers were accordingly "much moved", even "spellbound", by them. Despite the New Solemnity of Shostakovich reception in the *Gramophone* of the mid-Eighties, all that the magazine's writers felt safe to venture in exegesis of this intense, spellbinding tragedy was the prudently general view that it derived from the composer having lived in "troubled times".

The most perceptive *Gramophone* reviewer of this period, Michael Oliver received the 1984 paperback of Christopher Norris's *Shostakovich: the man and his music* with the observation that "this book must be read as a whole, and judiciously chewed, not swallowed". Yet he was by himself in venturing that he

heard subversive undertones (let alone anything satirically sarcastic) in these works. (He found "irony and anxiety at the very heart of the Ninth Symphony", reporting the finale of Kondrashin's 1980 version to be, far from non-stop jollity, "a horribly sinister thing".) Meanwhile his colleagues continued to discuss Shostakovich symphony recordings in generalised terms of tempi ("spacious" ones preferred), sound quality (ditto), and the occasional interpretative allusion to the mysterious Russian landscape (ditto again) or, alternatively, to "the interior landscape of the Russian soul" (Robert Layton on the Tenth).

The New Solemnity in Shostakovich studies came to an end around the time of the fall of the USSR in 1991. Then, my book *The New Shostakovich*, together with fresh testimony and evidence in the form of interviews and articles from colleagues of the composer freed by the absence of state-created fear or Soviet censorship to speak their minds, combined into a third position against both the "communist laureate" conception central to the erstwhile Naive Approach to Shostakovich and the "tragic introvert" (or "Hamlet figure") vaguely envisaged under the New Solemnity which replaced it. This third position, congruent with the view of Shostakovich proposed in *Testimony* and in isolated comments made by his former colleagues (and his son Maxim) during the 1980s, is that of revisionism in Shostakovich studies[22] - that for which revision is urged being our basic interpretation of Shostakovich's attitudes to the Soviet regime with regard to their bearing on the expressive aspects of his music. Intrinsic to revisionism is the proposition that, far from helplessly immersed in the unhappy aspects of his "troubled times", Shostakovich was bitterly critical of those responsible for Russia's woes and that therefore his music is as satirical as it is tragic.

Since revisionism directly challenges both of its rival positions on Shostakovich, it is inevitable that what amounts to a fourth position, anti-revisionism, now exists in order to rebut it. Anti-revisionism, which takes as its fundamental tenet the alleged fraudulence of *Testimony*, is a heterogeneous outlook embracing everything from the unreconstructed Naive Approach, through variations on the "tragic introvert" model, to more attacking postures in which Shostakovich is claimed to have written several key works not, as revisionists would insist, in a spirit of resistance or "secret dissidence" amounting to protest, but as deliberate sops to the Soviet regime in the hope of rehabilitation. The model of Shostakovich proposed in the attacking form of anti-revisionism implies a man of flexible, or inert, ethical make-up who, whether out of confused ambivalence or craven self-interest, did not attempt to disassociate himself from the Soviet regime until the early 1960s, and then only superficially and ambiguously, continuing to "accept" official posts and refusing to assume the role of an overt dissident, like Solzhenitsyn, Sakharov, Grigorenko, Yakir, Kim, and others. This, to borrow the coinage of two prominent advocates of such attacking anti-revisionism, may be called the "collaborator" model of Shostakovich.[23]

Whatever we understand to be meant by this term, it at least has the virtue of ostensible clarity. Here anti-revisionism unequivocally contends that the general Soviet socio-political background, outlined above, did not affect Shostakovich in the way it affected the many who, despite the fear spread by the

Soviet state in order to discourage dissent, expressed resistance in various ways throughout the entire period of Soviet rule; or that this background did affect Shostakovich in much the same ways as it affected Soviet citizens neither too overworked to think, too frightened to feel, too deprived of information to form a judgement, nor too morally incompetent to be disturbed by their impressions - but that he chose not to express such impressions in his life or work, becoming instead effectively a part-time collaborator with the Soviet regime.

Inasmuch as the negative character of the Soviet regime is very firmly established, the "collaborator" model of Shostakovich interpretation amounts to a charge against him of complicity in the crimes and oppressions of that regime; indeed, the main interpretive line flowing from the "collaborator model" is that Shostakovich was a man haunted by guilt for such complicity. One apparent justification for this thesis is that the original title of *Testimony* was to be *Testimony of Guilt*. Yet there is a vast difference between, on the one hand, supposing Shostakovich to have been haunted by guilt for direct collaborative complicity with the Soviet regime, and, on the other, deducing that he, like many other *intelligenty*, had been haunted by guilt for the paralysing fear which prevented him speaking out (other than in Aesopian ways or through his works) against a regime he loathed and had loathed throughout his life.

In the end, what is at issue is Shostakovich's music: is it expressive of resistance, of complicity, or of neither? Musical sceptics unacquainted with Soviet history often ask whether such a question has any intrinsic validity. Music is music, they argue; how can it matter what it is "about"? Since the emergence, during the last few years, of so much shocking testimony from friends and colleagues of Shostakovich, the popularity of this thoughtless contention has, thankfully, dwindled.^[24] In its place, there is a new objection, proposed by certain anti-revisionists, that to interrogate Shostakovich's music as to whether it can be said to resist, abet, or ignore the crimes and oppressions of the Soviet regime is to propose a "crudely one-dimensional" (or "ideological") criterion. It should be noted that this has never been said of the Naive Approach, whereby Shostakovich's communist orthodoxy is "given" and, as such, an integral assumption of interpretation^[25]; nor, evidently, is it deemed applicable to such inarguable crudities as Richard Taruskin's claim that Shostakovich, in *Lady Macbeth*, endorsed Stalin's genocidal policy of collectivisation^[26] or Laurel Fay's idea that Shostakovich wrote *From Jewish Folk Poetry* to appease Soviet demands for folk-nationalism, foiling his own manoeuvre by inadvertently picking "the 'wrong' folk".^[27]

Indeed, to ask whether Shostakovich resisted or complied in his music - to enquire, in effect, whether he was a "collaborator" or a "secret dissident" - is not an ideological but a moral question and, as such, one both fundamental and traditional to all critical apparatus, musical or otherwise. Nor, as I hope the material set forth above will have established, is there anything intrinsically "one-dimensional" in proposing that Shostakovich's music be set against the socio-political background of Soviet society and morally interrogated accordingly. The historical reality is abstruse, subtle, and multifarious. "Crudity" is merely in the eye of the ill-informed pundit.

Given the character of the Soviet regime, the charges of complicity and collaboration made by leading anti-revisionists are in effect a case for the prosecution, i.e., far from a moral giant, as most of his former friends and colleagues believe (and, so far as revisionists are concerned, his music self-evidently proclaims), Shostakovich was at best fearful, morally confused, and intellectually inconsistent; at worst a justly guilt-ridden trimmer who spent his life trying to suck up to a gang of outrageous political criminals. Those adhering to the Naive Approach naturally put a different spin on this: Shostakovich was indeed faithful to the regime - but why not? The USSR was, they assert on no discernible factual basis, a noble socialistic enterprise disfigured by Stalin's megalomania, but in other respects (apart, perhaps, from a regrettable lack of democratic free expression) morally superior to "capitalist imperialism".

Since we have before us what amounts to a preliminary case for the prosecution, it is the duty of those taking a contrary view to deploy a case for the defence. Such a case is, of course, fully argued in *The New Shostakovich* and *Shostakovich Reconsidered*. However, in a court of law, the logic of advocacy differs in kind from the first-hand experience and personal viewpoints of primary witnesses to facts adduced by defence or prosecution. Advocacy is rational and persuasive; witnesses are more immediate in impact - more vivid, more emotionally affecting. And, in the end, without such witnesses, neither defence nor prosecution can present an entirely convincing case. Since it is a well-trying tactic of anti-revisionism to imply that there is an equivalence of witness - and hence of credibility - on either side of the debate, it is time to make clear how far this is from the truth. We must turn to the witnesses for the defence in the case of Dmitry Shostakovich versus anti-revisionism and the Naive Approach.

II: The Witnesses

The largest single collection of individual testimony to who Shostakovich was and what he did is that edited by Elizabeth Wilson in *Shostakovich: A Life Remembered* (Faber & Faber, 1994). Wilson offers 81 individual "witnesses", of which around two-thirds constitute statements taken from existing books and articles, the rest being derived from interviews conducted by her or written contributions elicited by her during 1988-90. Of these 81 witnesses, 36 offer one or more statements showing that Shostakovich was disaffected with the Soviet regime in ways ranging from distaste to open hatred.[\[28\]](#) Of the remaining witnesses, 42[\[29\]](#) may be classified as neutral on this question in that their comments contain no explicit or implicit political content, although most are complimentary about Shostakovich's character and motives - dependable indicators in a totalitarian environment. (This would not be true of a similar list of testimonials to the character and motives of, for example, Dmitri Kabalevsky.)

Moreover, the testimonies of many of the "neutral" witnesses also strongly suggest, without giving specific positive evidence, that Shostakovich held the Soviet regime in low esteem (e.g., the testimony of Lyubov' Rudneva, pp. 248-55). Only 3 witnesses make statements remotely susceptible to the interpretation that Shostakovich ever, at any time, had any sympathy with communism - and one of these has elsewhere made emphatic statements to the opposite effect. All in all, a fair-minded person

would conclude from *Shostakovich: A Life Remembered* alone that the composer was seriously disaffected with communism; indeed one reviewer of Wilson's book, Terry Teachout, wrote thus: "*Testimony* or no *Testimony*, it is no longer possible to regard Shostakovich as a faithful servant of the Communist party. *Shostakovich: A Life Remembered* leaves no doubt whatsoever that he hated Stalin, hated Communism, hated the *apparatchiki* and the *nomenklatura*, and that much of his music was in some meaningful sense intended to convey this hatred." [30] Let us examine the testimonies of the 36 witnesses who make statements of this sort in *Shostakovich: A Life Remembered* (to which page numbers in the text below refer).

For the Defence

1) Zoya Shostakovich

The composer's younger sister provides an invaluable insight into the atmosphere of his home life during boyhood, a picture confirmed by Boris Lossky and Nadezhda Galli-Shohat. In common with other *intelligenty*, Shostakovich's father welcomed the revolution of February 1917 as a liberation from Tsarism (p. 6). However, his and his wife Sofiya's political views, far from radical or ideologically specific, appear to have been humanely generalised. "The atmosphere in our house," says Zoya, "was very free and liberal" - i.e., there were no prevailing sacred opinions derived from a fixed ideology such as Marxism or the programme of the Socialist Revolutionaries (SRs). Sofiya gave temporary shelter to "all kinds of people... Chernosotintsy [anti-semitic Black Hundreds] and communists included". This equivalence of right-wing anti-semites and communists implies that they were equably regarded by the family as similarly extreme (even though the latter included Shostakovich's uncle Maxim Kostykin). Otherwise, Zoya represents the Shostakoviches as effectively apolitical: "I do not remember talk of politics." (p. 6) This was at a time, between the February and October revolutions, when most *intelligenty* argued incessantly about politics. [31]

2) Boris Lossky

A fellow pupil of Dmitri's at the Shidlovskaya Gymnasium, Lossky confirms Zoya's contentions about the Shostakovich family's virtually apolitical outlook, recording that Dmitri's parents "belonged to the liberal traditions of the intelligentsia", adding that "the family was of a fairly conservative nature" (p. 30). In that communism is militantly atheistic, it is significant that Sofiya Shostakovich gave Dmitri's father a full Orthodox funeral which she took very seriously (pp. 30-1). It is of even greater significance that Madame Grekov, in her funeral oration, made an extremely risky reference to "the thinning ranks of the intelligentsia". By 1922, Lenin's antipathy to *intelligenty* who held views other than his had ensured that thousands of these had been executed or sent to the Gulag (Solovki). This places the Shostakoviches among the mainstream of the intelligentsia in that it would have meant automatic arrest to have said this at the funeral

of, for example, an SR (particularly in 1922).

Lossky (p. 12) recalls Shostakovich performing his *Funeral March in Memory of Victims of the Revolution* at the Stoyunina Gymnasium in January 1918 as part of a memorial for the *intelligenty* killed by communist troops whilst protesting Lenin's dissolution of the democratically elected Constituent Assembly.^[32] As for the Shidlovskaya school, Lossky describes its pupils as "chiefly drawn from the ranks of the 'out-lived'^[33] liberal intelligentsia who were unsympathetic to the 'official' [Soviet] bureaucracy of the day" (p. 13). One of these pupils, though, was none other than Trotsky's son Lev, with whom Dmitri "particularly" failed to get on. "During the spring of 1918, during Trotsky's rise to power," says Lossky, "Mitya never so much as hinted at any kind of sympathy with the 'existing regime', and I can vouch that this was the case until 1922". (In 1922, Shostakovich entered the Petrograd Conservatory as a full student.)

3) Evgeny Chukovsky

Chukovsky testifies that, in later years, Shostakovich recalled the publicly-displayed lists of those shot as "Enemies of the People" in the years after the revolution. Given the testimonies of Zoya and Boris Lossky, we can assume that this recollection was distasteful and, as such, representative of the young Dmitri's sentiments at the time.

4) Nadezhda Galli-Shohat

Shostakovich's aunt confirms the impressions of Zoya and Boris Lossky: "Mitya did not belong to any party, nor did Sonya [Sofiya, his mother]; and Sonya had lost her job partly on account of it." (p. 29) She adds: "It was clear that Mitya's position in the conservatory during this winter [1923-24] was only tolerated." So conspicuous were the young Shostakovich's lack of communist credentials at this point that a group of politically motivated fellow students tried, in spring 1924, to oust him and have his stipend suspended. (In September 1924, his home piano, on loan from Muzpred, was repossessed.) Galli-Shohat's contentions are supported by Nikolai Malko's claim that, in 1923, Shostakovich failed to answer a single question in the political section of his piano exam.^[34] Significantly, the only references to Lenin in Shostakovich's letters to Tatyana Glivenko occur around the time that he was being persecuted by communist students at the conservatory. Three of the four references are implicitly sceptical, including two instances of giving his address as "Saint Leninburg".^[35]

5) Valerian Bogdanov-Berezovsky

Confirming that Dmitri shared his immediate family's marked lack of interest in politics, Bogdanov-Berezovsky portrays him as "totally absorbed" in his music, an opinion echoed by the composer himself in a letter to the musicologist Boleslav Yavorsky (16th April 1925) in which he states: "There are no other joys in life apart from music. For me, all of life is music." (p. 30) Bogdanov-Berezovsky also remarks (p. 26) on the young Shostakovich's "early independence of thought and behaviour" (dependable Aesopian

code for "he wasn't a communist", inasmuch as independent thought and communist orthodoxy were, in practical terms, mutually exclusive).

6) Gavriil Yudin

Yudin describes the teenage Shostakovich's "ferocious wit and lively spirit" and recalls "all kinds of pranks, jokes, and improvised parodies which tumbled out of him in rich abundance". This tends to support Bogdanov-Berezovsky's hint that he was not a communist since, even in the 1920s, political orthodoxy and frivolity were incompatible in the USSR. That Shostakovich annoyed the conservatory's Soviet administrators is clear from the fact that, in spring 1924, his application for the post-graduate piano course was refused because of "his youth and immaturity". (Defying the conservatory council, Leonid Nikolayev gave him free piano lessons. In the end, Shostakovich found conditions so hard that he applied to be transferred to Moscow.)

7) Mikhail Druskin

Druskin confirms Shostakovich's love of satire and "keen eye for the ridiculous" (p. 41). He further confirms Bogdanov-Berezovsky's view of Shostakovich's outlook: "From his first creative efforts, Shostakovich occupied an independent position and defined his own terms in art without submitting to the aesthetic of the recognized authorities... His deep sense of responsibility towards life and art was an organic constituent of his make-up, and he totally accepted the moral principles behind these concepts." (pp. 42, 44) Anyone espousing moral principles in the USSR of the 1920s would have been identified as one of the "'old' people" in that the October revolution explicitly redefined traditional morality in terms of political expediency (i.e., moral decency ceased to exist, being replaced by communist doctrine). Druskin expands upon this by noting that Shostakovich was indifferent to, or aloof from, most of the fashionable left-wing art trends of the 1920s. Instead, "he searched for a more dynamic, complete expression of the national tradition within the context of modern-day actuality, resonant as it was with the dramatic events of a turbulent history, and a threatening sense of catastrophe" (p. 45). Druskin clearly implies that Shostakovich took a critical attitude to contemporary Soviet political developments.

8) Tatyana Glivenko

With its Leninist chorus, Shostakovich's Second Symphony is often taken to be a work exhibiting its composer's communist orthodoxy. There are several reasons to doubt this, but Tanya Glivenko gives a particularly strong one: that Shostakovich thought Bezymensky's verses for the aforementioned chorus "quite disgusting" (p. 61). This sentiment is voiced by Shostakovich himself in a letter to Tanya dated 28th May 1927: "Bezymensky has written abominable verses... I'm afraid I won't be able to handle them." This left-wing poem - which finishes with the fervent exclamations "October! Communism! and Lenin!" - is as creatively uninspired as it is "politically correct". The logical conclusion from his dislike of these verses is that Shostakovich himself was no closer to being "politically correct" in 1927 than he had been in 1924, when he was targeted as vulnerably apolitical by left-wing students at the Leningrad Conservatory.

Moreover, his dismissive attitude to Bezymensky's verses in 1927 is consistent with his later contempt for the communist libretti for his three ballets.[\[36\]](#)

9) Nikolai Malko

Malko confirms that Shostakovich despised Bezymensky's Leninist verses for the Second Symphony: "He simply laughed at them." He adds that Shostakovich had no more sympathy with the left-wing agitation group RAPM, the Russian Association of Proletarian Musicians, "and its limited ideas of simplification" (p. 62). RAPM was one of the groups used by Stalin as proxies to police his Cultural Revolution in 1928-32; as such, it was instrumental in bans or early closures for several Shostakovich theatre works of that era.[\[37\]](#) Former members of the proletarian groups continued to persecute Shostakovich through official bodies and committees until the late 1950s.

10) Pavel Maranchik

Maranchik records (pp. 78-79) a remarkable public run-in at the Leningrad branch of TRAM between Shostakovich and some RAPM representatives: "A fierce argument arose over the various ways in which Soviet musical culture should be developed. Shostakovich proved that in itself the term 'proletarian composer' was absolutely meaningless... and that many proletarian composers write noisy declarations and very mediocre music." In view of the conditions of the time, this was astonishingly outspoken behaviour and presumably the incident dates from no later than 1929.[\[38\]](#)

11) Yuri Yelagin

Confirming the claims of Glivenko, Malko, and Maranchik, Yelagin records that, in Akimov's 1932 production of *Hamlet*, for which Shostakovich wrote the music, the composer "angrily mocked both the Soviet authorities and [RAPM] who at that time were at the height of their power and caused much harm to Russian music and musicians" (p. 82). By 1932, conditions had eased sufficiently to allow such Aesopian satire to be presented on stage again, as it had been before the Cultural Revolution.

12) Venyamin Basner

Basner asserts that Shostakovich displayed "great courage" after the *Pravda* attacks and Composers' Union debates of early 1936, pressing ahead with rehearsals for his subversive Fourth Symphony until "the bosses" forced him to withdraw the work. (Basner's story about Shostakovich's alleged interrogation in 1937, together with his attached doubts about *Testimony*, are unreliable and not to be taken at face value.[\[39\]](#))

13) Boris Khaikin

Tonality was a political issue both during the Cultural Revolution and under the auspices of Socialist Realism after 1932. Minor keys were frowned upon; the "bright future" of socialism could only be associated with the major keys. Khaikin recalls a conversation with the composer in late 1937: "Shostakovich told me: 'I finished the Fifth Symphony in

the major and fortissimo... It would be interesting to know what would have been said if I finished it pianissimo and in the minor.' Only later did I understand the full significance of these words, when I heard the Fourth Symphony, which does finish in the minor and pianissimo." (p. 127)[40]

14) Mikhail Chulaki

Chulaki supplies an amusingly sarcastic account of the Soviet *apparat's* reception of Shostakovich's Fifth Symphony (pp. 132-8), showing that they did not understand it (trying to pass off its genuine popular success as a plot by the composer's formalist friends) and that its official acceptance was forced on the *apparat* rather than freely bestowed on Shostakovich as a "foreordained... immediate reward" (the words of Richard Taruskin, whose polemic on the reception of the Fifth omits any reference to Chulaki's deposition or to the supporting testimonies of Glikman and Gauk).[41]

15) Flora Litvinova

Litvinova, a long-standing friend of Shostakovich, wrote a memoir for inclusion in Elizabeth Wilson's book. A passage in which Litvinova implicitly gives credence to *Testimony*[42] was omitted by Wilson because she "did not want to get too involved in the whole vexed question about the authenticity of Volkov's *Testimony*".[43] Flora Litvinova got to know Shostakovich during his war-time evacuation to Kuibyshev, where he confided the meaning of his "anti-fascist" Seventh Symphony: "National Socialism is not the only form of Fascism; this music is about all forms of terror, slavery, the bondage of the spirit." Later Shostakovich told Litvinova "straight out" that the Seventh Symphony ("and for that matter the Fifth as well") were not just about Fascism, but about "our system, or any form of totalitarian regime" (pp. 158-9). Shostakovich, says Litvinova, was very upset by Zhdanov's ban on Akhmatova and Zoshchenko in 1946 (p. 201), while he and his wife Nina were "despondent" about the *apparat's* treatment of Soviet Jews (pp. 202, 206).

As for his view of communism, she recounts a conversation of 1956 in which Picasso's name was mentioned (pp. 271-2): "Dmitry Dmitriyevich burst out, 'Don't speak to me of him, he's a bastard.' We were stunned. 'Picasso, that bastard, hails Soviet power and our communist system at a time when his followers here are persecuted, hounded, and not allowed to work.' I interjected: 'But your followers are also hounded and persecuted.' 'Well, yes, I too am a bastard, coward and so on, but I'm living in a prison. You can understand that I'm living in a prison, and that I am frightened for my children and for myself. But he's living in freedom and he doesn't have to tell lies...' I tried to explain that Picasso probably didn't know what was going on in our country [and] pointed out that Picasso probably backed the idea of communism in general... 'And you, too, Dmitri Dmitriyevich, are for the ideas of communism.' He answered, 'No, communism is impossible.'" Litvinova is of the opinion that Shostakovich joined the Communist Party in 1960 under duress, because he was "simply afraid" (p. 308).

16) Isaak Glikman

Glikman is discreet to a fault and also somewhat naive. While his upsetting account (pp. 338-9) of Shostakovich's distress upon being forced to join the Communist Party in 1960 is sufficient in itself to establish the composer's attitude towards his country's political regime at that time, his commentary on Shostakovich's letters to him avoids overt political interpretations. Occasionally, however, he allows himself the luxury of underlining Shostakovich's political views in his observations on certain Aesopian passages in these letters - passages which, in themselves, establish the continuity of Shostakovich's anti-communism from at least 1942 (e.g., p. 175).[\[44\]](#)

17) Sofia Gubaidulina

Gubaidulina recalls that her generation (born around 1930) was very disappointed when Shostakovich joined the Party in 1960, believing him merely to have caved in and capitulated for "a carrot" (i.e., a measure of shelter and security). "I now realize," she adds, "that the circumstances he lived under were unbearably cruel, more than anyone should have to endure... I see him as pain personified, the epitome of the tragedy and terror of our times" (p. 307). It should be noted that the composers of Gubaidulina's generation were so completely disillusioned with Soviet society that disappointment with Shostakovich's capitulation was the only possible response for them; indeed, the very fact that his action was seen as a capitulation - rather than (as those Westerners who follow the Naïve Approach would assume) a confirmation of his principled communist commitment - is damning in itself and illustrates all too clearly why Shostakovich should have been suicidally agitated at being thus coerced.

18) Lev Lebedinsky

Lebedinsky confirms that Shostakovich "hated and despised" the Communist Party (p. 336) and suggests that the composer was tricked into signing the application for membership after having been "plied with drink". Lebedinsky continues: "As the date of the meeting where Shostakovich was to be 'admitted to the Party ranks' drew near, Dmitri Dmitriyevich's life became a torment. He went up to Leningrad, where he hid in his sister's flat, as if escaping from his own conscience... Shostakovich was so conditioned by fear that no logical argument or reasoning could reach him. In the end I literally physically restrained him from going to the station to take the night train, and forced him to send a telegram saying that he was ill." As a result of this, the Party meeting could not be canceled: "The authorities had to resort to deception, announcing that Shostakovich had been taken ill so suddenly that there was no time to notify all the invited Party members. Since an unprecedented number of people had gathered to witness Shostakovich's ultimate humiliation, in their eyes the cancellation of the Party meeting acquired the proportions of a major public scandal. They all formed the impression that Shostakovich was being pushed into the Party by force." (p. 337)

Lebedinsky relates the Eighth Quartet[\[45\]](#) to this chain of events: "The composer

dedicated the Quartet to the victims of fascism to disguise his intentions, although, as he considered himself a victim of a fascist regime, the dedication was apt... He associated joining the Party with a moral, as well as physical, death. On the day of his return from a trip to Dresden, where he had completed the Quartet and purchased a large number of sleeping pills, he played the Quartet to me on the piano and told me with tears in his eyes that it was his last work. He hinted at his intention to commit suicide. Perhaps subconsciously he hoped that I would save him. I managed to remove the pills from his jacket pocket and gave them to his son Maxim, explaining to him the true meaning of the Quartet. I pleaded with him never to let his father out of his sight. During the next few days I spent as much time as possible with Shostakovich until I felt that the danger of suicide had passed." (pp. 340-1)

Lebedinsky is categorical that Shostakovich was a lifelong anti-communist: "As a true democrat, he deeply detested the communist system, which continuously threatened his very life... When I remarked to Dmitri Dmitriyevich, 'You were the first to declare war against Stalin,' he did not deny it." (p. 335) Lebedinsky contends that Rayok was written as a secret protest against the Soviet regime in 1948 (pp. 298-9) and that Shostakovich originally composed the Twelfth Symphony as a satire on Lenin but rewrote it at the last minute, fearing that his intentions were too obvious (pp. 346-7). Elizabeth Wilson provides some corroborating evidence (p. 344).[\[46\]](#)

19) Marina Sabinina

Sabinina's evaluation of the Soviet cultural scene is particularly contemptuous. She describes Shostakovich satirically mimicking Soviet officials during the winter of 1949-50 (p. 225)[\[47\]](#) and recalls his tone of "venomous sarcasm" in speaking of them (p. 310). Most damning is her account of his self-revulsion at being forced to read out a "piece of idiotic, disgusting nonsense concocted by some nobody" (presented as his own opinion) at the 1948 Composers' Union congress. He "shrieked": "I read like the most paltry wretch, a parasite, a puppet, a cut-out paper doll on a string!" (pp. 293-5)

20) Yuri Lyubimov

Lyubimov confirms that, far from believing in and supporting the statements and articles which he read out or which appeared over his signature, Shostakovich often did not even read them - indeed would sign anything without looking at it in order to be left alone by Soviet officials, whom he despised and feared (p. 183). This fact is confirmed by Galina Vishnevskaya (p. 430), Sergei Slonimsky (pp. 430-432), and Edison Denisov (pp. 432-3).[\[48\]](#) Lyubimov adds: "People told me that he used to carry a briefcase with a change of underwear and a toothbrush in constant expectation of arrest... It is also recounted how he waited for his arrest at night out on the landing by the lift, so that at least his family wouldn't be disturbed if they came to get him."

21) Karen Khachaturian

"Shostakovich's favourite New Year toast reflected his philosophical irony: 'Let's drink to this - that things don't get any better!' After all, it was constantly being drummed into us that things would improve in our society; whereas we knew perfectly well that in reality things only ever got worse!' (p. 185)

22) Isaak Schwartz

Schwartz relates how, while his father was in the Gulag and his family internally exiled, Shostakovich secretly paid for his education during 1946-8, a period when Soviet Jews were being publicly persecuted as part of the officially approved post-war campaign against "rootless cosmopolitans" (pp. 219-222).^[49] Anyone aiding Soviet Jews at this time was by definition anti-Stalinist and in serious danger.

23) Rafiil Khozak

Khozak (p. 234) states that, in 1948, Shostakovich sheltered the Jewish musicologist Moshe Beregovsky while he was on the run from the Soviet authorities in Kiev.

24) Thomas Sanderling

Sanderling states (pp. 232-4) that Shostakovich always helped "innocently persecuted victims" in the aftermath of Stalin's death in 1953: "Anyone who came into contact with Shostakovich, whoever he might be, could not but be intensely aware of being in the presence of a person of great spiritual purity and moral fibre." (p. 419)

25) Abraam Gozenpud

"Shostakovich first showed his cycle *From Jewish Folk Poetry* at the Moscow Union of Composers early in 1953, just after the news bulletin in the press had appeared denouncing the Doctors. This provoked an immediate reaction from many well-known and famous persons demanding punishment of 'the murderers in white coats' (who were mostly Jews). Therefore, the performance of this cycle at that time was an act of great civic courage." (p. 238)

26) Natalya Vovsi-Mikhoels

Madame Vainberg describes how Shostakovich courageously wrote a letter of protest against her husband's arrest in 1953 (p. 231). For her, *From Jewish Folk Poetry* was "an open protest... against the hounding of the Jews in this last five year plan [1946-50] of Stalin's" (p. 229). She further recounts Shostakovich's amusement over the announcer's statement at the belated premiere of *From Jewish Folk Poetry* in 1955, concerning the line "Your father is in Siberia", that this sad situation "all took place in Tsarist Russia". Evidently, as with the Eleventh Symphony, the original historical setting had a dual (contemporary) focus and significance so far as he was concerned.

27) Zoya Tomachevskaya

"I was told by the choreographer, Igor Belsky, who produced a wonderful ballet on the

music of the Eleventh Symphony, that, when he consulted Shostakovich, the composer said to him, as if in passing: 'Don't forget that I wrote that symphony in the aftermath of the Hungarian Uprising.'" (p. 320) Flora Litvinova (p. 269) confirms that Shostakovich was eager for news of events in Budapest in 1956. Lev Lebedinsky describes the Eleventh Symphony as "a truly contemporary work... composed in the aftermath of the Soviet invasion of Hungary" (pp. 318-9): "True, Shostakovich gave it the title '1905', but... we heard in this music... not the police firing on the crowd in front of the Winter Palace in 1905, but the Soviet tanks roaring in the streets of Budapest. This was so clear to those 'who had ears to listen', that his son, with whom he wasn't in the habit of sharing his deepest thoughts, whispered to Dmitri Dmitriyevich during the dress rehearsals, 'Papa, what if they hang you for this?'"

28) Yevgeny Mravinsky

Mravinsky, in an article collected for Soviet publication in 1967, speaks Aesopically about his methodological relationship with Shostakovich during their collaboration on his symphonic music between 1937 and 1961. Referring to their first encounter at rehearsals for the Fifth Symphony in 1937, Mravinsky writes as follows: "However many questions I put to him, I didn't succeed in eliciting anything from him... In truth, the character of our perception of music differed greatly. I do not like to search for subjective, literary and concrete images in music which is not by nature programmatic, whereas Shostakovich very often explained his intentions with very specific images and associations." By starting this last sentence with his disclaimer, Mravinsky sets up a sceptical tone, thereby allowing an important revelation (that Shostakovich "very often" conceived his symphonic music in programmatic terms) to slip through "past the censor", as it were (p. 139).

In reality, as Yakov Milkis points out, Mravinsky himself likewise conceived Shostakovich's symphonic music in this programmatic way: "For instance, during a rehearsal of the Fifth Symphony, in the third movement, in the episode where the oboe has a long solo over the tremolos of the 1st and then the 2nd violins, Mravinsky turned round to the violin sections and said, 'You're playing this tremolo with the wrong colour, you haven't got the necessary intensity. Have you forgotten what this music is about and when it was born?'... I remember another occasion when he was rehearsing the Finale of the Ninth Symphony. He objected to the character of the sound in the celli and double basses when they play in unison with the trombones. 'You have the wrong sound. I need the sound of the trampling of steel-shod boots.' (We knew that he wasn't referring to ordinary soldiers, but to the KGB forces.)" (p. 315)

Shostakovich was reticent about "explaining" his music, particularly to anyone he did not know well, because he feared reprisals if such explanations ever reached the wrong ears. In the case of rehearsals for the premiere of the Fifth Symphony, he wrote a reciprocal account which Mravinsky quotes in his article. Again, the approach is Aesopian: "It seemed to me that [Mravinsky] was delving into too much detail, that he paid too much attention to the particular, and it seemed that this would spoil the overall plan, the general

conception. Mravinsky subjected me to a real interrogation on every bar, on my every idea, demanding an answer to any doubts that had arisen in him. But by the fifth day of our collaboration, I understood that his method was undoubtedly correct. A conductor should not just sing like a nightingale." [50] (p. 140)

The ingenuous tone of these comments is uncharacteristic. Shostakovich is known to have paid intensive attention to the tiniest detail during rehearsals of his works. (Indeed, Mravinsky goes on to describe how the composer objected when the cor anglais played an octave down during a tutti in the second movement of the Eighth Symphony [pp. 140-1], one of several such stories recounted by Wilson's witnesses.) This can only mean that Shostakovich's alleged "realisation" that Mravinsky was "undoubtedly correct" in grilling him on detail is a rhetorical pose adopted for the sake of conveying to readers the importance of paying close attention to the details of his music, wherein, one must presume, lie clues to its programmatic dimension.

That such programmatic clues depend on sometimes very small expressive details is indicated by Valentin Berlinsky's anecdote about Shostakovich firmly requiring the Borodin Quartet's cellist to play the low F at the beginning of the Third Quartet arco instead of pizzicato. The quartet made this change because they thought it sounded better. "Yes, yes," Shostakovich hastily replied, "pizzicato is much *better*, but please play arco all the same." (p. 245) We may deduce that the composer actively wanted a crude effect in this passage, having a programmatic meaning he wished thereby to imply. (I suggest a rationale for this in *The New Shostakovich*, p. 181.)

29) Yakov Milkis

Evidence that Shostakovich and Mravinsky not only collaborated in rehearsals, but also colluded in making Aesopian statements and gestures in connection with these rehearsals and the resulting performances, is supplied by Milkis, a violinist with the Leningrad Philharmonic. "Shostakovich," says Milkis, "never changed anything in his scores which he always prepared meticulously" - a carefulness which extended to his preparatory sessions with Mravinsky: "[Shostakovich] had many preliminary meetings with Mravinsky where every point, including the tempi, was agreed before orchestral rehearsals began." (pp. 312-13)

This throws an intriguing light on Milkis's story of rehearsals for the Eighth Symphony: "In the break Mravinsky turned round to us and said, 'Do you know, I have the impression that here in this place Dmitri Dmitriyevich has omitted something: there's a discrepancy between the harmonies of these chords as they appear here and where they occur elsewhere. I've always wanted to ask Dmitri Dmitriyevich about this point, but somehow I have never got around to it.' Just at this moment, Dmitri Dmitriyevich came up to Mravinsky, who put the question to him without further ado. Dmitri Dmitriyevich glanced at the score: 'Oh dear, what a terrible omission, what an error I have committed. But you

know what, let's leave it as it is, just let things stay as they are.' We then understood that this 'error' was deliberate." (p. 312)

In other words: (a) Shostakovich wished, via Mravinsky, to draw the orchestra's attention to a significant distinction in the score; and (b) Shostakovich and Mravinsky prearranged this piece of Aesopian "theatre" in their preliminary meetings, during which Shostakovich conceivably confided, in varying degrees of explicitness, the programmatic significance of passages like these.

Milkis himself is certainly convinced of this programmatic dimension: "I hear in all [Shostakovich's] instrumental music a hidden text and even specific words - and I hear a particular conflict, rather than a general drama." (p. 315)[\[51\]](#) Of course, were this programmatic dimension to operate in Shostakovich's music, it would have to be self-consistent within works and very probably across whole chains of works. This, too, Milkis is unafraid to propose: "Shostakovich's whole musical output is logical and consistent in its expression. Through it Dmitri Dmitriyevich found a way of registering a protest and of mocking the Soviet regime. However, the irony and sarcasm in the music are outweighed by a sense of profound tragedy." (p. 314)[\[52\]](#)

30) Kirill Kondrashin

Kondrashin's account of events leading up to the premiere of Shostakovich's openly anti-Soviet Thirteenth Symphony (p. 357-62) makes it clear what he considered the composer's attitudes towards the Soviet regime to be. Elsewhere,[\[53\]](#) Kondrashin joins Mravinsky and Milkis in discerning a programmatic dimension in Shostakovich's instrumental music: "The majority of Shostakovich's symphonies do not have titles and at first glance appear to be plotless. Nevertheless, contemporaries associate each of his symphonies with a specific period in the life of the composer... Several of his symphonies elicited such vivid associations with our reality that I developed them to full programme detail. Dmitri Dmitriyevich knew about my 'decodings'. He himself did not like to discuss the subtext of his music and usually said nothing, although he did not contradict me either. Since he was usually pleased with my performances, I believe he had no objection to such an approach to his music."

31) Fyodor Druzhinin

Druzhinin, who joined the Beethoven Quartet in 1964, shares the programmatic view of Shostakovich's instrumental music proposed by Mravinsky, Milkis, and Kondrashin: "People who lived in Shostakovich's epoch have no need to dig in the archives or to marvel at the evidence of repressions and executions and murders. It is all there in his music." (p. 390)

32) Mstislav Rostropovich

Rostropovich has made numerous statements in Western publications to the effect that

Shostakovich was the secret musical historian of the USSR but that the Soviet authorities were too stupid to realise the extent of his musical campaign against the Soviet regime. [54] Wilson quotes his opinion on *Testimony* ("basically everything that is stated there is true") (pp. 187-8) and his disclosure of the satirical presence of Stalin's favourite tune, "Suliko", in Shostakovich's First Cello Concerto (p. 323).

33) Galina Vishnevskaya

Vishnevskaya describes how the song-cycle *Satires* was given the sub-title *Pictures of the Past* in order to disguise its relevance to the USSR in the time it was written: "One of the poems was 'Our Posterity'. Though written in 1910, it had recently been published in the Soviet Union. Yet with the music of Shostakovich it took on an entirely different meaning - it became an indictment of the current Soviet regime and its insane ideology." (p. 342) Vishnevskaya's autobiography [55] contains the most sustained portrait of Shostakovich as an anti-communist outside the pages of *Testimony*. Wilson does not quote Vishnevskaya's direct statements on this subject, which are worth excerpting here:

"If in today's Russia the human consciousness is being more and more liberated, a great share of the credit must be given to Dmitri Shostakovich, who in his music, from the beginning of his career to the end, called upon people to protest against the coercion of the individual... An album called 'Shostakovich Speaks' and consisting of recordings of his public statements was issued in the Soviet Union. [56] How the authorities hastened to cover up the traces of the gradual murder of that great man! But they deluded themselves if they thought that by presenting Shostakovich in their package, by palming a Party card off on him, they had made him the very image of a loyal communist. Those statements, which run counter to his art and life, constitute nothing more than a damning document - a searing testimony to the communist regime's perversion and suppression of the individual... In his symphonies, those wordless monologues, there is protest and tragedy, pain and humiliation. If music can be called anti-communist, I think Shostakovich's music should be called by that name." [57]

34) Edison Denisov

Denisov quotes Shostakovich to the effect that he was forced to write *The Song of the Forests* (p. 302) and that prominent members of the Soviet government were tainted with blood (p. 303). When, in 1962, Solzhenitsyn's novella of the Gulag *One Day in the Life of Ivan Denisovich* was published in *Novy Mir*, Shostakovich (p. 304) told Denisov that the book was "reality varnished over; the truth was ten times worse than that", a view confirmed by the publication of *The Gulag Archipelago* in the 1970s. Denisov further confirms that Shostakovich's hatred of the Soviet regime was morally, rather than politically, driven. For this reason, he became ever more angry in old age over Soviet communism's systematic dismantling of traditional morality and human decency: "Dmitri Dmitriyevich always returned to one and the same theme: 'In my youth we were brought up on the Ten Commandments: "Don't kill; Don't steal; Don't commit adultery.'" But

nowadays there exists only one commandment: "Don't sully the purity of Marxist-Leninist teaching." (p. 433)

35) Nikolai Karetnikov

Karetnikov corroborates Denisov's claim of Shostakovich's preoccupation with the destruction of traditional moral values under communist rule. Shostakovich asked Karetnikov about a film which everyone was talking about. Karetnikov replied that he did not think the film would interest Shostakovich, since "the moral truths propounded in the film do not transcend the boundaries of what our mothers taught us in childhood: 'Don't steal, don't lie, respect your elders...'. Shostakovich replied: "But that's wonderful! That's wonderful! Indeed now, so to speak, now has come the time, the time when, so to speak, such things are necessary, these things should be constantly repeated. It must be a wonderful, so to speak, wonderful film. I'll definitely go, so to speak, I'll definitely go to see it." (pp. 308-9)

36) Grigori Kozintsev

"Music is not a profession for Shostakovich, it is the necessity to speak out and to convey what lies behind the lives of people, to depict our age and our country... In Shostakovich's music I hear a virulent hatred of cruelty, of the cult of power, of the persecution of truth..." (pp. 374, 371)

For the Prosecution

A) Lev Arnshtam

Arnshtam was a lifelong close friend of Shostakovich and is therefore vanishingly unlikely to have dissented from the view of the composer as an anti-communist put forward by the foregoing 36 witnesses. Unfortunately, Elizabeth Wilson includes an article "by" Arnshtam, collected in 1976 for a Soviet anthology,[\[58\]](#) which contains statements that suggest the teenage Shostakovich was enthusiastic for communism, including the claim that the composer's rhythmic sense was "forged by the rhythm and pace of the Revolution" (p. 23). This phrase is (a) a standard cliché of Soviet officials based on Proletkult ideas about "rhythms" and "tempos" of production, (b) a meaningless statement in itself, and (c) contradicted by the testimonies of Zoya Shostakovich and Boris Lossky.

As for the article's further claim that the composer "did not notice deprivation" because his "conscious awakening in life coincided with the Revolution", this is extensively contradicted in Shostakovich's own words in his letters to Tatyana Glivenko (1923-31), where his illnesses, depressions, and suicidal impulses bulk large while references to the Revolution are virtually non-existent. If Arnshtam did any more than add his signature to this nonsense, he may have interjected the ambiguous words "coincided with" in the above phrase. Sadly, he died in 1980, so Wilson had no opportunity to ask him whether or not he

would have consented to this article appearing in her book. For these reasons, Arnshtam cannot be counted as a serious witness for a prosecution case against Shostakovich.

B) Daniil Zhitomirsky

Zhitomirsky believed Shostakovich's Second Symphony to have been shaped by a genuine attempt "to glorify the October Revolution" (p. 72); he also criticised *Lady Macbeth* for not being free of the "propaganda tendencies of the 1920s" (p. 95). The first of these opinions is, on the face of it, demolished by Shostakovich's established contempt for Bezymensky's poem for the symphony (see above: 8. Tatyana Glivenko and 9. Nikolai Malko) and his own lackadaisical attitude to the composition of the work.^[59] The second of Zhitomirsky's opinions is unreconcilable with Shostakovich's lifelong regard for *Lady Macbeth*, which remained centrally important to him. Were such "propaganda tendencies" present in the opera, it would be reasonable to expect him to have stood by these only if he had been a lifelong communist, which he was not. As for the details adduced by Zhitomirsky, it should be pointed out that the end for which these were introduced into the libretti was arguably to satirise Soviet life. In other respects, Zhitomirsky, a friend of Shostakovich from the war years, must be counted among witnesses for the defence, as Wilson's remaining excerpts show (e.g., pp. 176-8, 328-9). That Daniil Zhitomirsky regarded Shostakovich as unequivocally anti-communist from the mid-1930s is clear from his extensive essay in *Daugava*.^[60]

C) Andrei Balanchivadze

Balanchivadze, a Georgian composer and brother of George Balanchine, befriended Shostakovich in 1927. It was at Balanchivadze's home in Tbilisi that Shostakovich finished the second act of *Lady Macbeth of Mtsensk* in 1932 and, when the opera was attacked in 1936, Balanchivadze came to his aid with a deposition (p. 80) concerning Shostakovich's alleged theories on "musical ideology". According to Balanchivadze, Shostakovich wrote to him "often" during the period of the Cultural Revolution. In one such letter, from which Balanchivadze presumably quotes, Shostakovich speaks of ideology as defined by attitude. In Marxist-Leninist terms, this contention is, of course, heretical. (Ideology, while undoubtedly born from attitude, is nonetheless an objective entity independent of attitude thereafter.)

What Balanchivadze seems to have intended by quoting this letter is to depict Shostakovich as a serious-minded cogitator on ideological issues, as opposed to the irresponsible perpetrator of musical "muddles" portrayed in the *Pravda* attacks. In the letter, Shostakovich begins with a comparison between the approaches of his hero Gogol and the "proletarian" RAPP playwright Alexander Afinogenov. He takes the comparison no further; apparently Balanchivadze is to know what is meant. Instead, Shostakovich proposes a contrast between two composers, Ivanov and Petrov (Smith and Jones), who each write a piece on the theme of "the Factory". Ivanov, with "the greatest professionalism", ends up merely imitating the rhythms and sounds of the machinery.

(Shostakovich may have had in mind Alexander Mosolov's then internationally notorious *Zavod [Factory]*.) Petrov, a more perspicacious fellow, hears these noises but sees something else: "He notices the pathos of socialist labour, the enthusiasm and dynamic energy of the working class, its tragedy in relation to its failures and its joys at its success in the overfulfilling of the Plan." This sentence, which is a sequence of contemporary propaganda clichés ostensibly copied from the front page of *Pravda*, is retailed with a straight face as if the author believes in it - precisely as similar passages of Soviet propaganda clichés are presented in Shostakovich's letters to Isaak Glikman.^[61] (As Flora Litvinova points out, "he excelled at parodying the bureaucratic lingo".)^[62]

The letter pivots on the Aesopian question and answer: "Which of them is closest [sic] to us? Clearly, Petrov." In fact, clearly neither the Mosolovian constructivist nor the pathos-seeking proletarian are "closest" either to Shostakovich or to Balanchivadze (who went on to become an admired symphonist in the colourful nationalist style of his Armenian colleague Aram Khachaturian). If anyone in these examples is "close" to Shostakovich, it is Gogol. Balanchivadze presumably hoped that Shostakovich's conclusion ("it is the attitude of the composer to a particular subject that defines his ideology") either sounded virtuous enough to deflect his attackers or was, as it was surely meant to be, ambiguous enough to throw them off the scent whilst indicating a more subversive interpretation. In any event, the statements about "ideology" in this letter cannot be seriously cited as evidence for the prosecution.

Why, though, would Shostakovich write Aesopically to Balanchivadze? For the same reason that he wrote in this way to Glikman: in case his mail was interdicted by the NKVD. But there is an additional reason. During the Cultural Revolution, when this letter was written, both composers were working for TRAM in their respective cities in order to obtain shelter from the Leftist attacks of RAPM. Since TRAM was also a left-wing organisation (merely a less oppressively censorious one), anyone working under its auspices would have had to present a degree of conformist appearance. Writing as one TRAM composer to another, it would only have been prudent for Shostakovich to have employed publicly accepted forms of political discourse of the sort found in this letter. In the testimony of no other witness in Wilson's book does Shostakovich animadvert on ideology, which, to go by majority opinion, held no interest for him.

In other words, none of the three ostensible "witnesses for the prosecution" adduced from Elizabeth Wilson's book are, in truth, anything of the sort. In fact there are *no* witnesses for the prosecution *at all* in *Shostakovich: A Life Remembered*. All of the witnesses in this book are either sympathetically "neutral" or plainly for the defence.

Summary

On its own, Elizabeth Wilson's book totally destroys the assumption of communist orthodoxy upon which the Naive Approach is constructed. Consequently the Naive Approach must be deemed obsolete, notwithstanding that writers like Christopher Norris and Robert Matthew-Walker doggedly and dishonestly continue to propound it.[\[63\]](#)

If the Naive Approach is a dead duck, the attacking brand of anti-revisionism I have characterised as the "collaborator model" continues to show signs of what, in certain departments of Western academia, passes for life. Yet the testimonies for the defence given here are equally fatal to any idea that Shostakovich acquiesced to the demands of the Soviet regime out of anything but fear for himself and his family, and under extreme duress. If such acquiescence can be called "collaboration", then the whole of Russia must be said to have been in a state of collaboration with the Soviet regime. Indeed, if mere acquiescence (let alone acquiescence under duress) is to be the criterion for collaboration, every citizen in every democracy who does not actively campaign against whichever party happens to be in power at a given time is a "collaborator" with that party.

If one is to play fast and loose with language, such a contention may seem acceptable; however, by the standard of those fascists and anti-semites in Nazi-occupied countries who enthusiastically co-operated with the Nazi authorities to betray or persecute their fellow countryfolk, such "collaboration" is so mild that it is plainly absurd to stretch the term to cover both kinds of behaviour. If Shostakovich can be shown to have betrayed and persecuted like this, either out of conviction or a wish to save his own life at the expense of others, then he may truly be called a collaborator. But there is *no evidence at all* that he betrayed or persecuted, while the idea that he held serious political convictions (in this case, in the ideology of Soviet communism) is, to go by the witnesses quoted in Elizabeth Wilson's book, simply out of the question.

In any case, the reality of conditions in the USSR was far subtler than anti-revisionism conceives. Many people of impeccable moral character (such as Vladimir Ashkenazy)[\[64\]](#) found themselves coerced by the KGB into offering information about their fellow citizens, and faced horribly difficult ethical problems as a result, striving not to comply with such requirements whilst at the same time maintaining an appearance of loyalty. Persecuted as he was, Shostakovich never had to confront such direct dilemmas (although we can confidently expect that he would have met them with the same "virtuously duplicitous" evasions resorted to by, for example, Ashkenazy).

Likewise, many people in the USSR carried Party cards merely as a disguise and a protection, believing in no part of the ideology which notionally came attached to such documents. (Kirill Kondrashin was once such.) Without an admixture of betrayal or persecution, this sort of pragmatism could only be termed "collaboration" by someone unacquainted with the practical dynamics of living in a totalitarian state. Even those unfortunate people - and there were thousands upon thousands in the USSR - who did betray their fellow citizens (and their loved ones) under duress of various kinds, can only be accused of collaboration if all extenuating circumstances are mercilessly disregarded.

Actively believing or venally self-seeking collaboration of the sort seen in Nazi-occupied Europe did

exist in the USSR, but it is a very far cry from anything perpetrated by the average citizen and certainly nothing remotely close to what we know Shostakovich to have done in the way of signing petitions without reading them or dutifully composing ridiculous works for Soviet state occasions. Indeed, the numerous stories of Shostakovich risking his life to aid Soviet-persecuted friends and colleagues run so sharply counter to anti-revisionist insinuations of collaboration that it is shameful that such insinuations have not been publicly withdrawn and apologised for. (Nor can the key anti-revisionist charge that Shostakovich collaborated by joining the Party in 1960 be seriously maintained after the publication of *Shostakovich: A Life Remembered*. As for the four alleged witnesses for the prosecution advanced by Malcolm Brown in support of this charge, not one of their testimonies survives the scrutiny of logic or contrary evidence.[65])

To the 36 "witnesses for the defence" herein adduced from the pages of Elizabeth Wilson's book may, at present, be added at least 17 others, including Shostakovich's son Maxim, daughter Galina, third wife Irina[66], Vladimir Ashkenazy, Rudolf Barshai, Andrei Bitov, Semyon Bychkov, Rostislav Dubinsky, Emil Gilels, Ilya Musin, Sviatoslav Richter, Gennadi Rozhdestvensky, Kurt Sanderling, Rodion Shchedrin, Yuri Temirkanov, Vera Volkova, and Yevgeny Yevtushenko. Nor do these include all of those to have gone on record as endorsing *Testimony* (around 30 witnesses to date) or Boris Tishchenko who (despite his by no means unreproachable criticism of *Testimony*) is known to share the prevailing view of Shostakovich as a moral anti-communist and secret dissident.

To this must be added the damning fact that there is no credible witness - not one! - to the contrary. (Tikhon Khrennikov is obviously excluded by definition.) I have demolished Fay's slurs on Shostakovich's motives for writing *From Jewish Folk Poetry*. (Since she has made no reply to my criticisms, the reasonable presumption must be that she has no reply to make.) I have likewise demolished Taruskin's theory on Shostakovich's motives for writing *Lady Macbeth* and his contentions concerning the official Soviet reception of the Fifth Symphony. (Since he has made no reply to my criticisms, the reasonable presumption must be that he has no reply to make.) Allan Ho and Dmitry Feofanov have demolished the anti-revisionist case against *Testimony*. There would seem, then, to be little left of the existing anti-revisionist position at the time of writing, though new attacks may yet develop.

At the root of the risible failure of anti-revisionists to come up with a single witness or a single sustainable argument to support their insinuations is a basic lack of interest in the Soviet background which, in turn, confers a basic ignorance of it. Whenever a new source turns up, they seem to skip lightly over the socio-historical aspects and alight on whatever musical details such a source may contain, however trivial. For example, David Fanning, in reviewing Elizabeth Wilson's book on BBC Radio 3, made no mention at all of its copious evidence of the political arm-twisting inflicted upon Shostakovich, let alone of the overwhelming testimony to his anti-communism, seizing instead on Edison Denisov's

claim (pp. 301-2) that, during a fallow interlude, Shostakovich kept himself occupied by orchestrating (and then discarding) all of Rimsky-Korsakov's songs. Fanning found this to be suspicious, but not because he doubted that Shostakovich could ever have needed to block out the world quite so determinedly; rather, because of the quantity of Rimsky's songs! It is this loftily superficial response to the whole subject of Shostakovich's life and work which lies behind the anti-revisionists' ignominious failure to come to grips with the background adequately enough to support their preposterous contentions.

Worse than mere superficiality, however, is the openly expressed indifference of Laurel Fay. Speaking at a meeting of the American Musicological Society in New York, on 3rd November 1995, Fay admitted that she deliberately pays no attention to the testimonies of Shostakovich's family and friends (i.e., the entire contents of her friend Elizabeth Wilson's book!) on the grounds that she considers these testimonies to be unreliable. She gave no evidence to support this contention but added that she "didn't want to become compromised by having them [such witnesses] tell me their stories and then being obliged somehow to retell them". [67] In other words, Fay ignores all 36 of the individual testimonies to Shostakovich's attitudes and motives quoted in this article - and, implicitly, the 17 others listed here. To her, the opinions of over 50 people who knew Shostakovich count for less than a demonstrably [68] bogus Soviet "toast" to "equality and mutual respect for the ethnic cultures of all the Soviet Union's constituent nationalities" printed on a front page of *Pravda* in 1948! Even a complete novice in this subject would know enough not to expect to derive an accurate, let alone an adequate, impression of it from reading *Pravda*. By taking her view of Soviet history from that tawdry propaganda rag, Fay turns herself into a scholastic laughing-stock. By cavalierly dismissing the testimonies of Shostakovich's family and friends, she disqualifies herself from consideration as a serious authority on his music. Her stance and conduct in this affair can only be called outrageous.

The attitudes of Richard Taruskin and Malcolm Hamrick Brown to the testimony of our "witnesses for the defence" are scarcely less defensible. The latter's claim that "it doesn't really matter how many ex-Soviets believe that *Testimony* is 'essentially accurate'" [69] is merely an echo of Fay's dismissive complacency. As for Taruskin, he seems either not to have read Wilson's book with close attention, or to have decided to ignore everything in it which does not conform to his prejudices, or simply to have farcically failed to understand any of it. For their persistent misinterpretations, misrepresentations and outright falsifications, these anti-revisionists deserve only history's contempt and, unless they soon mend their ways, that is what they will get.

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[1] *Nedelya*, April 1988.

[2] *Guardian*, 4th June 1990.

[3] Stephen G. Wheatcroft, "More light on the scale of repression and excess mortality in the Soviet Union in the 1930s" in J. Arch Getty and Roberta T. Manning, *Stalinist Terror: New Perspectives* (Cambridge University Press, 1993), pp. 275-290.

[4] Alec Nove, "Victims of Stalinism: How many?" in Getty and Manning, op. cit., pp. 261-274.

[5] E.g., Robert Conquest's review of Robert W. Thurston's *Life and Terror in Stalin's Russia, 1934-41* in *National Review* (15th July 1996), pp. 45-48.

[6] *Sunday Times*, 13th January 1991.

[7] Abbot Gleason, Peter Kenez, and Richard Stites, *Bolshevik Culture: experiment and order in the Russian Revolution* (Indiana University Press, 1985), p.74. Current estimates of deaths resulting from the Russian Revolution and its aftermath until 1922 are 20-25 million (Richard Pipes, *Russia under the Bolshevik Regime 1919-24* [Harvill, 1994], p. 509). Added to Klokova's guess, this produces an overall total in the region of Solzhenitsyn's estimates in *The Gulag Archipelago* of between 50 and 66 million.

[8] See *The Gulag Archipelago*. The Soviet use of torture, often assumed to have been introduced under Stalin, was in fact established under Lenin during the incumbency of Dzerzhinsky (see George Leggett, *The Cheka: Lenin's secret police*, Clarendon, 1981).

[9] "Mother Courage", 8th March 1998.

[10] Okunyevskaia's contention is supported in all five of the primary source books listed in this article. See, especially, Eugenia Ginzburg's account of life in the Moscow prisons during in *Into The Whirlwind*.

[11] *Sunday Telegraph Review*, 21st September 1997.

[12] "Fears" is also, of course, the title of the fourth movement of Shostakovich's Thirteenth Symphony, based on a poem evoking "the Stalinist era when everybody lived in terror of the NKVD and possible arrest" (Kirill Kondrashin quoted in Wilson, *Shostakovich: A Life Remembered*, p. 357).

[13] See, for example, the chapter "Fear" in Mikhail Heller's *Cogs in the Soviet Wheel: The Formation of Soviet Man* (Collins Harvill, 1988).

[14] Wilson, op. cit., p. 183.

[15] Not that this necessarily excluded unspoken dissent. Davies records the following peasant "joke": "A peasant went up to Stalin and asked him when socialism would be built. Stalin replied that it would be soon, in two years' time. And the peasant asked, 'So there will be no GPU or other guard?' Stalin said that there would not be. Then the peasant said 'Then we will shoot you all.'" Op. cit., p. 176.

[16] Ibid, pp. 168-82.

[17] See MacDonald, *The New Shostakovich*, pp. 109-111.

[18] Ibid, p. 176.

[19] See MacDonald, "Naive Anti-Revisionism" in Ho and Feofanov, *Shostakovich Reconsidered*, Toccatà, 1998.

[20] See MacDonald, "Thoughts on David Fanning's Shostakovich Studies", *DSCH Journal* No. 5 (Summer 1996), p. 17.

[21] E.g., Christopher Norris (ed), *Shostakovich: the man and his music*, 1982.

[22] This is not to be confused with "revisionism" in general Soviet studies which takes issue with what such revisionists refer to as the ideologically motivated "totalitarian model" they see as propounded by writers like Conquest, Medvedev, and Solzhenitsyn. (See, for example, Getty and Manning, op. cit.)

[23] Richard Taruskin: "A great deal of evidence suggests that in his later years Shostakovich became desperately obsessed with his historical image, and with the theme of self-justification. For he did have a history of collaboration to live down." ("The Opera and the Dictator", *New Republic*, 200/12, 20th March 1989, p. 35.) Malcolm Hamrick Brown: "As more of Shostakovich's contemporaries speak out and as reliable documentary information becomes available, the 'real' Shostakovich is likely to emerge as both a sometime closet dissident and a sometime collaborator." *Notes* (March 1993), p. 960; *melos* 4-5 (Summer 1993), p. 42.

[24] See I. MacDonald, "[Universal Because Specific: Arguments for a Contextual Approach](#)" and "Writing About Shostakovich: The Post-Communist Perspective" in Ho

and Feofanov, op. cit.

[25] See the contemporary statements of Christopher Norris and Robert Matthew-Walker.

[26] "The Opera and the Dictator: the peculiar martyrdom of Dmitri Shostakovich", *New Republic*, 200/12, 20th March 1989, pp. 34-40; "A Martyred Opera Reflects Its Abominable Time", *New York Times*, 6th November 1994, Section 2, pp. 25, 35-36.

[27] "The Composer Was Courageous But Not as Much as in Myth (Shostakovich's *From Jewish Folk Poetry* was not so much written 'for the drawer' as concealed in a belated panic)." *The New York Times*, 14th April 1996, Section 2, pp. 27, 32.

[28] Wilson herself, throughout her commentary, explicitly accepts that the composer hated Stalinism and communism (e.g, p. 333).

[29] Irina Kustodieva, Yuri Tyulin, Sofiya Shostakovich, Maximilian Steinberg, Olga Lamm, Lydia Zhukova, Nathan Perelman, Irina Derzayeva, Nikolai Sokolov, Tatyana Glivenko, Alexander Gauk, Tatyana Vecheslava, Galina Serebryakova, Nadezhda Welter, Arnold Ferkelman, Mikhail Tsekhanovsky, Alisa Shebalina, Grigori Fried, Nikolai Sokolov, Ilya Slonim, Mikhail Meyerovich, Alexei Ikonnikov, Yuri Levitin, Nina Dorliak, Nicholas Nabokov, Valentin Berlinsky, Lyubov' Rudneva, Tatyana Nikolayeva, Oleg Prokofiev, Mariya Konnikskaya, Evgeny Yevtushenko, Robert Craft, Sergei Slonimsky, Boris Pokrovsky, Peter Pears, Rudolf Barshai, Mark Lubotsky, Vladimir Ovcharek, Gennadi Rozhdestvensky, Sofiya Vakman, Evgeny Shenderovich, Krzysztof Meyer.

[30] "The Problem of Shostakovich", *Commentary* (February 1995), pp. 46-9.

[31] On the subject of whether Shostakovich witnessed Lenin arrive at the Finland Station, Zoya confirms this, recording that her brother was "in raptures", adding in mitigation: "Well, he was only a young boy of ten". Boris Lossky regards this story as extremely unlikely, calling it "sheer invention by the guardians of this Soviet composer's 'ideological purity'" (op. cit., p. 20). Lev Lebedinsky confirms the story with the twist that Shostakovich added: "I knew a dictator was arriving." (ibid., p. 335). There is no reason to suppose that, whether true or false, this event reflected anything serious about the young Dmitri's political beliefs, inasmuch as the only witnesses we have to these regard them as non-existent.

[32] 5th January 1918. Galli-Shohat puts the actual date of composition of the March a year earlier: spring 1917.

[33] I.e., the "'old' people", thus despised by communists as obsolete wishywashy liberal humanitarians.

[34] *A Certain Art*, p. 186.

[35] 26th April 1924, 3rd June 1924.

[36] Wilson, op. cit., pp. 89-91.

[37] E.g., *The Nose*, *The Golden Age*, and *The Bolt*.

[38] Among many thousands of *intelligenty* liquidated during the early years of the Cultural Revolution was Shostakovich's friend Mikhail Kvadri, dedicatee of the First Symphony, who was shot in 1929.

[39] See MacDonald, "[You Must Remember!](#)" in *DSCH* Journal No. 6 (Winter 1996), pp. 25-7.

[40] Cf. Yakov Milkis (Wilson, op. cit., p. 316) on the C major conclusion of the Eighth Symphony.

[41] See MacDonald, "Naive Anti-Revisionism" in Ho and Feofanov, op. cit.

[42] "In the last years of [Shostakovich's] life we met rarely, and not for long, or accidentally. And once, at such a meeting, Dmitry Dmitriyevich said: 'You know, Flora, I met a wonderful young man - a Leningrad musicologist [he did not tell me his name - F. L.]. This young man knows my music better than I do. Somewhere, he dug everything up, even my juvenilia.' I saw that this thorough study of his music pleased Shostakovich immensely. 'We now meet constantly, and I tell him everything I remember about my works and myself. He writes it down, and at a subsequent meeting I look it over.'"

[43] See Ho and Feofanov, op. cit.; MacDonald, "The Turning Point" in *DSCH* Journal No. 9 (Summer 1998). It should be noted that Wilson's avowed intent to avoid getting "too involved" in the matter of the authenticity of Volkov's *Testimony* did not extend to her editorial decision to include (op. cit., p. 125) Basner's charge that *Testimony* is "a falsified account" for the reason that it fails to mention the story of Shostakovich's interrogation in 1937. Although Shostakovich did not confide this story to him, Solomon Volkov was aware of it through other channels, but declined to mention it in his editorial commentary on the grounds of its manifest untrustworthiness (personal communication from Volkov).

[44] See MacDonald and Feofanov, "[Do Not Judge Me Harshly!](#) Anti-communism in Shostakovich's letters to Isaak Glikman" in *DSCH* Journal No. 8 (Winter 1997), pp. 11-14.

[45] Shostakovich sardonically described the Eighth Quartet to Glikman as "ideologically

unsound and of no utility to anyone" (19th July 1960).

[46] She also quotes the composer's third wife Irina's suggestion (given in a private interview, p. 345) that the finale of the Twelfth Symphony describes "a vision of the ideal ruler inspired by Pushkin's verses addressed to Nicholas I ('In Hope of All the Good and Glory' [1826])". Wilson adds: "In this case, the triumphant major apotheosis of the Finale can perhaps be interpreted as the victory of a much hoped-for utopia." Aside from the improbability of a realist like Shostakovich harbouring utopian ideals (let alone as late as 1961, after 44 years of the failed utopia of communism), Irina's suggestion and EW's interpretation arguably completely misconstrue the tone of the Twelfth's finale. While mingling tragic and satirical impulses in the composer's usual style, the movement, in particular its "triumphant major apotheosis", is clearly predominantly satirical, parodying Soviet triumphalist rhetorical conventions in the same way as Gavriil [Popov](#) in the eight-minute "apotheosis" of his Sixth Symphony (1969-70).

[47] Cf. Litvinova (Wilson, op. cit., p. 170) and Meyer (ibid, p. 463).

[48] Mstislav Rostropovich claims once to have found Shostakovich practising his signature upside down. "It's for 'my' articles in the newspapers," he explained. "It's so I can sign them when they push them across the table to me without having to turn them round to read them." *Classic CD* (June 1992), pp. 20.

[49] See MacDonald, "Naive Anti-Revisionism" in Ho and Feofanov, op. cit.

[50] A composer less likely ever to have wished his conductors to sing like nightingales would be difficult to imagine. Aside from Opus 4 No. 2, his music almost entirely lacks "nightingale" qualities (of the sort possessed, for example, by Rachmaninov's music, which Shostakovich disliked). In fact, Shostakovich is arguably more of a "speaking" composer than a "singing" one - hence his veneration of Mussorgsky.

[51] Cf., for example, Flora Litvinova's account of Shostakovich's minutely detailed plan for a musical setting of a passage in Gogol's *Dead Souls* (Wilson., p. 166).

[52] Just such a programmatic consistency is suggested by the present author in *The New Shostakovich*.

[53] [Statement by Kirill Kondrashin](#) read at a symposium held at Bucknell University, New York, 9th September 1980 (translated by Antonina W. Bouis).

[54] E.g., *Classic CD* (June 1992), pp. 19-21; *BBC Music Magazine* (February 1995), pp. 16-20.

[55] *Galina: A Russian Story*, Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1984.

[56] Grigoryev and Platek (eds), *Dmitri Shostakovich: about himself and his times*, Progress, 1981.

[57] Vishnevskaya, op. cit., pp. 399-400.

[58] G. M. Shneyerson (ed), *D. D. Shostakovich, Articles and Materials (Shostakovich: Stat'i i materialy)*, published by Soviety Kompozitor, Moscow.

[59] See MacDonald, "[Recent Commentary on Symphonies 1-5](#)" in *DSCH* Journal No. 7 (Summer 1997), pp. 9-10.

[60] "Shostakovich: the public and the private", *Daugava* (1990, Nos. 3-4).

[61] See MacDonald and Feofanov, op. cit.

[62] Wilson, op. cit., p. 170.

[63] Norris is still arguing that it is immoral to suggest that Shostakovich was not a faithful communist and that it is merely "fashionable" or "de rigueur" to claim as much (BBC Radio 3, 15th February 1998).

[64] Jasper Parrott with Vladimir Ashkenazy, *Beyond Frontiers* (Collins, 1984), pp. 77-84.

[65] See my reply to Brown in *Notes* (March 1994), pp. 1208-10. Brown seems to work on the basis that the unsupported assertions of a senior academic should, like the word of a gentleman, be accepted without question. Replying to the fully documented contentions of Allan Ho and Dmitry Feofanov in the AMS (American Musicological Society) email discussion group on 15th October 1997, Brown claimed that nowhere in the writings of himself, Laurel Fay, or Richard Taruskin could be found the assertion that "Shostakovich was Soviet Russia's most loyal musical son". This last statement demonstrates the Brown method in action: make an *ex cathedra* announcement and hope that no one shows it to be false; in other words, bluff it out. When Ho and Feofanov replied, showing where the phrase in question occurs (twice) in the writings of Richard Taruskin, Brown made no apology, offering only a piece of self-excusing obfuscation. Yet there was no reason for him to have got himself into this pickle in the first place. Had he simply picked up the phone and asked Taruskin if he'd ever used this phrase, the latter could have enlightened him straight away. Nor is this the only example of this sort of thing. Ho and Feofanov further enquired, in connection with Brown's partial reporting of Maxim Shostakovich's views on *Testimony*, why Brown did not simply ring up Maxim and ask for his views, as

they had. Brown has not explained why he did not do this - evidence of another airyfaery *ex cathedra* pronouncement without foundation. Now that he is being called to account for these and other examples of playing fast and loose with the truth, Brown, a man who has argued as robustly as anyone during this debate, is crying fainites - pleading that he, who accuses Shostakovich of collaborating with the Soviet regime and joining the Party in 1960 for his own advantage, has been a victim of *ad hominem* personal attacks (*DSCH Journal* 9 [Summer 1998]). Does he expect to be granted some form of academic immunity whereby he can sit safely in his office airily libeling a great artist without incurring any comeback? It seems so. Indeed, Brown now seeks to represent himself as an aggrieved moderate who does not understand the vehemence with which these matters are disputed. If he genuinely does not understand, he should not participate. If he does understand, he should check his facts before making his "authoritative" claims.

[66] Irina's supposedly dismissive stance on *Testimony* has been exposed as retrospective and motivated by, among other things, the question of royalties (Ho and Feofanov, "Shostakovich and the *Testimony* Affair", *DSCH Journal* 8 [Winter 1997], pp. 43-44). Moreover, with her other hat on, Irina is a signatory to the inaugural declaration of the Shostakovich Foundation (1992), which reads (in part) as follows: "The personality of Shostakovich proved a powerful moral influence on his contemporaries. During the hard and cruel era of Stalinism, he had the courage to express in his music the misery of his people by means of an extraordinary dramatic feeling, and to denounce the hidden forces which were then eliminating millions of human lives. His music became a moral support for all who were persecuted. Belief in the final victory of justice, instilled through his works, transformed his music into a powerful stimulus to the spirit of resistance and freedom... His work, of universal value, is recognised by all."

[67] Tape on file with Allan Ho and Dmitry Feofanov.

[68] *New York Times*, 14th April 1996, Section 2, p. 32. Cf. MacDonald, "Naive Anti-Revisionism" in Ho and Feofanov, op. cit.; or MacDonald, "Fay Versus Shostakovich: Whose Stupidity?" in *East European Jewish Affairs*, Vol. 26 No. 2 (Winter 1996), p. 10.

[69] *Notes* (March 1994), p. 1211.

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The Turning Point

Thoughts on Ho and Feofanov's *Shostakovich Reconsidered*

Ian MacDonald

I

When I set about writing *The New Shostakovich* in 1988, *Testimony* was being routinely disparaged in English-text newspapers and magazines as a worthless fraud; indeed, my immediate impulse for starting on the book was a short concert review in *The Independent* which referred, dismissively, to "the spurious *Testimony*". It was evident that the author of this phrase, like every other critic then writing on Shostakovich in English, had no conception of Soviet history and was therefore hopelessly unqualified to pass such a judgement. (Apparently he was also unaware that, two years earlier, the composer's son Maxim had given his endorsement in principle to *Testimony* on BBC television: "It's true. It's accurate... The basis of the book is correct.") Clearly there was a need for someone with a knowledge both of Shostakovich and his socio-political context to say why the trend towards confident rejection of *Testimony* was superficial, misconceived, and seriously misleading.

Having spent the 1980s waiting for someone else to do this, I decided, after reading that concert review, that if there really was no other writer in English both capable of the task and willing to carry it out, it had finally fallen to me, if only by default. I took this decision reluctantly, inasmuch as I regarded myself (as I still do) as merely a rank-and-file admirer of Shostakovich's music. However, I was spurred on by the fact that most of the so-called "experts" on Shostakovich in the West were (as they still are) little more than functional technicians with no grasp of history or cultural context, let alone any insight into the crucial role which these and other elements play in the formation of musical expression. Because of this, their "interpretations" of the composer's music consisted then, as they do today, mainly of empty exercises in meaningless formal analysis - a kind of critical autism unworthy of an advanced civilisation. I wrote knowing that saying this would draw a barrage of hostile fire.

Once *The New Shostakovich* was published, the bullets duly started whizzing around my head, mostly fired by sheltered men and women sitting comfortably at their pianos in university music departments or other similarly secluded locations devoid of material on Soviet life and culture. At the same time, and certainly not by coincidence, *The New Shostakovich* won the approval of precisely those critics who possessed a basic familiarity with Soviet history and Soviet cultural politics (e.g., Harlow Robinson, Seppo Heikinheimo, Gunther Schuller, Norman Lebrecht), as well as from every Russian who either wrote about it or corresponded with me after having read it (e.g., Maxim Shostakovich, Vladimir Ashkenazy, Semyon Bychkov, Andrei Navrozov). Around the time that the book appeared in 1990, several Russians who had formerly known Shostakovich (Rostislav Dubinsky, Daniil Zhitomirsky, Lev Lebedinsky, and Lev Mazel) published memoirs or articles which conveyed a portrait of Shostakovich

congruent with that given ten years earlier in *Testimony* and supported, in considerable detail, by *The New Shostakovich*. A fair-minded person might have concluded that there was a consistent pattern in this.

In fact, while this may not have been immediately apparent to the layman, there was an equally consistent pattern of difference between those who approved of what I'd written and those who rejected it - which is: the former knew something about Soviet history, whereas the latter were almost entirely ignorant of it. If this was hard to discern during the early 1990s, it became obvious in 1996 when Richard Taruskin published a supposedly scholarly essay on the Soviet reception of Shostakovich's Fifth Symphony which not only turned out to be a highly partial polemic ignoring crucial testimony already in the public domain, but which also depended on a view of Soviet history which even a first-year student of the subject could have identified as outlandishly ill-informed.^[1] As if deliberately to confirm that Taruskin's fumbling misconstruction of the facts was a consistent trait of those "anti-revisionists" who rejected *Testimony* and *The New Shostakovich*, Laurel Fay followed her colleague soon afterwards with an article purporting to show that Shostakovich composed *From Jewish Folk Poetry* not as a protest against concerted Soviet anti-Semitism, but rather as a dim-witted attempt to placate the musical *apparat* with a harmless piece of Socialist Realist folk-nationalism: "It was [Shostakovich's] rotten luck that of all the available nationalities, great and small, he just happened to pick the wrong 'folk' as his inspiration."^[2] Fay's contentions were based on an even grosser misconstruction of Soviet history than that of Taruskin - so gross, in fact, that two specialists on the Jewish aspect of Sovietology^[3] to whom I showed her article were incredulous that it could have been published as serious work, while a third such authority, the musicologist Joachim Braun (who regards Shostakovich as a secret dissident) responded as follows: "The meaning of Shostakovich's music is disclosed to the 'aware listener'. It is his 'rotten luck' that among the unaware are also some musicologists."

For the convenience of those interested in the Shostakovich debate, my rebuttal of Fay's claims^[4] has been combined with my earlier rebuttal of Taruskin's, along with other new material, as "Naive Anti-Revisionism: The Academic Misrepresentation of Dmitri Shostakovich" in Allan B. Ho and Dmitry Feofanov's *Shostakovich Reconsidered*.^[5] I would submit that no one who reads this essay is likely to retain much faith in the historical competence of the anti-revisionist lobby in Shostakovich studies. Indeed, the assumptions of Taruskin, Fay, and others in their camp are so transparently silly that they could only have been got up in haste by pundits who, realising too late that they have fatally neglected an entire dimension of their subject, now frantically wish to give a contrary impression and as a result perpetrate the neophyte errors which those faking knowledge of a complex subject are bound to make. Were they to submit their contentions in general Sovietological circles, Fay and Taruskin would be met with derision and forfeit their reputations. Luckily for them, academic specialists in 20th century music tend not to know much history.

The Western academics who reject *Testimony* and *The New Shostakovich* possess no discernible historical basis for doing so for the very simple reason that they have never adequately considered the historical context of Shostakovich's music. In his foreword to *Shostakovich Reconsidered*, Vladimir Ashkenazy is rightly scathing about this; indeed, every Russian who ever suffered under Communist misrule has a right to be angry with the fraudulent nonsense pedalled as authoritative historical comment

by Taruskin and Fay. Despite relativistic claims to the contrary, there is an objective core to history; this being so, a scholar is on his or her honour to respect the facts before launching into personal interpretations. In claiming that there was no contemporary intellectual resistance to Stalinism, Richard Taruskin shows only that he has done no reading on this subject. In claiming that there was no officially-coordinated Soviet anti-Semitism before the end of 1948, Laurel Fay comes close to committing some anti-Semitism of her own, albeit purely as a result of her amazing historical ignorance. Under normal circumstances, two academic reputations ought now to be hanging by a thread. However, this article is partly about predicting the near future in Shostakovich studies, and it is my guess that, given the historical naivety of most of the participating musicologists, Taruskin and Fay will be excused for blunders which in other academic fields would occasion the end of their careers.

Though woeful, the foregoing tale is merely a sideshow and, given the outcome I have predicted, it would be futile to waste further time on it. The only significant question presently at hand is: Who was Dmitri Shostakovich? In *Shostakovich Reconsidered* the answers are clear and cohesive. He was the man whose cast of mind, private opinions, and personal style are faithfully embodied in *Testimony*. Allan Ho and Dmitry Feofanov's case for believing this to be so is too intricate and sustained to be adequately paraphrased; in any case, no one who has any interest in the Shostakovich debate can avoid scrupulously sifting this argument, set forth in the authors' paper "Shostakovich's *Testimony*: Reply To An Unjust Criticism". Having said this, it is worth pointing out that one of the findings made by Ho and Feofanov during their investigation of the *Testimony* question is that four separate witnesses (Galina Drubachevskaya, Flora Litvinova, Rostislav Dubinsky, and Yury Korev) have independently testified to knowing during 1971-74 that Shostakovich was "talking" to Volkov, i.e., that work on *Testimony* was then in progress. Indeed, Central Committee documents prove that, despite her subsequent - stout and still continuing - repudiations of *Testimony*, Irina Shostakovich, the composer's third wife, was herself well aware of all this from the start. (In her own words to the board of the Soviet copyright agency VAAP in 1978: "Everyone whom this [*Testimony*] concerned knew about it. The journal *Sovetskaya Muzyka* knew about it as well." [6])

Overwhelmingly (by about ten to one), those with a respectable opinion about *Testimony* have endorsed it as accurate and convincing. These include Sviatoslav Richter, Kirill Kondrashin, Mstislav Rostropovich, Kurt Sanderling, Emil Gilels, Rudolf Barshai, Vladimir Ashkenazy, Yuri Temirkanov, Semyon Bychkov, Mark Lubotsky, Ilya Musin, Rostislav Dubinsky, Lev Lebedinsky, Ivan Martynov, Daniil Zhitomirsky, Rodion Shchedrin, Vera Volkova, Yuri Lyubimov, Andrey Bitov, Yevgeny Yevtushenko, Gerald Abraham, John Warrack, Yehudi Menuhin, Boris Schwarz, Harold Schonberg, Harrison Salisbury, Krzysztof Meyer, Detlef Gojowy, Seppo Heikinheimo, Torsten Ekbohm, and, crucially, the composer's son Maxim. Not least among several major coups in *Shostakovich Reconsidered* is the addition to this already impressive list of the imprimatur of Shostakovich's other child, Galina: "This book represents, fairly and accurately, Shostakovich's political views... I am an admirer of Volkov. There is nothing false [in *Testimony*]. Definitely the style of speech is Shostakovich's - not only the choice of words, but also the way they are put together." Addressing the vexed question of whether the notorious "signed pages" can be said to represent subterfuge on Solomon Volkov's part, Galina is categorically dismissive: "Maxim has shown me parts of the manuscript. There is no question that the signatures are [my father's]. Shostakovich did sign some stupid articles about

inconsequential subjects without reading them, but *he would not have signed something this big and important without reading it.*" [My emphasis.]

II

Shostakovich Reconsidered marks a turning-point in the study of Shostakovich. One can only agree with Vladimir Ashkenazy that anyone who reads Ho and Feofanov's book yet still maintains that *Testimony* is a fraud, that Shostakovich was not a long-standing secret dissident, and that these facts do not bear directly and consistently on his work, must either be obtuse to the point of insanity or suffer from an obdurate allegiance to Communism (which amounts to the same thing). Again, a reasonable person might be forgiven for assuming that the controversy over who Shostakovich really was is finally over and that we can now get down to examining his works in proper context without ignorant barracking from those too unaware of the facts to offer a valid opinion and too lazy to change their ways. On the basis of events over the last seven years, I would doubt this. Those who have obtusely held up the advance of Shostakovich studies during that time are, despite the egg on their faces, unlikely take the honourable course and admit their faults.

For one thing, they are not, and have never been, on the level. That is: they are less concerned with truth than with the health of their reputations based on statements they have made in the past. Their egos, rather than their intellects, are in play, with the result that they do not fight fairly. Ho and Feofanov's paper on *Testimony* and my own essay "Naive Anti-Revisionism" have shown how unprincipled is much of the work of the anti-revisionists. Misrepresentations by omission and commission abound. Suppression, too, is not unknown. Solomon Volkov's brief written replies to unjust criticisms by Malcolm Brown in *The New York Times* (1979) and Richard Taruskin in *Atlantic Monthly* (1995) were spiked by these periodicals and appear in *Shostakovich Reconsidered* for the first time. Similarly, David Fanning, introducing his anthology *Shostakovich Studies*, [7] manages to mention Galina Drubachevskaya's 1991 interview with Solomon Volkov [8] without pointing out that Drubachevskaya corroborates Volkov's account of how the interviews for *Testimony* were arranged. Richard Taruskin, too, cites Drubachevskaya in his 1993 review of the facsimile of Shostakovich's Seventh Symphony, [9] yet fails there, and indeed anywhere else in his subsequent writings on Shostakovich, to report that she confirms Volkov's claims.

Even Elizabeth Wilson, otherwise an honourable contributor to the cause of truth in Shostakovich studies, turns out to be, on the face of it, guilty of a comparable act of suppression. A 70-page memoir of Shostakovich, written at Wilson's request by the composer's friend Flora Litvinova, originally contained the following passage:

In the last years of [Shostakovich's] life we met rarely, and not for long, or accidentally. And once, at such a meeting, Dmitry Dmitriyevich said: "You know, Flora, I met a wonderful young man - a Leningrad musicologist [he did not tell me his name - F. L.]."

This young man knows my music better than I do. Somewhere, he dug everything up, even my juvenilia." I saw that this thorough study of his music pleased Shostakovich immensely. "We now meet constantly, and I tell him everything I remember about my works and myself. He writes it down, and at a subsequent meeting I look it over."

Wilson warns her readers at the beginning of *Shostakovich: A Life Remembered* that, "for reasons of space", she has had to cut passages from some of the depositions made for her by her many witnesses. Since this passage from Litvinova's memoir did not appear in Wilson's book, Ho and Feofanov asked her for an explanation. (They also took the trouble of checking with Litvinova). Wilson replied as follows:

Excuse my delay in answering, but for a variety of reasons I have had little time available. I also wanted to think carefully about my reply... The passage in question about Volkov was indeed there in Litvinova's original... You ask why I omitted this passage. It may have been a mistaken decision on my part, but I did not want to get too involved in the whole vexed question about the authenticity of Volkov's *Testimony*, so I tended to omit references, as it seemed to me material that was irrelevant to my main subject.[\[10\]](#)

It should be observed that had not the whole of Litvinova's original text appeared in the December 1996 issue of *Znamya (The Banner)*, no one would ever have known that she had made this crucial statement about the provenance of *Testimony*. As for Elizabeth Wilson's plea that she omitted the passage in question because *Testimony* (or the absolutely fundamental controversy surrounding it) was "irrelevant" to her "main subject", I leave it to others following this debate to pass their own verdicts.

Ho and Feofanov have not been afraid to describe some of the foregoing examples, along with other anti-revisionist misrepresentations and suppressions (though not Wilson's) as amounting to "an academic cover-up". Faced with Wilson's omission of Litvinova's testimony pro *Testimony*, and replying to Ho and Feofanov's charges, Malcolm Hamrick Brown, a colleague of Taruskin and Fay, responded as follows:

Wilson's own explanation for the omission certainly strikes me as lame and self-serving... But to declare Wilson's omission to be an "academic cover-up" and to suggest that this is but one specific example of an implied "many", but without further supporting evidence, seems intemperate and not in the spirit of academic debate.[\[11\]](#)

Brown's description of Wilson's action as "self-serving" is inaccurate and grossly unfair. Perhaps academics are used, casually, to applying this epithet to each other, and for good reason - in which case, Brown has possibly used the insult reflexively, without thinking very deeply about what he meant by it; or perhaps he had other intentions. It is, in any case, exceedingly difficult to see how Elizabeth Wilson could fairly be said to have served herself by excluding Litvinova's testimony; indeed, as she is clearly aware, she has placed herself in an embarrassing position by doing so. Nor, had her suppression remained undetected, would it yet be accurate or fair to call her action "self-serving", since there could have been no conceivable personal advantage to her in doing so; indeed, by any normal criterion, the

only personal advantage for her would have consisted in *including* Litvinova's testimony, for the reason that such revelations sell books. Only if Wilson should turn out to espouse some cause for which the omission of Litvinova's testimony is advantageous could her action be deemed to have been serving some purpose - whereupon Brown's charge that she had been "self-serving" in her action becomes not only inaccurate and unfair but redundant, in that it would have been the cause, rather than some purely personal interest, which Wilson would have been engaged in furthering.

What "cause" might have been involved? This is scarcely a question for Sherlock Holmes. The only cause for which the suppression of Litvinova's testimony could have been advantageous is that of anti-revisionism: those who reject *Testimony*. Yet Wilson begins her book by promising "a balanced reappraisal to discover where the truth lies". Can she, despite her assurances of impartiality, have been in cahoots with the anti-revisionists? On the face of it, this supposition is problematic, not least because her book amounts to a sustained rebuttal of the anti-revisionist position.

Defending herself, Wilson pleads that, in *Shostakovich: A Life Remembered*, she tried to steer clear of the *Testimony* debate (despite evidently having studied the book closely and notwithstanding several references to it in her anthology, some implicitly sceptical).^[12] Moreover, in her Preface, she implies that *Testimony* should be counted among the "extreme representations" which "cannot help to facilitate our understanding of Shostakovich's enormous range and depth of vision" - an inexplicable statement considering that the majority of the declarations in her book redound to the *Testimony* side of the debate rather than to the anti-revisionist side, while the historical narrative with which she links these declarations conforms in detail with that provided in *The New Shostakovich*.^[13] Indeed, as I remarked in my [review](#) of *Shostakovich: A Life Remembered*, "the full truth about Shostakovich, as revealed by Elizabeth Wilson's witnesses, is far worse than even *Testimony* suggests, and certainly exceeds the most pessimistic deductions made by me in *The New Shostakovich*".^[14] If Wilson truly imagines that the picture she has assembled of the life and times of Shostakovich is, in some abstruse way, less "extreme" than those portrayed in *Testimony* and *The New Shostakovich*, one can only conclude that she is somehow bemused as to the gist of her own narrative and quoted materials. In fact, I do believe Elizabeth Wilson to be in some degree bemused in this way; yet she is an intelligent, informed, well-qualified writer. How can she be thus befuddled? I would suggest that Wilson's confusion stems from her friendship with Laurel Fay.

Having apparently accepted without question Fay's criticisms of *Testimony*,^[15] it seems that Wilson finds it impossible, or at least very difficult, to recognise that *Testimony* is nonetheless authentic in fact and endorsed as a truthful representation of Shostakovich by almost everyone who knew him. Her ability to maintain an independent view on this is further compromised by her professional and personal closeness to Fay. In the Acknowledgements to *Shostakovich: A Life Remembered*, Wilson writes as follows: "I wish to express my gratitude to Laurel Fay... Apart from allowing me to indulge in stimulating discussions, arguments and speculations with her, she kept me up to date with new publications when I was housebound in Italy." This is the warmest of Wilson's Acknowledgements (which include a "debt of deepest gratitude" conceded to Irina Shostakovich). That Fay reciprocates Wilson's feelings is confirmed by her reference (after her address to the American Musicological Society

in New York on 3rd November 1995) to Wilson as her "close friend".[\[16\]](#)

It is reasonable to suppose that Elizabeth Wilson "did not want to get too involved in the whole vexed question about the authenticity of Volkov's *Testimony*" for reasons not unconnected with her close relationship with the leading enemy of "Volkov's *Testimony*", Laurel Fay. It is, of course, entirely possible that, during the "stimulating discussions, arguments and speculations" Wilson "indulged in" with Fay, the topic of Flora Litvinova's remarkable claim about the "wonderful young man - a Leningrad musicologist" simply never came up and was never considered. If this actually was the case, Elizabeth Wilson may care to confirm it. Perhaps given her faith in her colleague's infallibility, Wilson decided not to raise the issue with Fay for fear of distracting her from completing her long-awaited book on Shostakovich? On the other hand, such surprising first-hand evidence would surely have been of pressing interest to someone engaged in such a task? - particularly to one who has based her reputation in Shostakovich studies on a full-tilt attack on the probity of the very writer and the legitimacy of the very book to whom and to which Flora Litvinova may be reasonably supposed to be referring in this pregnant passage.

Is Elizabeth Wilson guilty of suppression of vital information? Objectively speaking, the answer can only be Yes. However, the extenuating circumstances are substantial and, I would argue, absolve her of anything amounting to deliberate suppression of evidence awkward to her case (unlike the cited examples involving Taruskin and Fanning). As she herself pleads, she was, when she cut the passage from Litvinova's memoir, engaged in making no case about *Testimony*. Although she implies in her book that *Testimony* is a discountable source, she mounts no direct attack on it. Does this, then, mean that she was not, after all, allying herself with the anti-revisionist "cause" by excluding the passage in question (and, presumably, by omitting to show it to her guru Laurel Fay)? I would suggest that she did, in fact, thereby ally herself with anti-revisionism - but passively rather than actively. Wilson is astute enough to recognise that there is an overwhelming consistency to the evidence presented in her book, and that this consistency redounds to the revisionist, rather than to the anti-revisionist, side. Her friendship with Fay, on the other hand, naturally pulled her the other way. Unable to resolve this, she ducked the issue by cutting the passage in question. Unfortunately for her, she in effect thereby suppressed crucial evidence.

Apart from the question of the evidence itself, why is it necessary to go so carefully through the issues involved in this case? Firstly, because Elizabeth Wilson has in no other respect shown herself to be a dishonourable person. To call her "self-serving", as Malcolm Hamrick Brown casually does, is contemptible. Secondly, because her invidious position vis-a-vis the Litvinova testimony has arisen, not from any willful attempt to pervert the course of the Shostakovich debate, but because, like others less honest than her, she has allowed herself to be browbeaten, or at least intellectually "leant on", by the leading anti-revisionists, whose use of bullying and insulting language towards their opponents and ostentatious parading of their alleged expertise has, I would submit, been designed to throw dust in the eyes of the general audience and to coerce less informed fellow pundits into their camp. The paranoiac malice with which the anti-revisionist campaign has been waged has been deliberately disconcerting to those whose views happen to be unsupported by a firm grasp of the relevant issues. In the matter of Flora Litvinova's testimony, Wilson, for all her knowledge, temporarily allowed herself to become one

of these. Such are the pressures of this intense debate. Such is the debased level to which it often sinks.

III

Suppression - the sort of suppression (along with misrepresentation) which Ho and Feofanov adduce in their claims of an "academic cover-up" - may, as we have seen, take several forms, one being suppression through intellectual intimidation. By this I mean the use, in the absence of factual evidence and cogent argument, of coarse insults and the bullying adoption of (to borrow an ethological term) the dominant posture of the "alpha" animal. Ironically, it appears that some pundits on the anti-revisionist side have, from time to time, felt thus intimidated - presumably by me. David Fanning, in his introduction to *Shostakovich Studies*, seems to be expressing such a sentiment: "It is time," he declares, "to let all who care about Shostakovich's music speak for themselves and in their own way." Since what I have written on Shostakovich is either densely factual or carefully argued, I can only deplore what, in this case, seems to be no more than an expression of vague subjective dismay at finding one's views challenged in fact and thought. If one feels intimidated merely by the fact of being opposed, one is unwise to make contentious statements to begin with. There is a difference between reasoned remonstrance and bullying bluster.

As for bullying bluster, let us examine a few examples. Addressing a meeting of the American Musicological Society in New York on 3rd November 1995 (long before I had ever written a critical word about her), Laurel Fay referred to my book *The New Shostakovich* as "a moronic tract". Fay's surprisingly broad insult, I would suggest, was coined less in the forlorn hope of intimidating me than of browbeating the members of her audience into banishing from their minds any suspicion that *The New Shostakovich* might be a book worthy of the attention of intelligent people. What Fay was attempting to do by using this epithet was to consign a fellow writer's work wholesale to oblivion rather than attempt to confront the material within its pages with which she disagreed. Conceivably many in her audience were coerced in the manner she intended and have never since been able to pick up a copy of *The New Shostakovich* for fear of Laurel Fay leaping out from behind the curtains and calling them morons for doing so. It is true that I find it piquantly amusing to be called a moron by someone whose knowledge of Soviet history is barely above the kindergarten level; yet I have taken the trouble to substantiate my counter-claims in this regard and so have earned the right to return her scorn with a little of my own. This does not alter the fact that her behaviour in this matter is utterly deplorable.

In his review of Richard Taruskin's recent book on Stravinsky in *Tempo*, Gerard McBurney, a sensible and informed commentator on Shostakovich, reported that "Taruskin writes (and indeed talks) with the unmistakably ungentlemanly air of a bully".^[17] In his essay on Shostakovich's Fifth Symphony in Fanning's *Shostakovich Studies*, Taruskin raises bullying bluster into a minor art form. He calls his enemies (i.e., those who take a different view from him) "egoistic trivialisers",^[18] excoriates "their hypocrisy, their criminality",^[19] and accuses me personally of dishonourable conduct, of having "resorted to the rank tactic of guilt by association", of committing acts of "vile trivialisation" and

"McCarthyism", and of being "the very model of a Stalinist critic".[\[20\]](#) Were his historical knowledge and his arguments sound, I might have been more impressed by Taruskin's invective. Yet, as I have shown - without response from him since my reply to his essay was published two years ago - his account of the circumstances surrounding the early performances of Shostakovich's Fifth Symphony is fundamentally awry, depends on the omission of testimony that contradicts it, and is advanced within the framework of a view of Shostakovich's intellectual position which is unsupported by any known account of the historical context of Soviet life and culture (upon which the bibliography is vast). Taruskin's essay on Shostakovich's Fifth is either dishonest or incompetent, or a blend of both.

The heated abuse which, from time to time, lunges like a brandished fist through the haze of Taruskin's befogged harangue seems to be partly an expression of its author's spleen; more reprehensibly, it appears, like Fay's outburst, to be designed to cow any possibility of dissent. While it would never occur to me to liken Richard Taruskin to Joseph Stalin in this respect - at the risk of losing my sense of humour, that really *would* be a piece of vile trivialisation - I would suggest that here, again, is the motif of suppression through intellectual intimidation. What, after all, are the readers of Taruskin's tirade likely to deduce from the tone in which it is prosecuted? - That, if for a moment they imagine Shostakovich to have been a secret dissident, they will be perpetrating "a self-gratifying anachronism", proving themselves to be "would-be romanticisers", and displaying "smug vulgarity, insipid pretension".[\[21\]](#) Taruskin's medley of bullying insults has, I would submit, nothing whatever in common with reasoned and scholarly persuasion. On the contrary, it amounts to a brutal attempt to extinguish objections or contradictory thoughts before they can so much as arise.

Such a strategy undoubtedly reaps rewards. Those who prefer not to tire themselves by going to the trouble of forming their own opinions are generally grateful to have a ready-made intellectual position handed to them on a plate (or, in this case, thrust upon them roughly with a menacing air). The lazy parroting of idle common-room rumour is a standard feature of life among second-rate academics and their media cousins, each of whom will deferentially swallow any amount of nonsense so long as it comes to them courtesy of a lady or gentleman with letters after their name.[\[22\]](#) First-rate academics - those who maintain scholastic integrity and hence never find themselves stooping in panic to hide historical solecisms behind falsehoods, or to conceal distortions under further distortions; those who weigh the evidence (all the evidence) without lapsing into prejudice, and use their own considered judgement to reach a measured conclusion - are thin on the ground in Shostakovich studies. Instead, we have Richard Taruskin and Laurel Fay. We also have Malcolm Brown.

In a passage quoted above, Malcolm Brown opines that to declare Elizabeth Wilson's omission of Flora Litvinova's testimony to be a species of "academic cover-up" - "and to suggest that this is but one specific example of an implied 'many', but without further supporting evidence" - seems (and I quote) "intemperate and not in the spirit of academic debate". Can this Malcolm Brown, now pleading for temperate debate, be the same gentleman who, four years ago, described my book *The New Shostakovich* as "nothing so much as Soviet hard-line criticism in reverse, but [sic] no less primitive and one-dimensional" and who responded to my careful rebuttal of his criticisms with the following unprovoked display of incoherent petulance?

Ian MacDonald just doesn't get the point that it makes ordinary commonsense *not* to trust someone you know to be a liar, and that's what we know Solomon Volkov to be. It doesn't really matter how many ex-Soviets believe that *Testimony* is "essentially accurate". MacDonald also doesn't get the point that... [and so on in this vein.][23]

Is this temperate? It is tropical. Does it even make sense? Scarcely. Solomon Volkov has not been shown to be a liar; Malcolm Brown sees fit to call him one - a different matter. Even if Volkov had been shown to have lied on a particular question, it would be neither logical nor sensible to assume that everything else he utters is a lie; as in every other walk of life, one must employ one's judgement in conjunction with the evidence (all the evidence). Brown himself has repeatedly misrepresented Maxim Shostakovich's view of *Testimony* by ignoring statements by Maxim which do not fit his thesis. To take one example, he disregards Maxim's 1986 declaration that he considers *Testimony* to be "true, accurate, basically correct" - a verdict cited prominently in *The New Shostakovich* and which we may therefore assume Brown to have encountered. To pretend, in effect, that Maxim Shostakovich never said this is tantamount to a lie. Does it follow that it is necessary to ignore everything else Brown says?[24] As for the extraordinary sentence "It doesn't really matter how many ex-Soviets believe that *Testimony* is 'essentially accurate'", it is astonishing to find such stuff emanating from a tenured academic. Brown's *a priori* dismissal of evidence inexpedient to his prejudices - not to mention his implied denigration of figures like Vladimir Ashkenazy, Mstislav Rostropovich, Semyon Bychkov, Ilya Musin, Andrey Bitov, and Yevgeny Yevtushenko as (mere) "ex-Soviets" - is so far from "temperate debate" that it is incredible that an academic journal should have printed it. Yet *Notes*[25] not only printed it without scruple, but bestowed on Brown its Eva Judd O'Meara Award for the best review published in its pages. Behold the state of academic life in the American musical world of the 1990s. That there is an audience for this sort of thing seems to be confirmed by the flocks of hangers-on which Brown apparently leads around with him from debate to debate. But perhaps by now the reader is wise enough to the strategy of bullying bluster used by the anti-revisionists to demand the protective application of some ironic inverted commas, viz: "...which Brown apparently leads around with him from 'debate' to 'debate'." For, in truth, the routinely and calculatedly abusive "debating" style of the anti-revisionists is adopted expressly to discourage the growth of any real debate at all.

IV

Can such naked attempts to suppress potential opposition by means of intellectual intimidation be described as an "academic cover-up"? Not on their own. But taken in conjunction with the direct suppressions of material mentioned earlier and the many, often gross, examples of anti-revisionist misrepresentation by commission and omission examined in the opening and closing essays of Ho and Feofanov's *Shostakovich Reconsidered*, the accusation of an academic cover-up becomes all too legitimate. Yet, while evidence of the crime is plentiful, the layman could be forgiven for wondering what conceivable motive there could be for committing it.

Why should several Western academics risk their reputations to enforce, chiefly by foul means, a view of Shostakovich and his work which is so sharply at variance with the views expressed by those Russians and East Europeans who actually knew and worked with the composer? The academics in question would have us believe that they are soldiers for truth - and that part of the truth is that Shostakovich's former associates are, by and large, either fibbing, mistaken, romanticising the past, or, for various reasons, to be discounted *a priori* as unreliable witnesses. If this were the case, it would certainly amount to a cover-up, albeit from the other side of the divide. Yet these academics have never formally made such a charge. Why not? It may, of course, never have occurred to them; or perhaps they are unable to establish that a concerted effort, such as would merit the accusation of a cover-up, operates behind the many Russian expressions of support for *Testimony* and its portrait of Shostakovich, or motivates other witnesses who have given their own independent portraits of Shostakovich which also happen closely to resemble that of *Testimony*. Indeed, such a concerted effort (conspiracy) would have been extremely difficult to initiate and coordinate over so many years and between so many people - not least because some of these people, when it comes to other subjects (and sometimes on points of detail regarding Shostakovich), often bitterly disagree with each other.

Turning, then, from fantastic speculation to something more down to earth, what is the rival truth about Shostakovich advocated by the anti-revisionists? - And is this truth of such a sort as to be plausibly implicated in a putative academic cover-up?

In 1993, Malcolm Brown hazarded that "as more of Shostakovich's contemporaries speak out and as reliable documentary information becomes available, the 'real' Shostakovich is likely to emerge as both a sometime closet dissident and a sometime collaborator".^[26] This hostile verdict was based on statements by four former contemporaries of Shostakovich: Genrikh Orlov, Grigori Fried, Viktor Bobrovsky, and Edison Denisov. These statements (which offer no facts to substantiate Brown's claim that Shostakovich was "a sometime collaborator") are based on assumptions easily rebutted either by logic or by statements to the contrary made by those closer to the composer.^[27] In the same context, Brown baldly asserted that "few former Soviet musicians who lived through that period believe that Shostakovich, in his position as leading Soviet composer, was compelled to apply for Party membership". I have twice asked Brown to justify this claim;^[28] he has made no response. Nor has Brown ever confronted the statements from musicians and others who "lived through that time" yet believed precisely the opposite about Shostakovich's 1960 application for Party membership: Lev Lebedinsky,^[29] Kirill Kondrashin,^[30] Vladimir Ashkenazy,^[31] Flora Litvinova,^[32] Maxim Shostakovich,^[33] and Yevgeny Yevtushenko.^[34] Indeed one of Brown's four witnesses, Edison Denisov, contradicts Brown's general insinuation within the very statement Brown adduces from him: "They made [Shostakovich] secretary of the Russian Union of Composers *because they needed his name for cover!*" (My italics.) Worse still for Brown, Isaak Glikman - in *Letters to a Friend*, published in 1993: the year Brown made his assertions - gives an horrific account of Shostakovich's distress "brought on [in the words of Elizabeth Wilson] by his enforced enrollment into the detested Communist Party".^[35] Glikman's evidence confirms Lebedinsky's contention that Shostakovich was wildly distraught over this affair^[36] - a contention published three years before Brown called Shostakovich "a sometime collaborator" and claimed that "few former Soviet musicians believe that Shostakovich... was compelled

to apply for Party membership". Such idly callous slanders constitute Brown's "rival truth" about Shostakovich. We have heard no more of these claims since he made them in 1993: no explanation, no apology. Perhaps he stands by them; or perhaps he blusters in an effort to make us forget them?

Laurel Fay's infantile suggestion, made in 1996, that Shostakovich, being somewhat spineless and stupid, wrote *From Jewish Folk Poetry* in a comically misconceived effort to curry favour with the Soviet authorities, but "just happened to pick the wrong 'folk' as his inspiration", is evidently cut from the same cloth as Brown's, i.e., Shostakovich was a craven mess whose greatest music (we are forced to assume) displays moral stature only by virtue of the same completely serendipitous process by which he blundered into choosing the Jews as his subject in summer 1948. In other words, Shostakovich, a sort of *idiot savant* whose intelligence was a figment of his friends' imaginations, composed great music purely by accident. This inane scenario recalls Richard Taruskin's description of Shostakovich's alleged bumbling attempts to tickle Stalin's fancy with *Lady Macbeth*: "What a dismal surprise awaited [him]! How completely [he] had misunderstood the nature of Stalinism!" [37] By now we are getting the picture: Shostakovich was a feeble-minded trimmer who spent half his career on his knees trying desperately to get accepted into the Communist Party by composing something which didn't misunderstand the nature of Stalinism or pick the wrong folk as its inspiration. This, broadly speaking (and that, one feels, is the appropriate dialect here), is the "rival truth" of anti-revisionism.

Those who have taken the trouble to read *Shostakovich: A Life Remembered* and *Shostakovich Reconsidered*, and who are not so frightened by Laurel Fay as to have been entirely scared away from *The New Shostakovich*, will know this "rival truth" to be radically at variance with the overwhelming majority of Russian testimony on Shostakovich. There is no simpler way of putting this: you believe those who know the historical background because they personally lived through it and lack any rational motive for conspiring to misrepresent Shostakovich as a secret dissident or for characterising his music in that spirit; or you believe a tiny caucus of second-rate Western academics who, as the composer Rodion Shchedrin recently told Toccata Press's proprietor and editor-in-chief Martin Anderson, "know nothing about it". [38]

V

Under the circumstances, it would be strange indeed if the anti-revisionists had not started to suspect - or, perhaps (perish the thought) had known all along - that they were grotesquely wrong about Shostakovich and the significance of his work. Let us suppose that they *have* begun to realise this. They are unlikely to apologise for their past statements, since apologising would imply either that they had not understood the subject on which their reputations depend, or that they had "debated" unfairly by using intellectual intimidation and by suppressing or misrepresenting aspects of the record. As an alternative to making such apologies, the anti-revisionists would, it is safe to assume, be likely to pursue the following parallel courses of action:

(1) to quietly and gradually abandon their former posture and move closer to the revisionist position, declaring as they do so that they are assuming a notional "middle ground" - a supposed point of balance between "extremes" from which they may re-establish themselves as "temperate" arbiters of the real truth about Shostakovich: that he was a puzzling, inconsistent, essentially incalculable figure about whose life and work it is, conveniently, impossible to say anything definite at all;

(2) to *cover up* this intellectual relocation by emitting a smokescreen of theoretical obfuscations and sorrowfully "realistic" innuendoes against Shostakovich which, by cutting him down to size and making him seem inscrutably ambiguous, will serve quietly and gradually to move him from where he rightly belongs - on the revisionist side of the debate - towards the notional "middle ground" (where the formerly extreme, but now supposedly "central" and "balanced", anti-revisionists may meet their manufactured ghost-image of the composer floating over from the enemy position and embrace it as evidence of their own faked "truth").

Just such a dual course of action is already under way. Malcolm Brown, for instance, when challenged in the AMS discussion group by Ho and Feofanov, claimed:

Neither Laurel Fay, Richard Taruskin, or I have ever asserted that *Testimony* contains no words of Shostakovich exchanged with Solomon Volkov during the course of private meetings. Neither have we claimed that the image of Shostakovich that emerges from *Testimony* bears no relationship to the human being Shostakovich. Nowhere in the writings of any of the three of us can be found the assertion that "Shostakovich was Soviet Russia's most loyal musical son".[\[39\]](#)

When Ho and Feofanov pointed out that this last phrase was prominently displayed in two essays by Brown's colleague Richard Taruskin ("The Opera and the Dictator" and "A Martyred Opera Reflects Its Abominable Time"), Brown, predictably, did not apologise for his mistake, instead responding in a manner designed to relocate himself and Taruskin - after her *New York Times* blunder, Fay may have become a liability so far as Brown is concerned, as Elizabeth Wilson clearly is - into the notional middle ground from which all their earlier extreme statements may be disclaimed as misunderstandings on the part of their enemies, and Shostakovich may be subtly reshaped into a figure without stable form or substance: their new "puppet Mitya".[\[40\]](#)

To accomplish this stealthy manoeuvre, Brown appears to insinuate that Taruskin's description of Shostakovich as "perhaps Soviet Russia's most loyal musical son" applies only prior to the attacks on him in *Pravda* in 1936.[\[41\]](#) Yet were this to be so, Taruskin would have had to have written "*till then* perhaps Soviet Russia's most loyal musical son". In "The Opera and the Dictator", published in *New Republic* on 20th March 1989,[\[42\]](#) there is no such helpful qualification; the statement is categorical and can only reasonably be interpreted as a verdict on Shostakovich's entire career (or at least the majority of it).[\[43\]](#) Curiously, though, in "A Martyred Opera Reflects Its Abominable Time", published in *The New*

York Times on 6th November 1994,[\[44\]](#) the words "till then" *have* been interpolated before the phrase "perhaps Soviet Russia's most loyal musical son". This mysterious rewrite logically implies that a change occurred in Shostakovich's situation thereafter - an intriguing development in Taruskin's conception of the composer. Unfortunately, Taruskin omits to tell us what he imagines Shostakovich changed into at that point. (Perhaps Soviet Russia's second most loyal musical son? Perhaps Soviet Russia's least loyal musical son?)

Those in the West who, in spite of all we now know, persist in clinging to the idea that Shostakovich was a straightforward lifelong Communist (e.g., Christopher Norris,[\[45\]](#) Robert Matthew-Walker[\[46\]](#)) must presumably have been taken aback by Taruskin's textual adjustment. But what can have happened between 1989 and 1994 to change Taruskin's mind, prompting him to interpolate this escape clause? It cannot have been any reconsideration of *Testimony*, which he refers to in 1994 as "Solomon Volkov's spurious book of Shostakovich 'memoirs'". Nor can it have had anything to do with the publication in 1990 of *The New Shostakovich*, which he describes as "Ian MacDonald's worthless ventriloquist's act on the music". Could his change of mind have been provoked by the appearance of the articles by Mazel, Lebedinsky, and Zhitomirsky, and the book by Dubinsky, mentioned above in my third paragraph? Perhaps. But it is more likely that he was moved to tone down his original charge against Shostakovich of lifelong loyalty to the USSR by encountering the many testimonies to the contrary in Elizabeth Wilson's *Shostakovich: A Life Remembered*, published two months before he quietly adopted his rewrite in 1994.

In his 1994 article, Taruskin refers to Wilson's "magnificent new oral history... the one indispensable book about the composer". While this establishes that he has at least glanced at *Shostakovich: A Life Remembered*, he cannot have read it very carefully or he would presumably have spotted the testimony of Mikhail Chulaki, first published in *Zvezda*, No. 7, 1987, and presented in English by Wilson on pages 132-8 of her book. (Chulaki's account of events attending the first months of Soviet performances of Shostakovich's Fifth Symphony completely contradicts Taruskin's version, offered in his essay "Public lies and unspeakable truth" in Fanning's 1995 collection *Shostakovich Studies*, wherein he fails to mention it.) Notwithstanding this peculiar oversight, it is fair to assume that what caused Taruskin to adjust his 1989 statement in 1994 was the copious evidence in Wilson's book to the effect that, contrary to his original claim that Shostakovich had been "perhaps Soviet Russia's most loyal musical son", the composer was in fact a secret dissident of long standing. Terry Teachout spelled this out a few months after Taruskin's 1994 article appeared:

Testimony or no *Testimony*, it is no longer possible to regard Shostakovich as a faithful servant of the Communist party. *Shostakovich: A Life Remembered* leaves no doubt whatsoever that he hated Stalin, hated Communism, hated the *apparatchiki* and the *nomenklatura*, and that much of his music was in some meaningful sense intended to convey this hatred.[\[47\]](#)

Calum MacDonald wrote similarly of *Shostakovich: A Life Remembered*:

Here is copious confirmation that many of [Shostakovich's] works may be read as coded protest and denunciation of Soviet misrule, infusing the melodic commonplaces and rhetorical vocabulary of "Socialist Realism" with transcendent ambiguity.[48]

Supposing Taruskin to be bright enough to draw the same conclusions as Teachout and Calum MacDonald, it would be reasonable to expect his subsequent writings on Shostakovich to contain further surreptitious adjustments to his line on the composer. Indeed, Taruskin's article in the February 1995 edition of *Atlantic Monthly*, [49] shows signs of just such reconsideration, hasty or otherwise, in its title: "Who Was Shostakovich?". As for the theoretical obfuscations and sorrowfully "realistic" innuendoes which we might expect from Taruskin were he to be engaged in the sort of furtive intellectual relocation outlined above, these are present in such agitated profusion that it is difficult to read them without a cynical chuckle - and the occasional sigh.

VI

So reflexively hyperbolic and hectoring is Taruskin's style - he appears to suffer from some cultural variety of Tourette's Syndrome which renders him unable to prevent himself from shouting both at his intellectual enemies and his deafened readers - that it requires a special persistence to keep track of his wandering, self-contradictory arguments. In "Who Was Shostakovich?", Taruskin tells us clearly who the composer was, then backtracks, informing us that such clarity is impossible; asserts that the condition of music is such that no verbally paraphrasable meanings can be assigned to it, then acknowledges such meanings in some of Shostakovich's most famous works; accuses Isaak Glikman of wanting to "foreclose interpretation" of Shostakovich's outlook and at the same time to render it inscrutably ambiguous.

Let us start with Isaak Glikman. In his commentary on his collection of letters from Shostakovich, Glikman makes it clear where he thinks the composer stood vis-à-vis the Soviet regime. His note to a letter from Shostakovich dated 29th December 1957 which satirises Soviet festivities in Odessa proves that he knew the composer held the regime in contempt;[50] his account of the circumstances surrounding the Eighth Quartet shows that he was aware that Shostakovich loathed and feared the Party. [51] Taruskin's remarks on the Eighth Quartet indicate that he accepts Glikman's view of it;[52] he has also indicated that he concedes the satirical irony of the Odessa letter.[53] Logically, then, Taruskin must share Glikman's opinion that Shostakovich held the Soviet regime in contempt and loathed and feared the Communist Party. Sadly, as in several of his contentions in his polemic on the Fifth Symphony, logic plays no part in Taruskin's assertions: "Glikman's reading... of the text... was an attempt to fight Soviet methods of appropriation with Soviet methods. What Glikman tried to do is to carry out a sort of pre-emptive strike not only against the old, opportunistic official view of Shostakovich, to which the reflexes of a lifetime had understandably rendered him permanently sensitive, but also against the equally opportunistic habits of nonconformist interpretation in which he knew his readers, in reaction to the very same coercive official construction, had been thoroughly

trained." [54] That is to say: "Glikman believed that Shostakovich held the Soviet regime in contempt and loathed and feared the Communist Party, and I (Taruskin) agree with him; yet, for some unspecified reason, I insist that Glikman did not want his readers to believe this." I.e., while "attempting to take possession of the text", [55] Glikman tried to keep its meaning so equivocal that no one could say what it was. Does this make sense? In terms of logic, it is nonsense. As strategy, though, it is readily understandable - providing we are expecting Taruskin to attempt to establish the spurious 'central' position we have predicted. In effect, Taruskin reinterprets Glikman as a 'centrist' in order justify his own intellectual relocation.

It would be no surprise if, baffled by Taruskin's bizarre "pre-emptive strike" theory, his readers were confused as to Shostakovich's political stance in the Glikman letters and Glikman's comments on them. Yet Glikman, while discreet to the point of blandness (and, as such, untypical of fellow witnesses as to the composer's views) quite clearly stipulates that Shostakovich suffered long and horribly under the grim strictures of the Soviet regime and, as a result, hated any contact with officialdom. [56] It simply will not do to ascribe ambiguity or "centrality" to Glikman. Even if Shostakovich had not chosen nonconformism, as other witnesses insist he did, it would have been effectively forced on him by the way he was treated by the Soviet *apparat* in his last fifty years, to which Glikman was a confessedly horrified observer. The impression of confusion given by Taruskin is either in his own mind or is the result of an intent to bamboozle his readers with a smokescreen of non-sequiturs and illogicalities.

The same trail of smoke persists through Taruskin's preamble to the main body of his essay. Here he argues that the meaning of music is by nature insusceptible to verbal paraphrase and hence that its meaning can never be "owned", "limited", or "controlled". (One suppresses the mischievous impulse to add "except by Richard Taruskin".) "Music eludes conclusive paraphrase," he declares. "Meaning is never wholly immanent but arises out of a process of interaction between subject and object, so that interpretation is never subjective or objective to the total exclusion of the other." Moving from platitude to pretension, Taruskin goes post-structuralist: "Where latent musical meaning is neither negated nor successfully administered - where, in other words, it is acknowledged but contested - the value of the vessel is much enhanced." Fortunately he has lucid intervals: "Unlike the socialist-realist critics who tried to catalogue and thus circumscribe his 'imagery' and 'intonations'... Shostakovich insisted on keeping latent content latent - and keeping it labile... The fact is that no one owns the meaning of this music, which has always supported (nay, invited - nay, compelled) multiple opportunistic and contradictory readings."

Adducing Shostakovich's tendency to remain tight-lipped about the meaning of his music, Taruskin deduces that this silence represented a preference for "keeping latent content latent - and keeping it labile". To be as kind as one can be under the circumstances, this is fatuous. Shostakovich stayed mostly silent about what he was up to in his music because not to have done so would have invited disaster. For precisely the same reason, he did not object when Socialist Realist critics catalogued and circumscribed his music. When, very rarely, he touched upon its meaning, this invariably turned out to be of a dissident kind. Shostakovich was no free Western modernist able to indulge himself by secreting his aesthetic in a fashionable carapace of ambiguity; nor did he support, invite, or compel multiple "opportunistic"

interpretations of his work (although he fatalistically accepted these as facts of life). Only in the way he talked did latency and lability perform a practical (protective) function.

Taruskin's discourse on meaning has at least three discernible motives: (1) to rebut the theoretical basis of the interpretations advanced in *The New Shostakovich*; (2) to suggest that, since meaning in music is irreducibly subjective, the meaning of Shostakovich's is beyond "final arbitration"; (3) to generalise the issue of meaning sufficiently that any sort of stable answer to the question "Who was Shostakovich?" becomes impossible. (I anticipated and critiqued these strategies six years ago.[\[57\]](#))

It appears that Taruskin is under the affronted impression that I wish to "fix" the meanings of various pieces of music by Shostakovich. With the exception of a few instances, such as the Eighth Quartet, for which we have confirmation and for which it would consequently be obtuse to suggest alternative readings, this is not so. Far from "fixing" meanings, my intention in *The New Shostakovich* was merely to point my readers' minds in the right direction. Although Taruskin does not use the word "universality", it appears that he sees any attempt to "arbitrate" or "limit" the meaning of a piece of music as automatically to incur the loss of this attribute: "The position that would eliminate a whole level of meaning from music impoverishes it literally and obviously." What, though, if a certain "level" of meaning is spurious or contingent? Are we "impoverished" by forfeiting something incongruous or misleading? To argue, vis-a-vis Shostakovich, that "musical genius [should] suggest an infinite number of meanings at once"[\[58\]](#) is to posit a nonsensical proposition in that any utterance which suggested an infinite number of meanings at once would be so "labile" as to be devoid of any meaning at all. Shostakovich did not compose in a conceptual infinity. He was a dry, ironic, down-to-earth person who composed in, and very often about, specific situations - a fact which no more annuls his claims to universality than it does those of any other artist who ever lived.[\[59\]](#) To suggest some flexible limits to the possible range of meanings he may have had in mind is only sensible. As in every situation in life, all that is at issue is where we draw the line.

It is precisely upon this point that Taruskin's furtive enterprise of intellectual self-relocation is at its most obvious - mainly because it is here that it begins to unravel. In fending off my interpretation of the Fourth Symphony, Taruskin lapses, all of a sudden, into a poignantly uncharacteristic uncertainty: "And yet, there is indeed something about the symphony that does seem naggingly to foreground the issue of individual integrity and social stress - namely, the extremes within it of inwardness and extroversion, and the manifestly ironic way in which these extremes are juxtaposed and even thematically interchanged." What, we wonder, has happened to the man who once confidently accused Shostakovich of being "perhaps Soviet Russia's most loyal musical son"? Stumblingly, Taruskin continues: "Of course I cannot say exactly what it is that this disquieting exchange of roles signifies." (Of course not.) "Unlike MacDonald, I have no ready verbal paraphrase with which to replace it... But my uncertainty may be one reason why the symphony haunts me the way it does. Maybe incertitude - irreducible multivalence - is essential to experiencing it as a work of art." (But an utterance suggesting an infinite number of meanings at once would be devoid of any meaning at all.) The confident tone has evaporated. It is as if, transfixed by the possibility that he might be catastrophically *wrong*, Taruskin is caught talking to himself in public: "Ultimately it is difficult - no, it is impossible - to know whether [Shostakovich] is

forcing his autobiography on us [in his music] or we are forcing it on him." (Difficult or impossible? There is a crucial difference.)

Confronted, finally, with the Eighth Quartet, Taruskin attempts to stand up and dust himself off: "I'm pretty sure I do know exactly what the Eighth Quartet is about. Shostakovich has seen to that... This is the one composition of his that does ask expressly to be read as autobiography... Shostakovich was clearly identifying himself as a victim. In the final movement, when the DSCH motif is played in exquisitely wrought dissonant counterpoint against the main continuity motif from the last scene of *Lady Macbeth*, which depicts a convoy of prisoners en route to Siberia, things become almost too clear for political comfort... Shostakovich was being pressured to join the Communist Party as a trophy, and had not found within himself the fortitude to resist... The Eighth Quartet is thus a wrenching human document: wrenching the way Glikman's commentary to it is wrenching, or the way... well, the way a note in a bottle can be wrenching." So the meaning of music is not, after all, beyond "final arbitration"; nor is "irreducible multivalence" essential to experiencing it as a work of art. Taruskin swiftly wriggles out of this by proposing that what, in normal and respectable musical parlance, would be called the "programme" of the Eighth Quartet, vitiates its claim to greatness. (He does not go so far as to deny its claim to be regarded as a work of art.) Yet while the argument about the status and value of "programme" music, whether overt or covert, is venerable and honourable, it should not distract us from noting that Taruskin here, in effect, acknowledges Shostakovich, far from a loyal Soviet son, to have been a dissident.

Taruskin himself hammers this point home. Shostakovich's shift to quartet form, commenced six months after the *apparat* furore over his Fifth Symphony, "was manifestly an anti-Soviet move of a sort, for, as both the Soviet government and its citizens knew long before it became a trendy slogan in the West, the personal is political... Like the silenced Akhmatova and the martyred Mandelstam, Shostakovich, as the American Slavist Clare Cavanagh so movingly suggests, managed to bear witness 'against the state on behalf of its citizenry'." Taruskin, though, has another escape clause to hand: Shostakovich was not a dissident but an *intelligent*, "heir to a noble tradition of artistic and social thought, [whose] mature idea of art... was based not on alienation but on service".^[60] That this image of Shostakovich does not square with what Taruskin himself finds in the Fourth Symphony and the Eighth Quartet is of small import. That it appears to be a total and abject retreat from his assertion that Shostakovich was "perhaps Soviet Russia's most loyal musical son" is welcome (although, we observe, no apology). What is more important than any of this is that Taruskin's new, hopefully manufactured "central" position on Shostakovich - that he was a noble servant rather than a loyal son - is based on an absolutely crass misconstruction of the history of the Russian intelligentsia, who resisted the Soviet regime from the outset and secretly continued to resist and dissent from Soviet misrule throughout the reigns of Stalin and his successors. I have set out the case for this at length in my essay "Naive Anti-Revisionism" in Ho and Feofanov's *Shostakovich Reconsidered* and have no room to retail it here.^[61] The reader need only observe that Taruskin's last-ditch refusal to acknowledge Shostakovich's secret dissidence is spurious from top to bottom: a smokescreen: a *cover-up*. "Who was Shostakovich?" is, in effect, nothing more than a "pre-emptive strike" to cover his "opportunistic" intellectual exodus from his former position on Shostakovich (which, having read Wilson's *Shostakovich: A Life Remembered* in 1994, he has realised is no longer tenable).

The nature of the anti-revisionist cover-up - its motives, its methods, its present and future strategies - has been established. As to where these people will wander next, we have several depressing clues. Smart enough to realise that developments are trending in the direction of a more or less complete vindication of *Testimony*, Richard Taruskin has twice in print allowed for this possibility whilst at the same time declaring that such a vindication would nevertheless be worthless: "The 'Shostakovich' to whom ownership [of the meaning of his music] is returned [in the books of Volkov, MacDonald, and Glikman] is an ex-post-facto construction - as he would remain even if the authenticity of *Testimony* were confirmed" [62]; "It is also understandable, should it ever turn out that Shostakovich was in fact the author of *Testimony*, that he, who though mercilessly threatened never suffered a dissident's trials but ended his career a multiple Hero of Socialist Labour, should have wished, late in life, to portray himself in another light." [63] We may confidently predict that the first of these statements will provide one of Taruskin's future lines of defence: that ex-post-facto judgements (excluding his own) are somehow intrinsically invalid (goodbye, history) and that no one can ever be certain about anything at all really (hallo, deconstruction). Along with reiterations of Stravinsky's claim that music means nothing in itself, these motifs will, sadly, keep Taruskin in the Shostakovich debate for some time to come. [64] As for his disgusting assertion that Shostakovich did not suffer a dissident's trials and merely wished to exculpate himself at the end of his life by pretending that he had, this can only be said to represent the last refuge of a scoundrel. Elizabeth Wilson's witnesses are in formidable chorus against this viciously tawdry contention, as are Malcolm Brown's scorned "ex-Soviets". If Taruskin really does intend to use this slander as a secondary line of defence, he will lose the last rags of scholastic honour still adhering to what remains of his reputation. In the wake of *Shostakovich: A Life Remembered*, the onus is on Taruskin and Brown to substantiate their charges that Shostakovich was in some way a "collaborator". [65] If they cannot do this, it will be only just to expect them to withdraw and apologise.

VII

Shostakovich: A Life Remembered is a vital exhibition of evidence in favour of the "new" Shostakovich presented by *Testimony* in 1979 and set in provisional historical context by me ten years later. Yet Elizabeth Wilson's book, while benefiting from an accurate and sympathetic historical running commentary by the author, is poorly cross-referenced and leaves too much to the reader in terms of deciding what given testimonies are worth. Less rich in sheer diversity of testimony, Ho and Feofanov's book is more rigorously critical and, as such, deserves to become the pivot on which future discussion of Shostakovich will turn. All the significant evidence to date is assembled and evaluated here, and all the major issues are deployed and analysed. In time, past false images of Shostakovich will be disposed of, along with the many misconceptions of his music which arose from them. However, there remain some obsolete conceptual obstacles to this and it is important to identify these right away.

The first obstacle is the old premise of the "stupid Shostakovich" which I diagnosed and critiqued in *The New Shostakovich*, [66] but which still persists. The misconceived idea that Shostakovich was stupid, or

at any rate not as clever as the musicologists commenting upon him, permeates Taruskin's approach - a fact which entails a nice irony, in that the confusion Taruskin sedulously sows in "Who Was Shostakovich?" (1995) stems partly from his own. This is clear from his polemic in Fanning's *Shostakovich Studies* (1996) wherein his version of Shostakovich reverts to type, obtusely refusing to entertain a critical thought in his Fifth Symphony and later pretending to be a dissident^[67] - a travesty carried forward to 1948 by Laurel Fay with her claim that the composer then tried to come up with an acceptable piece of folk-nationalism but dimly picked "the wrong folk". This phantasm, which should have been ruled out many years ago, is the "stupid" Shostakovich, partly assumed from the undoubtedly idiotic articles which he signed but did not write, and partly inferred by musicologists from their analysis-bound inability to identify the *tone* of the music they claim to describe. Before it became accepted that part of Mahler's style entailed the juxtaposition of high and low forms and conventions in order to create alienation effects, musicologists routinely accused him of unintentional vulgarity or of being erratically uneven in taste. The superiority complex of their descendants vis-à-vis Shostakovich is virtually identical, although Shostakovich, it must be said, went considerably further than Mahler in using impersonated crudity and banality in order to create not only alienative but also satirical effects. In terms of generating misinterpretations of his music, untold damage has been done by the condescending academic fallacy that Shostakovich's "crudity" and "banality" (for example, in the finale of the Twelfth Symphony) were unintentional. The prejudice of the "stupid Shostakovich" is held by no one who knew him and must be rejected out of hand.

The second conceptual obstacle to any advance in understanding of Shostakovich's music is the delusion that to associate specific meanings with it as a result of placing it in historical context deprives it of essential alternative resonances or of cultural universality. This philosophical solecism (which I have addressed repeatedly in the past seven years and which is dealt with in my essay "Universal Because Specific" in *Shostakovich Reconsidered*), remains obstinately current. Here, reliably, is Richard Taruskin: "The present rash of opportunistic efforts - by Volkov, by MacDonald, even by Glikman - authoritatively to define the meaning of Shostakovich's work can only diminish that value. Definitive reading, especially biographical reading, locks the music in the past. Better let it remain supple, adaptable, ready to serve the future's needs." Leaving aside the weasel plea that it is "better" not to think too hard about any of this, it is evident that Taruskin is among those who cannot see that artistic universality is achieved by works of art which, far from meaning an infinite number of different things to different people, mean the same thing, or a cohesively limited number of things, to all of us. *King Lear*, for example, carries no meaning in respect of current developments in microbiology. Its range of possible meanings is thus "limited". Instead it conveys a cohesive complex of meanings concerned with certain human phenomena with which we can all identify and which are the basis of its universal resonance. What actually confers what we call the play's universality is the skill and intensity of Shakespeare's artistry - yet this universality arises from the behaviour of specific characters in specific situations. In this respect, Shostakovich, a very "literary" composer with a theatrical bent and a propensity for mimicry, strongly resembles Shakespeare, who was his favourite playwright. To point out that a piece of music has its context in totalitarian experience is not to define or limit the response of the listener, but to initiate a response which may, according to his or her sensibility, then develop and deepen through feeling. Moral and aesthetic responses are not static but developmental. Such deepening of response is bound, reciprocally, to enrich apprehension of the artist's skill and intensity - which, in

turn, is certain further to subtilise the listener's inner experience. To claim that contextual specificity "impoverishes" the potential of Shostakovich's music is childish. The fact that modern musicologists can seriously argue in such primitive terms is in itself a measure of degraded critical standards. If anything impoverishes the modern musical response, it is the morally spineless relativism of contemporary musicology.

The third conceptual obstacle I wish to demolish is less tangible than the first two: that it is not enough merely to concede that context must be taken into account in coming to an understanding of Shostakovich's music. The *research* must be done, the *knowledge* acquired - a process which takes time. (It has taken me twenty years and I am still learning.) On the whole, musicians are a woolly lot, uninterested in, and therefore ignorant of, fields beyond their own. So central to them are aesthetic ideals of beauty that they tend to elevate personal intuition above the common coinage of knowledge and objective truth, either imagining themselves magically qualified to pronounce on issues arising in other fields by virtue of their finer sensibilities, or inclining to dismiss rival modes of expression as intrinsically inferior. Yet the fences dividing the adjoining fields of literature, art, theatre, philosophy, historiography (etc., etc.) are entirely notional. The earth they stand on - that of the expressive side of human culture - is one continuously evolving land; and the commerce between these fields proceeds now, as it always has, as if no divisions between them existed. When I call for Shostakovich's music to be placed in historical context, I ask for a more than a hasty consultation with some off-the-shelf "timetable of history" crib.

As a result of the empty ahistoricism of contemporary musicology, commentators whose knowledge of the Bolshevik revolution appears to have been obtained from the back of a cornflakes packet can be found confidently referring to Shostakovich's supposed "youthful revolutionary enthusiasm" (a hackneyed substance of almost certainly chimerical constitution).[68] Musical pundits referring to the Soviet scene during the 1920s routinely muddle chronology, misconstruing political and cultural developments, and feeding these misconstructions back into their "interpretations" of Shostakovich's music.[69] In 1991, one such, Robert Matthew-Walker, realising in a road-to-Damascus flash that the cornflake-packet version of Soviet socio-cultural history was inadequate, yet faced with the task of writing sleevenotes for a recording of Shostakovich's largest piano work, appears to have rushed off to his local library, snatched down a likely-looking history book, and hastily copied out swathes of facts from it as "background" to his orthodox musicological commentary. (Sadly none of what he copied was relevant to the music in hand.)[70] Matthew-Walker, currently one of the last people on the planet who believes that Shostakovich was *ever* a Communist, let alone a lifelong one, referred in a 1997 sleevenote to the link between the "release" of Shostakovich's Tenth Symphony and the death of Stalin and execution of Beria in 1953: "To us, such events would hardly seem to have an artistic effect, but they impinged - as did others - on the overall social climate of Russia, including the cultural." [71] To make the miserly concession that the sudden absence of Stalin and Beria "impinged" on the climate of life in Russia in 1953-4 represents not merely a comical failure to come to grips with the reality of the background, but an active disregard for it. Matthew-Walker has had six years to do some historical research. He has either done none, or very little, or has simply been unable to understand it.

Like music, history - and all the other fields of human knowledge and endeavour which cluster under its auspices - is not just a complex of material facts but a system of signs indicating an "inner life" in which a historian must self-immense or risk completely misunderstanding his or her subject. "I need hardly emphasise at this stage," writes Vladimir Ashkenazy, in his foreword to *Shostakovich Reconsidered*, "that, without profound (and, I repeat, *profound*) knowledge of what Shostakovich had to live through, it is virtually impossible to be a serious and credible analyst of his output." Since such profound engagement requires years of reading, thinking, and discussion to acquire, it is clearly impossible, here and now, to demonstrate conclusively what this entails with respect to the study of Shostakovich. Instead, a hopeful lightning-flash of local illumination is all I have space for. Everyone who has followed the Shostakovich debate is aware of the story that, expecting arrest in 1936-7, he took to sitting outside his apartment at night with a packed suitcase so that his family might not be disturbed and that he should have the minimum he would need for survival in the Gulag. The poet Daniil Kharms, for example, was "taken" in his shirt-sleeves and carpet slippers, while many arrested in Leningrad during the early stages of the Terror were picked up in summer clothes or evening dress and thus transported to labour camps within the Arctic circle where no other clothing was provided. Yet even these facts require deductive imagination on the part of the reader. Only something more vivid (more "artistic") can bring the reality into such immediate focus that one's understanding is *qualitatively* transformed. Here, then, is a short extract from a memoir, written in 1990, by Natalya Rapoport, daughter of Yakov Rapoport, one of the Jewish physicians arrested in connection with the notorious "Doctors' Plot" of early 1953. Natalya was 14 when "a gang of [MGB] thugs" burst into the family apartment and took both her parents away. Later her mother was released, but Natalya conceived an understandable morbid fear that the secret police would soon call again at night and take her mother away for ever:

The night-time fear began at eleven and lasted until five in the morning. For some reason, I was convinced she couldn't be arrested earlier or later. My fear was so strong that during those hours I trembled all over as if in a fit; I even slept in the hall on a cot rather than in my room, listening tensely the whole night to sounds and rustlings on the staircase; the slamming of the elevator door on the nearby floors made me cry out in terror.[\[72\]](#)

Sensitive readers will instantly have transferred the impression conveyed by the pen of Natalya Rapoport to their mental image of Shostakovich sitting outside his apartment at the height of the Terror; at the same time, perhaps, their understanding of his Fourth and Fifth symphonies will have leapt suddenly into sharper focus. Insensitive readers - those who have merely wandered into this discussion because they enjoy the noise Shostakovich's music makes or admire the shapes it cuts on paper - will, of course, be none the wiser. The fact remains that there can be no way of conceiving what Shostakovich was writing about without deliberately detaching oneself from the superficialities of Western everyday life and studying the subject. Those too lazy or self-satisfied to do this will, of course, continue to listen to, and write about, "their" Shostakovich, but that phantasm and those responses to it will likewise continue to be little more than an arbitrary fantasy with no cultural value. The real Shostakovich - a creative presence of enormous significance to human history - can only be approached (and this approach is not finite but an ongoing process) through emotional empathy with, and intellectual understanding of, his milieu.

The future in Shostakovich studies arguably depends more on the removal of this third obstacle - the failure to engage in depth with the background - than on any other single factor preventing comprehension in this subject. While every gain in understanding will expand apprehension of the music, such engagement requires time and effort. For this reason, the current generation of Western musicologists is unlikely ever to arrive at a full unfolding of Shostakovich's creativity. This, instead, will fall to others, just now becoming aware of the Shostakovich debate, who are prepared to devote themselves to the in-depth research and thought that form the indispensable foundation for authoritative conclusions in this subject. The future in Shostakovich studies will be in their hands. Yet among the coming generation there will also be the usual superficialists who prefer theory to thinking, preconception to human reality. I have been shocked by the spiritual and imaginative shallowness of many trained musicians, who often seem to regard technique as an end in itself. Likewise, some of the most emotionally stunted and arrogantly selfish people I've ever met happen to be classical music specialists. Such individuals are unlikely ever to say or write a sane, let alone a perceptive, word about Shostakovich's music. Consequently, the future in this subject (notwithstanding the advances in comprehension which we can expect to accumulate on the bedrock of *Testimony*, *The New Shostakovich*, *Shostakovich: A Life Remembered*, and *Shostakovich Reconsidered*) will continue to be dogged by the dead cavils of the unthinking and the unfeeling.

I chose to enter this arena in 1988 because the public cannot be blamed for believing what the majority of pundits tell them and because, at that time, the majority of pundits on Shostakovich were talking dangerously ignorant nonsense about him. Quite simply, I felt under an obligation to help my fellow "ordinary listeners" to realise where, and how grievously, they were being misled. Ten years later, those same pundits persist in retailing very much the same sort of nonsense. Thankfully, this new book by Allan Ho and Dmitry Feofanov gives cause for hope that we have at last reached a turning point in this subject, after which the truth about Shostakovich, his music, and his extraordinary milieu, will finally be accepted in the West.

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¹ See 'Thoughts on David Fanning's *Shostakovich Studies*', *DSCH* 5 (Summer 1996), pp. 10-29.

² 'The Composer Was Courageous But Not as Much as in Myth (Shostakovich's *From Jewish Folk Poetry* was not so much written "for the drawer" as concealed in a belated panic).' *The New York Times*, 14th April 1996, Section 2, pp. 27, 32.

³ Dr Harold Shukman of St Antony's College, Oxford; Dr Howard Spier of the Institute for Jewish Policy Research, London.

⁴ 'Fay versus Shostakovich: Whose Stupidity?', *East European Jewish Affairs*, Vol. 26 No. 2 (Winter 1996), pp. 5-26.

⁵ To date, neither Fay nor Taruskin has made any response to my rebuttals of their claims.

⁶ Ho and Feofanov, 'Shostakovich's *Testimony*: Reply to an Unjust Criticism' (Section A:6) in *Shostakovich Reconsidered* (Toccata Press, 1998).

⁷ Op. cit., p. 4.

⁸ *Muzykal'naya Akademiya*, 1992, No. 3, pp. 3-14.

⁹ *Notes*, 50/2, December 1993, pp. 756-61.

¹⁰ Letter on file with the authors.

¹¹ American Musicological Society (internet) email discussion group, 15th October 1997.

¹² E.g., Wilson, op. cit. pp. 180-1. It should be noted that Wilson's avowed intent to avoid getting 'too involved' in the matter of the authenticity of Volkov's *Testimony* does not square with her editorial decision to include (op. cit., p. 125) Veniamin Basner's charge that *Testimony* is 'a falsified account' in that it fails to mention the story of Shostakovich's interrogation in 1937. Although Shostakovich did not confide this story to him, Solomon Volkov was aware of it through other channels, but declined to mention it in his editorial

commentary on the grounds of its manifest untrustworthiness (personal communication). See MacDonald, '[You Must Remember!](#) Shostakovich's alleged interrogation by the NKVD in 1937' in *DSCH* Journal No. 6 (Winter 1996), pp. 25-7.

¹³ Some will claim that this conformity derives solely from the fact that Wilson borrowed much of the material in such passages from *The New Shostakovich* without making any specific attribution; yet the fact that she makes no mention of my book in hers (even in her bibliography) refutes this charge, since it would clearly be impossible for her to borrow material from a source she has never consulted.

¹⁴ See also *DSCH* No. 2 (Winter 1994), pp. 17-21.

¹⁵ 'Shostakovich versus Volkov: Whose *Testimony*?', *Russian Review*, 39/4, October 1980, pp. 484-93.

¹⁶ Tape on file with Allan Ho and Dmitry Feofanov.

¹⁷ No. 200, April 1997, pp. 36-39.

¹⁸ Op. cit., p. 55.

¹⁹ Op. cit., p. 17.

²⁰ Op. cit., pp. 52-3.

²¹ Op. cit., pp. 18, 46.

²² As an example of the latter, I would offer *Gramophone* reviewer David Gutman, whose regular sniping at my sleevenotes for Shostakovich discs, as well as deliberately misleading in substance, is explicitly mounted on the back of his obviously gratified discovery of Taruskin's polemic on the Fifth Symphony (*Gramophone*, June 1996, pp. 56-8). (He even appropriates Taruskin's vocabulary. Taruskin: 'What level of criticism seeks to anthropomorphise every fugitive instrumental colour...' [Fanning, *Shostakovich Studies*, p. 27.] Gutman: 'Ian MacDonald's relentlessly anthropomorphizing booklet-notes...' [*Gramophone*, October 1997, p. 90]. Let the dog see the rabbit, as the English say.) In his review of Vladimir Ashkenazy's recent Decca recording of Shostakovich's Seventh Symphony (*Gramophone*, October, p. 90), Gutman claims that, in my notes for

this issue, I 'manage to imply that as late as 1964 the world-renowned and much-decorated composer was most widely known in the USSR as a formalist whose music, apart from some songs and festive pieces, was banned. This cannot be right so why repeat it?' Since Gutman strives to give the impression that the statement he refers to is my own, readers may find his last sentence puzzling. In fact, the statement in question, as is clear from its context, is partly a direct quotation and partly a paraphrase of a published reminiscence by Vera Volkova, now a professor at the Nizhny Novgorod conservatoire. Volkova was 17 when she first heard Shostakovich's Seventh at a retrospective of his work in her city in 1964. She says: 'At that time we, young people, were constantly indoctrinated by the official propaganda which emphasised 'formalist deviations' in Shostakovich's work; his music was merely associated with several cheerful marches, songs, and overtures. And suddenly in his music we discovered a world of unexpected and irresistible musical beauty, tense passions. People were crying at the festival concerts, deeply experiencing the tragic revelations of the Fifth, Seventh, and Eleventh Symphonies.' This statement refers to the situation among young music students in 1964 in what was then the city of Gorky - not, as should be obvious, among older audiences (who had grown up with Shostakovich's music) in Moscow, Leningrad, and Kiev. Prohibitions both on Shostakovich's major works and on the ways in which it was permissible to discuss them - if at all - were by no means uniformly relaxed in the USSR after the 1948 resolution against 'formalism' was half-heartedly rescinded in 1958. In the Soviet provinces, as distinct from the major cities, performances of the composer's more troublesome works were sufficiently rare that an entire musical generation grew up with an inadequate grasp of the full range of his creativity. This is what Volkova is referring to, and her statement, made from her perspective as a provincial teenager in 1964, is neither contentious in itself nor was intended by her to be. I quote Volkova not because her statement is controversial, but for the interest of her attached observations on Shostakovich's Seventh Symphony. David Gutman, not for the first time where Shostakovich is concerned, elects to miss the point.

²³ *Notes* (March 1994), pp. 1210-11.

²⁴ Another example: in the AMS discussion group on 15th October 1997, Brown refers to an interview conducted with Maxim by David Fanning for *Gramophone* in May 1991 without mentioning that it contains statements contradicting his claims. Maxim: 'When we take this book [*Testimony*] into our hands we can imagine what this composer's life was like in this particular political situation - how difficult, how awful it was under the Soviet regime.' Maxim (referring to one of Sofia Khentova's books on Shostakovich): 'I hate, I kh hate her book, and I told her so because she makes him look like a genuine son of the Communist Party [expletive deleted].' Fanning: 'There is a recurring theme in Maxim's remarks... that it is important to feel the history behind his father's music, to realize that the music is a mirror of its times - hence his general endorsement both of Volkov and of Ian MacDonald's *The New Shostakovich*.'

25

The quarterly journal of the American Music Library Association.

26

Notes (March 1993), p. 960; *melos* 4-5 (Summer 1993), p. 42. Apparently taking his lead from Brown's claim, Stephen Johnson echoed him in *The Independent* (16th June 1994), claiming that the case for believing Shostakovich to have been a secret dissident depends solely on *Testimony* and adding that 'some who knew the composer, and who previously welcomed *Testimony*, have been growing more critical'. He omitted to name these alleged deserters. They have not since come to my attention.

27

See my reply to Brown in *Notes* (March 1994), pp. 1208-10. Brown made no response to my rebuttals.

28

melos 4-5 (Summer 1993), p. 46; *Notes* (March 1994), p. 1210.

29

'No doubt Dmitri Dmitriyevich had been plied with drink, and was under its influence when he signed the "request" to be admitted to the Party... He associated joining the Party with a moral, as well as physical death.' Wilson, op. cit., pp. 336, 340.

30

'At Party activist meetings, the [Thirteenth] symphony was talked about as if it were not Soviet music, although Shostakovich had recently joined the Party. Participants in those meetings asked: what sort of Party candidate is he, writing such a symphony?' Abridged from *Muzykal'naya Zhizn*; reproduced courtesy of *Sputnik*. A version of this piece appeared in *DSCH*, xviii, May 1992, pp. 9-12.

31

Jasper Parrott, *Beyond Frontiers* (Collins, 1984), pp. 55-6.

32

'We had been told how pressure had been exerted on him from certain quarters... Shostakovich was quite simply afraid. He feared for his children, his family, himself and his neighbour.' Wilson, op. cit., pp. 270, 308.

33

'My father cried twice in his life: when his mother died and when he came home to say "They've made me join the Party"... This was sobbing, not just tears, but sobbing. It was in the 1960s that he was forced to join the Party. There was simply no other way for him at that time.' Statement made at a symposium chaired by Harlow Robinson in the Bush Pavilion at Russell Sage College, Troy, New York, on 25th January 1992.

³⁴ 'Remember, at that time Shostakovich was First Secretary of the Union of Composers of the Russian Republic and was helping a lot of people in that capacity. But it simply wasn't possible in the Soviet Union then for someone in a position of that official responsibility to not be a member of the Party. All editors, for example, were members of the Party.' (Same source as previous note.)

³⁵ See Wilson, op. cit., pp. 338-9.

³⁶ 'Letters', *Novy Mir*, 1990, No. 3.

³⁷ *The New York Times*, 6th November 1994, p. 25.

³⁸ Shchedrin: 'It makes me so angry. These people...' Anderson: 'You mean people like Fanning, the Western academics?' Shchedrin: 'Yes. They know nothing about it, they never lived through it, and they write things that are so deep [holds thumb and forefinger close together] - one millimetre!' Anderson: 'Ian MacDonald says the same of Laurel Fay.' Shchedrin: 'Yes, exactly; she knows nothing either.' (Conversation on 18th November 1997 at La Maison de la Radio France, Paris. By permission of Martin Anderson.)

³⁹ American Musicological Society (internet) email discussion group, 15th October 1997.

⁴⁰ Fanning, *Shostakovich Studies*, p. 31.

⁴¹ AMS discussion group, 15th October 1997. Brown's statement is so evasive as to be almost impossible to interpret.

⁴² 200/12, pp. 34-40.

⁴³ The word 'perhaps', used in this context, is not meant to indicate provisionality, but is an academic convention whereby a writer, in effect, says 'This is my view, though I'm not prepared to justify it'.

⁴⁴ Section 2, pp. 25, 35-36.

⁴⁵ E.g., 'The Cold War Revived: Shostakovich and Cultural Politics. A Review of Ian MacDonald's *The New Shostakovich*', *melos* 4-5 (Summer 1993), pp. 34-41.

⁴⁶ E.g., sleevenote to Revelation RV10084, in which he doggedly describes *Poem of the Motherland* as 'a genuine celebration of the 30th anniversary of the October Revolution' and represents Shostakovich as 'remaining a convinced Communist' when he wrote the *Festive Overture* in 1954.

⁴⁷ 'The Problem of Shostakovich', *Commentary* (February 1995), pp. 46-9.

⁴⁸ *Tempo*, No. 191 (December 1994), p. 42.

⁴⁹ 275/2, pp. 62-72.

⁵⁰ MacDonald and Feofanov, [Do Not Judge Me Harshly!](#) Anti-Communism in Shostakovich's letters to Isaak Glikman', *DSCH* 8 (Winter 1997).

⁵¹ Wilson, op. cit., pp. 338-9.

⁵² *The Atlantic Monthly*, February 1995, pp. 71-2.

⁵³ Talk: 'Shostakovich and Us', 27th September 1996, as part of 'Speaking of Shostakovich: A Symposium' at Hunter College, New York, 27th-28th September 1996. (Tape on file with the author.)

⁵⁴ *Ibid*, p. 68.

⁵⁵ *Ibid*, p. 68.

⁵⁶ 'Dmitri Dmitriyevich absolutely hated... having any dealings with high-up officials.' This observation leads into Glikman's account of the savage castigation by *apparat* review committee of *Lady Macbeth* in March 1956 (Wilson, op. cit., pp. 290-92).

⁵⁷ 'Common Sense About Shostakovich: Breaking the "Hermeneutic Circle"', *Southern Humanities Review*, XXVI No. 2 (Spring 1992), pp. 153-167.

58 Nicholas Kenyon, *The Guardian*, 20th May 1990.

59 See my essays 'Universal Because Specific' and 'Writing About Shostakovich' in Ho and Feofanov, *Shostakovich Reconsidered*.

60 *The Atlantic Monthly*, pp. 70, 72.

61 For documentation on contemporary resistance to Stalinism, see Sarah Davies, *Popular Opinion in Stalin's Russia: Terror, Propaganda, and Dissent: 1934-41* (Cambridge University Press, 1997).

62 *The Atlantic Monthly*, February 1995, p. 63.

63 Fanning, *Shostakovich Studies*, p. 47.

64 Taruskin has recently recycled his *Atlantic Monthly* article in the obscurely titled essay 'Shostakovich and the Inhuman: Shostakovich and Us' in his book *Defining Russia Musically: Historical and Hermeneutic Essays* (Princeton, 1997), pp. 468-97. As expected, his smokescreen of critical verbiage is here redoubled in an effort to show that it is theoretically impossible to determine whether Shostakovich was ever being ironic or not. (Oddly, in view of this, Taruskin begins by quoting the Odessa letter to Isaak Glikman, which he finds self-evidently ironic.) On the question of whether Shostakovich's Eleventh Symphony alludes, at the same time, to the 1905 Russian Revolution and the 1956 Hungarian Uprising, Taruskin writes: 'Did the composer intend it? The question is naive, unanswerable, and irrelevant.' The question, quite obviously, is none of these. How, for example, can it be 'naive' to ask what another person intends or intended? We spend our lives doing just that; indeed our criminal courts to a large extent function on finding answers to questions of this sort. Were such questions 'unanswerable', it would be impossible, for example, to distinguish between murder and manslaughter. Nor is the fact that Shostakovich is dead a guarantee that we can no longer discover his intentions. In the first place, we have the testimonies of those who knew him (testimonies which Taruskin arrogantly dismisses); in the second place, logic alone determines that we might yet find an explicit answer to this question in a document the composer wrote but which has not yet been discovered. That Taruskin wishes thus to impose "closure" on a question which can have no expiry date confirms both his general lack of acquaintance with logic and his unprincipled drive, at all costs, to dictate the limits of the Shostakovich debate. (In any case, Ho and Feofanov's vindication of *Testimony* suggests very strongly that we already have just such a document before us.) As to Taruskin's desperate suggestion that Shostakovich's intentions are 'irrelevant' to the understanding of his music, it is incredible

that a supposedly intelligent participant in this debate should advance such an inane opinion at this late stage. Taruskin's own expressed views on the Odessa letter, on the slow movement of the Fifth Symphony, and on the Eighth Quartet in general clearly show that he himself takes the composer's intentions centrally into account. If what he has written in this devious and dishonest polemic means anything at all it is that views on Shostakovich's intentions should be counted 'irrelevant' if they emanate from persons other than himself.

⁶⁵ 'A great deal of evidence suggests that in his later years Shostakovich became desperately obsessed with his historical image, and with the theme of self-justification. For he *did* have a history of collaboration to live down.' ('The Opera and the Dictator', *New Republic*, 200/12, 20th March 1989, p. 35.) To my knowledge, Taruskin has never produced any of the 'great deal of evidence' he casually refers to. (For Brown's charges, see references above.)

⁶⁶ Op. cit., pp. 245-64.

⁶⁷ The 'noble servant' of less than a year earlier did not last long!

⁶⁸ See my essay 'His Misty Youth: the Glivenko Letters and Life in the '20s' in Ho and Feofanov, *Shostakovich Reconsidered*.

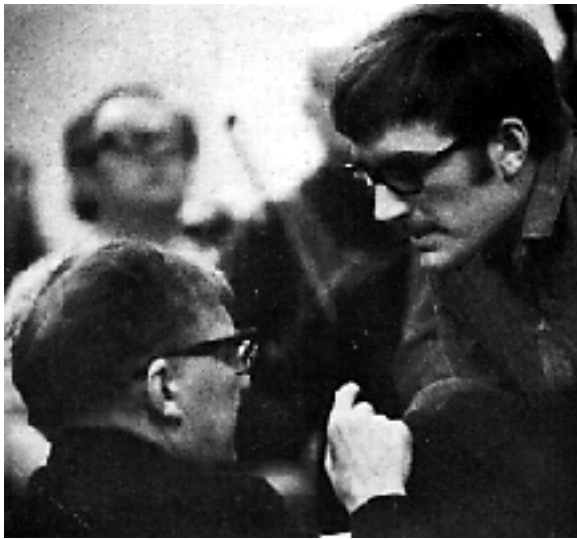
⁶⁹ See my essay 'Naive Anti-Revisionism' in Ho and Feofanov, *Shostakovich Reconsidered*, note 111.

⁷⁰ Shostakovich's 24 Preludes and Fugues, Op. 87, as recorded by Tatiana Nikolayeva for Hyperion (CDA66441/3).

⁷¹ Sleeve note to Revelation RV70002.

⁷² 'Memory is Medicine', in Yakov Rapoport, *The Doctors' Plot* (Fourth Estate, 1991), pp. 1-22.

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"Papa, what if they hang you for this?"

Maxim Shostakovich to his father during rehearsals for the première of the Eleventh Symphony (according to Lev Lebedinsky)

Book review

Elizabeth Wilson. *Shostakovich. A Life Remembered.*

Elizabeth Wilson is reportedly worried that she hasn't produced the book she wanted to. She shouldn't be. This is a hugely important work and if any critics say otherwise, you can be sure that they don't know what they're talking about.

Having studied cello in the USSR in the Sixties, during which time she met Shostakovich, Ms Wilson amassed extensive musical contacts in Russia and found herself in an ideal position to write a major book on the composer. The exigencies of history prevented the undertaking of such a study until 1988, at which point she set out on a round of research and interviews in Russia with the aim of publishing them as a volume in Faber's "Composers Remembered" series. In the event, the material took two years to gather and a further four years to winnow and edit. Having accumulated too many contributions, she found herself in the invidious position of having to reject even material specially written for her. (One such contribution was by Moisei Vainberg.) Despite this, she has been unable to cut her book below 500 pages - a fact which may have annoyed Faber, since it drives a coach-and-horses through their series format guidelines, but for which Shostakovich devotees will be profoundly grateful, since there is relatively little amongst this flood of words which isn't of vital interest to them.

Granted, there is much here which *DSCH* readers will have seen before: extracts from well-known books by Serov, Malko, Nabokov, Yelagin, and Vishnevskaya; articles by Khentova, Zhitomirsky, and Lebedinsky, and so on. Those who have read Isaak Glikman's *Letters to a Friend* will likewise find many extracts from it in these pages. Nor is Ms Wilson's haul of interviewees as exhaustive as one might have hoped; among those who declined to be interviewed by her were Galina Ustvolskaya, Kurt Sanderling, Boris Tishchenko, Alexander Solzhenitsyn, Dmitri Frederiks, Boris Tchaikovsky, Leonid Trauberg, and Dmitri Tsyganov. Similarly there is nothing from Manashir Yakubov or the composer's

last wife or his children (although Wilson did manage to talk to his sister Zoya before her death in 1990).

The book is a triumph nonetheless in that, despite its author's disingenuous pretence in her preface that her material is somehow mysteriously contradictory, the picture of Shostakovich which emerges from it is overwhelmingly consistent and coherent. This being so, it's a pity that she feels the need to cover herself against accusations of partiality by espousing, in her introductory remarks, a stance of virtuous detachment which, frankly, none of us is at present entitled to claim. To wit, she writes that "extreme representations of whatever kind cannot help to facilitate our understanding of Shostakovich's enormous range and depth of vision". This appears to be a sop to those Western critics who, knowing little about anything beyond musical technique, decline to accept that Shostakovich wasn't a Communist; or, if they do accept it, refuse to concede its relevance to understanding his art.

What is extreme to some is moderate to others, and to ordain a point of balance in the Shostakovich debate in 1994 is manifestly premature. After all, the idea that he was a Communist, with all that this entailed in terms of comprehension of his work, is itself almost certainly a complete chimaera, and thus a wild extreme. Yet nearly everyone who wrote about him prior to *Testimony* adhered to this extreme without any apparent qualms; indeed, some still do. It surely behoves all of us to shut up for a while about where we think the Golden Mean lies in Shostakovich's case, particularly since some of us have been so spectacularly inept in identifying it hitherto.

As it happens, Elizabeth Wilson's book so clearly belies her mask of academic caution that one can only assume she donned it in order to trick the diehard sceptics into blundering into these pages unawares. Since the fact will not, of course, occur to many of our learned colleagues, it's worth stressing right away that the reality evoked in this book is absolutely nightmareish: a homicidally insane culture in which the most sensitive and intelligent were completely at the mercy of the stupidest and most vicious. Anyone who seriously contends that a man like Shostakovich could have left this reality out of his art - or wanted to - is morally, psychologically, and aesthetically incompetent. (Which reminds me: I must warn certain parties that I violently object to being charged with an "ideologically" motivated approach to Shostakovich. The issues and motivations are ones of morality and decency, *and of nothing else*. The next scribbler to accuse me of being a rabid rightwinger will shortly thereafter encounter me on his doorstep with my social democratic fists arrayed in Marquis of Queensbury mode.)

My shelves are full of huge tomes detailing the horrors of Soviet Communism in the most compendiously appalling terms, yet I was amazed to discover myself still shockable by the full truth about Shostakovich. For, as revealed by Elizabeth Wilson's witnesses, it is far worse than even *Testimony* suggests, and certainly exceeds the most pessimistic deductions made by me in *The New Shostakovich*. Critics who have spent years claiming that the accounts given by Solomon Volkov and myself are Cold War caricatures will need all the evasiveness and dishonesty they can muster to wriggle out of this one.

Although by no means every depth is plumbed - there's nothing here, for instance, about the rumoured NKVD murder of Ivan Sollertinsky - there are eye-openers a-plenty, not the least startling of which is Nikolayeva's claim that the Tenth Symphony was written in 1951, two years earlier than previously supposed. While in no way discrediting the post-*Testimony* view of the work as a musical monument to Stalinism (Stalin's death having been fervently anticipated by the Russian liberal intelligentsia for several years), the contention is remarkable.

Aside from this, the revelations the book contains are unequivocally on the side of *Testimony*, the most notable examples being Veniamin Basner's disclosure that, in 1937 (shortly before writing the Fifth Symphony), Shostakovich was closely interrogated by the NKVD about Tukhachevsky's non-existent plot to kill Stalin, and Lyubov' Rudneva's deeply distressing account of the hostile reception given by the Composers' Union to the Preludes and Fugues, Op. 87. Taken together with Glikman's description of the official rejection meted out to *Katerina Ismailova* in 1956, it becomes easy to understand why, four years later, Shostakovich broke down in front of his friend, sobbing that "they" had hounded and pursued him. (This was just before the composer planned to kill himself with an overdose, Malcolm Hamrick Brown please note.)

Only a few trivial details can conceivably be said to redound to the opposing "anti-revisionist" view. In other words, Shostakovich's life was even more ghastly than some of us had already deduced, rendering his many supposedly enigmatic traits of behaviour only too understandable.

To be fair, a few of Wilson's witnesses remain genuinely puzzled by him, several reporting "inexplicable" changes of mood and sudden silences. These, though, are only mysterious if one possesses no psychological *nous*. Considering the standard of interlocution he was subjected to by even his close friends, it's hardly surprising if he occasionally sat back thinking 'What's the use?'

During a conversation with Flora Litvinova in the Fifties (wherein he reveals a very shrewd grasp of politics), he vents a *Testimony*-like outburst about "that bastard Picasso" for praising communism while his fellow artists languished under the same system in the USSR. Astonishingly, Litvinova suggests that Shostakovich, too, is "for the ideas of communism". "No," replies the composer, "communism is impossible" - and thereupon understandably clams up. Litvinova is likewise extraordinarily dense about why Shostakovich was so helpless and shattered in the face of state menace. Perhaps if she'd been relentlessly persecuted by brutal idiots from 1929 onwards, she might have had less trouble comprehending him.

Other witnesses simply seem to be ill-informed. Sofia Gubaidulina, for instance, is baffled as to why Shostakovich joined the Party in 1960 and assumes that he was "unable to overcome the temptation of a 'carrot'". (I.e., that he sold himself out for an official stipend.) Elizabeth Wilson should have added a note at this point, cross-referring the reader to the contributions on the background to the Eighth Quartet by Glikman and Lebedinsky, where the truth is revealed.

Indeed, there are several places where such cross-references are vital and yet omitted. For example, Yevgeny Mravinsky is quoted on one page as follows: "I do not like to search for subjective, literary, and concrete images in music which is not by nature programmatic, whereas Shostakovich very often explained his intentions with very specific images and associations." On another page, Yakov Milkis, a violinist in the Leningrad Philharmonic, claims Mravinsky berated his strings for poor tremolo in the *Largo* of the Fifth Symphony: "Have you forgotten what this music is about and when it was born?" Or that the conductor criticised a timbre in the finale of the Ninth Symphony: "You have the wrong sound. I need the sound of the trampling of steel-shod boots" (adding: "We knew that he wasn't referring to ordinary soldiers, but to the KGB forces").

Ms Wilson seems to assume that her readers will notice the discrepancy and work it out for themselves. (Mravinsky's quote comes from an official Soviet book published in 1967, while Milkis talked to Ms Wilson in 1989 and so was free to speak his mind.) Unfortunately this just isn't good enough. Many Western readers don't understand the terms of the debate and haven't read enough background on Soviet Russia to know what to look for. The dates of each contribution are given at the back, whereas they should have been supplied beside the relevant portions of text so that browsing readers could easily decide for themselves what a given statement is worth.

Even this, though, is no safe insurance against misunderstanding, and the final condemnation of Elizabeth Wilson's declared intention to let her readers make up their own minds is her inexplicable inclusion of a piece of brazen propaganda purporting to have been written by Lev Arnshtam, in which Shostakovich is represented as being so full of Revolutionary enthusiasm at the Petrograd Conservatoire that he didn't notice he was hungry, ill, and freezing cold during the winter. If there is anyone still happy to accept that Shostakovich's rhythmic sense was "forged by the rhythm and pace of the Revolution", they'll doubtless enjoy this weird, alien ranting. Those familiar with the Martian traits of Soviet Realist officialese will recognise that this piece (published in 1976) is state-sponsored balderdash which Arnshtam, had he not died in 1980, would have witheringly repudiated. Not to point this out in a note is a dereliction of editorial duty. Unless she believes it to be genuine, which is hard to credit, Wilson can only have included this article to fill a gap - and it is noticeable that her coverage of events before 1950 is very much thinner than it is thereafter.

It is especially unfortunate that, for obvious reasons, Elizabeth Wilson was unable to interview many people who knew Shostakovich during the Twenties and Thirties, for the wealth of material she adduces from interviews relating to the post-1950 period suggest that a similar store of surprises remains to be unearthed from among the scores of the preceding quarter-century. Even so she presents more than enough material to prove - notwithstanding the spurious "Arnshtam" article - that Shostakovich was not only never a Communist, but almost certainly not even a Narodnik.

Speaking to Wilson some time between 1988 and 1990, his sister Zoya insists that the atmosphere in their house after the Revolution was "very free and liberal" with "no talk of politics". Boris Lossky, a

pupil with Shostakovich at the Shidlovskaya School, opines, in an article written in 1989, that the *Funeral March in Memory of the Victims of the Revolution* was linked to the massacre of those protesting against Lenin's dissolution of the Constituent Assembly at the beginning of 1918: "During the spring of 1918, Mitya never so much as hinted at any kind of sympathy with the 'existing regime', and I can vouch that this was the case until 1922." The Glivenko letters of 1923 to early 1924 contain a number of pro-Lenin statements which the anti-revisionists will seize on with relief - but the probability (as with the composer's letters to Isaak Glikman) is that Shostakovich was writing against the chance that the secret police might open his mail, which, on the face of it, was highly likely. (He destroyed most of his letters to his mother shortly after her death in 1955. Zoya recalls him "coming into the room, a bundle of nerves, and burning them all in the stove". Presumably they contained compromising passages.)

Apart from these almost certainly bogus references, the picture is one of an aesthetic, superhumanly gifted, and utterly apolitical boy for whom music (and literature) were the be-all-and-end-all. Writing to Boleslav Yavorsky in 1925, he confesses: "There are no other joys in life apart from music. For me, all of life is music." His fellow student Valerian Bogdanov-Berezovsky, writing under constraint in 1976, lets the cat out of the bag: "An outstanding feature of the young Shostakovich was his early independence of thought and behaviour." (This is reliable Aesopian for "He wasn't a Communist.") Mikhail Druskin effectively confirms this, while elsewhere we learn that Shostakovich was contemptuous not only of Bezymensky's Lenin-lionising verses for the Second Symphony but also of the propagandist plots of all three of his ballets.

A letter to Andrei Balanchivadze, published in 1967, ostensibly indicates that he approved of music with an ideological thrust. However, this is not to be taken at face-value and contains an obvious Aesopian component, which I leave readers to identify for themselves. (Incidentally, the reason why Shostakovich tried to dissuade Valentin Berlinsky from playing a quartet by Luigi Nono is not so much that he disliked Nono's idiom as that Nono was a boorishly intolerant Euro-Communist. See Nikolai Karetnikov, 'The Visit of a Distinguished Musician', *Tempo* 173.)

According to Lev Lebedinsky, to whom Elizabeth Wilson gives great credence, he once said to Shostakovich: "You were the first to declare war against Stalin." The composer did not deny this - and Lebedinsky's attached comment that "already, from his early years, Shostakovich understood what was going on in our country and what was to come" is borne out by the witnesses mentioned above. "What did you go to the Finland Station for?" he asked Shostakovich. "I wanted to hear Lenin's speech," he replied. "I knew a dictator was arriving." If Harvey Pitcher's *Witnesses of the Russian Revolution* is anything to go by, the experience must have been quite a let-down since Lenin's reputation as a charismatic orator was a propaganda myth. (It should be said that Boris Lossky thinks the Finland Station story was another myth - yet here, again, Wilson misses the chance for a cross-reference.)

It's a shame that there's still virtually nothing available about Shostakovich during the period of the Cultural Revolution. It's also a pity - though hardly Ms Wilson's fault - that Isaak Glikman's

characterisations of the symphonies are so jejune. (Lovely man, lousy critic.) Sad, too, to see so much squabbling between members of the composer's inner and next-to-inner circles. Bolshoi Theatre director Boris Pokrovsky may have got bad reviews from Glikman and Levitin for his production of *Katerina Izmailova*, but that doesn't excuse his biliously irresponsible statement that "the people who surrounded Shostakovich in his later years, who visited him in his home and today publish memoirs claiming the closeness of their relationship, these people are the enemies of Shostakovich, not Stalin and Zhdanov". It's motivated backbiting of this sort which makes it difficult to take certain testimonies at face value (notably the depositions of Edison Denisov).

On the other hand, there are some wonderful things here, not the least of which is a magnificent reflection on the Thirteenth Symphony by Grigori Kozintsev. And the musicians are absolutely at one on what Shostakovich's music meant, e.g., Fyodor Druzhinin: "People who lived in Shostakovich's epoch have no need to dig in the archives or to marvel at the evidence of repressions and executions and murders. It is all there in the music."

(Richard Taruskin, who scorns the idea that Shostakovich ever composed music with specific images in mind, will now have to deal not only with Yevgeny Mravinsky's contention to the contrary - Kirill Kondrashin's remarks to this effect are already well-known - but also several other similar testimonies in these pages, notably Flora Litvinova's account of Shostakovich's minutely detailed scheme for musically depicting a scene in Gogol's *Dead Souls*.)

This is not the definitive Shostakovich biography and musicological study we're all waiting for; the author herself acknowledges that we'll have to wait a long time for that. (One hopes somebody out there is writing it.) Instead it's a rich trove of reminiscences and evocations of a fascinating, funny, endearing, and altogether extraordinary man. It is also a damningly wholesale indictment of the murderous stupidity of Soviet Communism. We are in Elizabeth Wilson's debt.

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SHOSTAKOVICH RECONSIDERED

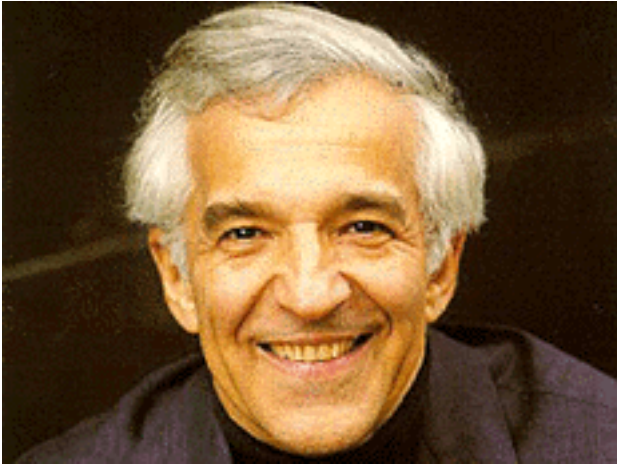
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SHOSTAKOVICH AND THE SOVIET STATE

Vladimir Ashkenazy talks about the composer

Vladimir Ashkenazy was interviewed by John Stratford and John Riley in October 1991 while travelling by car to his hotel from Walthamstow Town Hall, where he had spent the day rehearsing the Eighth Symphony with the Royal Philharmonic Orchestra. This interview, conducted shortly before the attempted Communist coup which, backfiring, brought Boris Yeltsin to power, originally appeared in [DSCH](#).

You left the Soviet Union in 1963. Did you ever meet Shostakovich?

I met him two or three times. Once I played his Trio for him with some friends of mine. He was very sweet. But he didn't make any comment. Later I found out that this wasn't very good. It probably meant he didn't like our interpretation too much! Fair enough, we were only students. But I thought we played quite well! Another time I met him at a concert, and he congratulated me; and another time I went to the first performance of his Cello Concerto, given by Rostropovich with piano accompaniment, in the Union of Soviet Composers. I shook his hand, I think. But I never met him properly.

You mentioned playing the Trio. Have you played much of the piano music?

Well, there isn't much, as you know. I've played a few Preludes and Fugues, that's all.

Are you planning to record any of these?

No, I don't think so, although I like them very much. I think it's a bit too late now for me to learn them. I have other priorities. The concertos I never was very fond of, for different reasons. The First is just too early for me, a little bit like the Second and Third Symphonies. Not much to do, not very deep.

And the Second even more so?

The Second is written for his son, when he was a student. Very light. It's very sweet. He's a master - whatever he wrote is masterful. But the Preludes and Fugues... this is serious. An incredible journey! Fantastic cycle. But it's so difficult to learn. You have to devote so much time and energy and concentration.

Yes, in your autobiography *Beyond Frontiers* you mentioned visiting Richter when he was struggling with the G sharp minor.

(Laughing) Ah, yes. But Richter is a great interpreter of these pieces, and Nikolaeva too.

Perhaps we could turn to some recent recordings of yours. You have already recorded the Fourth and Fifth Symphonies. Do you see a big break between the Fourth and Fifth Symphonies? Is there a signal in the Fourth as to how Shostakovich may have developed in different circumstances?

(Very thoughtful) Difficult to say. I think there is a distinct border, a watershed, between the Fourth and Fifth. My guess is that... there was a spectacularly talented young composer in the Fourth Symphony. And I think in the Fifth Symphony there is already a man who has suffered a lot, who developed a way of expressing himself. In the Fourth it is not yet self-expression. It's just the reaction of a very interested individual to the world around him. Then, as you know, he was vilified by Stalin for the opera *Lady Macbeth* and, while rehearsing the Fourth Symphony in Leningrad, decided to scrap it. I think he suffered very much. He must have felt he was a very talented man. He already had success and a certain recognition. He wasn't an idiot - he knew it was unfair to make him a public culprit and there was a lot of suffering in his soul and mind. You can hear it in the Fifth Symphony. Here is an individual who is suffering from the injustice of the world. It's not just a reaction to the world that is happening around him. It's already an inner problem which became one of his hallmarks.

But what is interesting to me is that it doesn't sound like self-pity, which you can find in Chekhov and Mahler for example. I don't find self-pity in Shostakovich. Although it is his torture, it becomes sublimated, totally transcended. It becomes the tragedy of an individual, not of Shostakovich but of an individual, a victim of the Soviet system. You can feel it in the Fifth to some degree already. You certainly feel it in the Sixth, in the first movement, and in the Eighth, Ninth, and Tenth, and in the Violin Concerto. Along with his grotesque satire and disdain for the trivia around him, this is the strongest point of his greatest output. It is the tragedy and the darkness of the life of an individual within totalitarian oppression.

Does it contribute to the widely accepted greatness of the Fifth Symphony that, through it, he found not only a means of self-expression but was forced to express things which were internal?

The Soviet authorities you mean? In my humble opinion I think they hailed the Fifth Symphony only because of the D major at the end.

Even in the West, the Fifth is his most popular symphony. Do you feel this popularity is justified?

Well, it's accessible enough, very clear, very tonal. You don't need to make a great effort listening to it, or studying it. This contributes to many pieces being very popular, not just Shostakovich! Other pieces are more complex. You need a greater effort, but you get greater rewards too. That's human nature. What's easier to listen to very often becomes more popular, and this is very unfair to many pieces. But there is nothing wrong with an accessible piece like the Fifth Symphony being popular. It has substance at the same time.

To many people, in his attitude to the Soviet state, Dmitri Shostakovich is still something of an enigma. Do you agree?

No, not at all. In fact to call him an enigma, if I may say so, is if anything to simplify the issue. I think that too much is made out of the fact that he wrote a lot of very important music, with a lot of self-expression and a lot of substance, and that there are also pieces that seem to be, so to speak, a lot of hot air, written as a sort of due, or official pay-off, to the Communist Party. Therefore there is a school of thought that he is an enigmatic man, that we can't quite figure him out. Was he really somebody who approved of the Soviet system, or somebody really not approving, but hiding this inside himself?

You see, with the constant brainwashing of the propaganda in the Soviet Union it would have been difficult to remain sane for the sanest of people. It is very hard for you to conceive how it was, to be living in the former Soviet Union. A nightmare, really. You can become a schizophrenic, not in the fullest psychological sense perhaps, but in the sense that you try to retain your 'inner world' somehow and yet in public, in your daily work and relationships with other people, you have to be someone else. You can't really be yourself, you can't speak your mind. An idea... it has an imprint on almost everybody, and anybody. There must be some exceptions, I suppose, but not so many. I believe Solzhenitsyn is one of those who managed to fight and win, in a way, retaining his sanity. But people are different. Some very intelligent people, people of great integrity even, sometimes did succumb to the Soviet propaganda. Sometimes they became only fellow-travellers, sometimes even adherents of the Soviet system, believing sincerely that this system might have some future, in spite of the terror, the murders and the killings and so on.

So therefore just to put a stamp on Shostakovich as an enigma is simplifying the thing. It is a case of a person with a great degree of awareness of life, with great gifts in his profession, great integrity as an individual - there is no question about that. He might have been influenced by the constant propaganda - not to the degree that he would approve, but to a degree where he could see enough hope that the system could somehow transform itself; that maybe all the sufferings would not be in vain. Seeing millions being killed in the camps, sometimes you might think 'Well, it's a terrible sacrifice, but maybe something will come out of it'. Imagine the psyche of a person like this. So let's give him the benefit of the doubt.

Maybe some of the expression in *Song of the Forests*, or some other pieces of 'glory' to Stalin, maybe they had one per cent of hope. Maybe it's not all in vain. So that is where the truth might lie. But at the same time he also knew, I'm sure, that if he wrote these pieces he'd be able do his own job, so to speak -

his planned path as a great composer and a great individual - if he writes his Eleventh Symphony, Twelfth Symphony, the *Song of the Forests* and so on. 'Why don't I write it? I'll pay them off! Then I can write the Thirteenth, Fourteenth, Fifteenth.' But it's not an enigma!

Has your personal and musical appreciation of Shostakovich changed radically since you came to the West, or since *Testimony* came out?

I think it would be wrong to suggest that my view of Shostakovich changed, because of, or with, my coming to the West. I came to the West when I was 26. I was still really an immature young boy. My character was formed in the West. Had I stayed in Russia I would be a different person. But my perception of music, of life, of *everything* really only started when I came to the West. That's when I began really to think for myself, and form my view of Shostakovich's music. I didn't have much of a view before. It was part of our life. Shostakovich, the great man, was always there!

You've recently recorded the Michelangelo suite and the Lebyadkin cycle.

Yes, the Michelangelo with Fischer-Dieskau and the orchestra. We did it last week.

You seem to have an affinity with some of the slightly more unusual works. For instance, your recording of the Fifth Symphony is coupled with the *Five Fragments*.

Well, why not? It's not that I'm particularly fond of these pieces, but you have to fill up recordings with something. The company comes up with different ideas. And I'm interested in exploring things. *Lebyadkin*, actually, is not bad at all. It's a terrific piece. I'm glad that they suggested it. When I learnt it, I said 'it's good, it's interesting'. Otherwise I would maybe never come across it. It's such a rare piece. I think it's only been recorded once before.

The Eighth Symphony, which you're recording tomorrow - how do you feel it fits into the development of Shostakovich? I'm thinking of the 'political' aspects of the Seventh and Eighth Symphonies. Do you think they were wholly 'patriotic' works?

(Thoughtfully) Patriotic works... Well, the Seventh is in a way patriotic, of course. I don't know the Seventh that well - I haven't learnt it yet. I don't think it is one of his strongest pieces. The man was identifying himself very much with his country and his people. During the war how could you help but be patriotic? The country was invaded by a hostile enemy, and a very strong enemy, who was marching through the west of the country and burning everything around him, torturing and killing people for no reason. Naturally, Shostakovich, as a son of his motherland, couldn't help but express it. There's nothing political about it. Just being a part of your country. In a way, you would feel the same about England if an invasion of this kind happened to you. Whether it is Communism or not, you just feel for your country.

The Eighth is a different cup of tea, although it's still a war symphony - you hear the armies are still

marching. But I think he knew the war was going well. His mind turned back to the stark reality of the country, as it would be again after the war. The oppressiveness of the system, and the suffering of the individual, both in the first movement and in the slow movement - you can hear them very strongly. The Eighth was written at exactly the same time as the great tank battle of Kursk, which followed the battle of Stalingrad, in July and August 1943. I'm sure the optimism was there. They knew they were winning the war. There was nothing to hold the Soviet army. That's why I think his mind was already turning to the future. And the future probably didn't sound terribly optimistic to him. There is a glimmer of hope in the symphony, at the very end, there is a kind of... not optimism, but a feeling that at least some of the suffering is over with the eventual end of the war. At least something has been achieved. But that's not all. It's only a glimmer of hope. Interestingly enough, in the Thirteenth Symphony, which was composed and performed in 1962, again at the very end, there is also - very reminiscent of the Eighth Symphony - this glimmer of hope at the end of the quartet of the strings. Maybe it's not the end of the world. Something will happen. Maybe something will happen. Maybe we'll find peace with ourselves, in our soul or... somewhere! (*Chuckles.*)

What about symphonies like the Eleventh and Twelfth? There are the diverging theories: the Party line, Soviet theory that these are 'patriotic' works. The other theory being that the Eleventh is in fact more about events in Hungary in 1956 than in Russia, 1905. Do you think that this is particularly relevant to the symphony?

(*After a long pause*) Difficult to say. I think to relate it to the Hungarian revolution is too dangerous. After all, the Russian revolutionary songs have a certain atmosphere that can be related only to what happened in Russia in 1905. Let's not forget that 1905 was a very important year in Russian history. 1905 was the year when the monarch, the Tsar, decided to give up some of his powers to the people. Of course, this was limited, but it was still a step forward. People have parliaments and they decide what to do. So, Party line or not, it was still an important year.

More so than 1917?

Well, in retrospect, yes. Of course, 1917 was an extremely important year, but from another point of view - from the cataclysmic point of view. A tragedy for the country. I think the Eleventh was a combination of 'paying off' the Party and composing a piece that's very effective in any case. It's a great master who is putting together not a bad piece. Maybe the Eleventh is not a great piece of self-analysis or self-expression, or perception of the world, but it's programme music that's very well put together and that meant a lot for the Russian people historically, temperamentally.

And then came *The Execution of Stepan Razin* soon after the Eleventh.

This wasn't so welcomed by the Party, because although on the face of it, Razin was considered as the leader of the peasantry - revolting against the Tsar and against the autocracy for the freedom of the peasants. Transferred to the present-day Soviet situation, it was double-faced. You couldn't say that it wasn't a genuine tribute to Razin. At the same time it was in Aesopian language. It could be the

execution of any potential fighter for freedom in the Soviet Union! The piece certainly wasn't very popular with the Party! Neither were the Michelangelo poems terribly popular, because the references to Solzhenitsyn were so clear there. The lines which refer to Michelangelo as an exile, it is Solzhenitsyn, no question about it.

What are your views about the Twelfth Symphony?

The Twelfth Symphony is not a very strong work.

Not even the first movement?

I don't think so. I think it's really a pastiche. Maybe he tried genuinely to find something attractive in Lenin. But I don't know if he could really find it.

You mentioned the Eleventh Symphony is not a great expression of personal feeling, but a frankly political work. How do you think those two halves of Shostakovich relate? Were all the political works simply paying his dues?

Not necessarily political ... Look at Mussorgsky's *Boris Godunov*. Would you really consider this a political work? Though it wasn't very welcome in Tsarist Russia, because he depicted the tragedy of the Tsar, he also depicted the participation of simple people in shaping the fate of Russia. Is it political? Or is it simply caring about your country's history, its future, the national mentality and the national fate? Isn't it legitimate to suggest that Shostakovich also cared about his country's fate and therefore *The Year 1905* is in a way a product of that? - Not necessarily political, but just a historical view? The fact that the Communists singled out 1905 for their own ends doesn't mean 1905 wasn't important for the country. The Communists never came to power then. But Lenin is a difficult, different situation. Lenin was the Communist leader who made the country what it became - who started the tragedy.

Do you think that the same sort of feelings as in the Twelfth were behind the Second Symphony, which is probably another weak work which deals with the same period, and the same sort of events?

No. He was a young man, young, probably quite immature, who couldn't quite figure out just what was happening. Nobody could. It was an exciting time. There was a lot of hope. On the face of it, the Communists said power went to the people now. Nobody knew it wasn't actually true. People believed it *was* true. Half of the West believed it. Some cretins, excuse me, from the West travelled to Russia and said 'we have seen the future, and the future works' - H. G. Wells and lots of other people. People were blinded. And Shostakovich could have been too - I don't know enough. I will never know, probably. But a young man could have been easily led, not knowing quite where things were going. He could have been fairly enthusiastic, even if just on the surface, just superficially enthusiastic. 'Let's see what happens. Let's just contribute to it.' The Second and Third Symphonies are shallow pieces. There's nothing in them. Just slogans and chaos. It was chaos around him and he reflected it. In the Fourth,

which unlike these two is powerful, maybe something in him was already starting to awaken, maybe his eyes were opening. Maybe he felt unconsciously there is a great tragedy coming - it's very possible. But not the Second or Third - just exciting. Chaotic, exciting.

Your comments about the idiotic Westerners totally misunderstanding the situation in Russia seem very reminiscent of various comments in Volkov's book *Testimony*. What are your views about *Testimony*?

Funnily enough, I've recently started reading Ian MacDonald's new [biography](#). I am very impressed. I have nothing to add to his thorough research and honest description of how people took to *Testimony*. For me it was good reading. What he says is totally true. So I have nothing to add. My views are identical with MacDonald's views! He really understands what happened, and in the end he says what I said and what Rostropovich and Vishnevskaya said, and what Maxim said in the end. That's where the truth lies. Of course, Shostakovich could not have been a Party person. He was just a true son of his country (*Ashkenazy taps his palm emphatically here*) who was influenced by what was happening in his country.

Who could not fail to see that the system didn't work? Yes, he wanted to pay his 'due' to the Party, for this they might leave him alone. It's like Newspeak, Orwell, *1984*, and all that. You're one person with yourself, or with your closest friend, and you're not quite the same with other people, because you're afraid to be. Look at Gorbachev, for instance. He obviously wanted to change the country, no question about it. He knew the only way was to join the Party, to get to the top, if he's lucky, and then change things. Lots of people joined the Party in the last couple of decades for that same reason, because although they knew the country was going downhill, without going through the Party apparatus, nothing could ever be changed.

Because the Party was the only instrument that could do anything. It had total authority. Finally, I'm happy to say, it happened. Gorbachev and these people... (*Searches for the right words*) ...shifted the balance within the Party. Look at him. Up to the events of August, Gorbachev still thought the Party would do what he wanted it to do. He couldn't escape his background and upbringing. Although his mind was going ahead, his background held him back. Naturally, Shostakovich is a much 'greater' individual than Gorbachev in the sense of awareness of life. But something must have had an effect on him, from what was around him. Maybe a part of him thought that something could be changed within the system. That's why I think some of the Party pieces are not just paying off the Party, but express some hope too, if only a tiny percentage.

To take another lesser known side of his musical output, do you have any views on his film music?

I can't say I know it terribly much. He had to write it, to earn his living. I listened to *Hamlet* and *1919*, I think. It's not his strongest output, although it is very fine and masterly. It's not like Prokofiev's film music for *Nevsky* and *Ivan The Terrible* - that's really something. The film music is a very important part of Shostakovich's image, but not for me.

Shostakovich's standing in the Soviet Union seems to be going down at present. For example, fewer of his recordings are available.

Oh, I don't agree with you. If Shostakovich is not popular, then who is? I think at this moment of great change in the Soviet Union there just isn't much attention paid to music in general. There is no money for music. Conservatories are neglected, music schools are not looked after, concert life is fragmented, few people are going to concerts. So I don't think you should draw any conclusions. I don't know what the criteria are now, for 'popular' or whatever. Don't draw any conclusions about Shostakovich until Russia becomes more... normal.

Are there any plans to publish *Testimony* in the Soviet Union?

Passages have already been published in *Soviet Music*, I read them myself - or in *Music Life*. I think Volkov told me they are going to publish the whole book.

What do you think the response will be? Will people be surprised?

No. Not at all. A confirmation of what they already knew. If there are any inaccuracies in *Testimony*, and I'm not sure that there are, I am sure that they arise out of the normal problems of recording interviews and conversations - just misunderstandings and misinterpretations. As far as the character and image of Shostakovich are concerned, I'm sure it is true to life. I was always sure Shostakovich hated the Soviet system, because we all hated it. But I still think there is this glimmer of hope in all his music.

The Fourteenth Symphony doesn't seem to have any hope in it at all.

Well, that's personal. I find it difficult to comment. Each one of us has a different concept of death or dying. That's nothing to do with politics. That's what he was. I can't pretend to enter his 'inner world' here.

With its politically unpopular texts, and death not being an allowable subject in the USSR, it must have taken incredible courage to write and present that work.

Yes, but it's apolitical in a sense. It's political only in that the Party declared we always talk about optimistic things. Not about death - it's too negative! But it's not a critique of the Soviet system. They performed the piece a few times, but they didn't encourage it. At least he wasn't vilified for the piece. Perhaps because he had written the Eleventh and Twelfth Symphonies.

Very different to the Thirteenth Symphony, which is a direct, head-on attack.

Oh yes. An implicit and explicit attack on the system. And it was nearly cancelled, as you know. But don't forget that even under an inflexible, totalitarian system, it was still a living country, with people

who were living a full life. There were tensions even within the Party, the Central Committee, even within those who were totally Communist oriented. So, it was possible to perform the Thirteenth Symphony even though it was critical of the system. And it was possible to overthrow the system twenty or more years later. This means that things were brewing, it wasn't just black and white. People were even able to influence the hacks on the Central Committee.

Kondrashin saw it as his patriotic duty to perform the work.

Exactly. Well, he was only a 'Communist with a Party card'. Inside, he wasn't a Communist, no question. He hated them. He had to join the Party to do things for his orchestra, to travel abroad, to be trusted.

Mr. Ashkenazy, many thanks for giving us so much of your time at this late hour.

It's been a pleasure.

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Recent Commentary on Symphonies 1-5

Since 1989, much material about Shostakovich has emerged from the former Soviet Union, some of it historical, some in the form of new articles, some of it given in interviews. This is a digest of such commentary on the first five symphonies. Digests of commentary on symphonies 6-15 will appear in the future.

Symphony No. 1 in F minor, Opus 10 (1924-5)

The composer's life during the composition of the First Symphony was stressful; he was often ill and frequently depressed. Shostakovich's letters to his girlfriend Tatyana Glivenko supply an outline of his view of the composition of the First Symphony. On 1st February 1924 (eight months earlier than hitherto supposed), he writes to Tanya that he has begun to compose a symphony and has "already done a bit". (He was then 17.) Four days later he reports himself "very busy with my symphony", adding that he's been to see Tchaikovsky's *Sleeping Beauty* "about ten times" and is immersed in Dostoyevsky. He notes the approach of the second anniversary of his father's death and speaks highly of him. On 26th February 1924, he tells Tanya that he has started to compose the "third part" of his symphony. As part of his work for Maximilian Steinberg's form/composition class, he has submitted the scherzo, which Steinberg has "ripped to shreds": "What is this enthusiasm for the grotesque? There were grotesque passages in your Trio (Opus 8), all your cello pieces (Opus 9) are grotesque, and finally this scherzo, too, is grotesque! Probably there will be some critic in Leningrad who'll say this is brilliant, this is wonderful, and that'll be the end of you!" (In a letter to the pianist Lev Oborin dated 4th December, Shostakovich repeats this story, conceding that "it would be more fitting to call this work Symphony-Grotesque".) Despite his disapproval, Steinberg tells his pupil to continue with his symphony.

Around March-April 1924, Shostakovich becomes disillusioned with Petrograd.^[1] In a letter dated 22nd March, he tells Tanya that he's decided to move to Moscow (where she lives) and take up his studies at the city's conservatory. He is fed up with the backbiting in local musical circles, some of which is directed at him. On 23rd May he mentions a purge at the Leningrad Conservatory (which "doesn't concern" him). A fortnight later, he notes that the purge has "got rid of" his best friend. A letter dated 13th May states that he plans to write some "patriotic" music during the summer.^[2] By June 1924 he is convalescing in a Crimean sanatorium and forbidden to play the piano. (This reminds him of his similar sojourn in the Crimea the previous year when he met Tanya.) On 11th July, he mentions plans to finish the Scherzo, Opus 7 ("begun recently"), plus "two violin pieces" and the Fugue, Opus 11. No further mention of the First Symphony occurs in Shostakovich's letters to Tanya Glivenko until 1st October, when he announces - quite as if he has never mentioned it to her before - that he is composing a symphony! (Whether this is the work he refers to in his letters of February is unclear, although presumably the scherzo is the same.)

On 6th October, he tells Tanya that he is so fed up with the poverty of his family that, in November, he will start playing the piano in a local cinema. This, he says, will simultaneously allow his mother to stop working thirteen hours a day (!) as a cashier and be an easier way to earn money than giving concerts, which always makes him so nervous. On 7th November, Shostakovich again announces, as if for the first time, that he's writing a symphony (his conservatory task for the year). It is, he says, "quite bad, but I have to write it so that I can have done with the conservatory this year, since I'm sick of it and don't feel like writing a symphony now". On 10th December he reports having written two sections of the symphony. A week later he is having to do twice as long in each cinema session (four hours) and is finding it very tiring. His creativity has "died" and he has still only completed the first two parts of the symphony. In a letter dated 19th December, he describes himself as neurotic, irritable, insomniac, fed up with his cinema work, and on bad terms with God; all in all, he is not in the mood for writing the third movement. A fortnight later Shostakovich is writing the third movement, and confessing that the work will be a weight off his shoulders when it's finished. He finishes the third movement on 12th January 1925: "In my view it's turned out very well, the most substantial of my works." He adds that he fears that it'll never be performed - or performed only after he has died: "And it'll be performed badly since I won't be there to show them how it should go."

In January 1925, Shostakovich's sister Maria secures a position giving dancing lessons. Able now to drop his onerous cinema job, he is free to complete the symphony and his spirits rise. On 28th January he reports himself "blissfully happy" composing the finale. By 16th February, however, times are tough again. Still only 18 years old, he is suing the owner of the Bright Reel cinema - Akim Volinsky, "a well-known person used to respect" - for unpaid wages. ("People are shocked that I'm taking such a distinguished person to court.") He's hungry, suffering from bronchitis, and finding it difficult to write the symphony's finale. On 4th April he reports meeting the musicologist Boleslav Yavorsky, "the only real musician in Moscow and Petrograd, the only ray of light in the darkness of the modern musical world". Yavorsky has shown him that his music is "infected with conservatism"; he is trying to get rid of this. Shostakovich's next letter, a week later, is unhappy. His friend, the poet Volodya Kurchavov, is dying. As for himself, he's ill and thinking about suicide. Six days later, he writes about this to Lev Oborin, complaining of the difficulty of finding digs and describing his love-hate relationship with Moscow: "Its teeming masses make a horrible impression on me - its low houses, the crowds on the streets - but nevertheless I yearn to go there with all my soul. Doubts and problems, all this darkness suffocate me. From sheer misery I've started to compose the finale of the Symphony. It's turning out pretty gloomy - almost like Myaskovsky, who takes the cake when it comes to gloominess."^[3] Next day he writes to Tanya, telling her he's in "sweet ecstasy" when composing, which he does till four in the morning. Though he tried to hang himself, he didn't have the guts to kick away the chair. He describes hallucinating. On 1st May, he announces that he finished the symphony on 26th April, is very pleased with it, and has dedicated it to his friend Mikhail Kvadri.

In contrast with Shostakovich's practice as an adult, his First Symphony was not composed into full score as he proceeded. Thus, he had to go back and score the work, movement by movement, during June 1925 - hard labour that made him ill again. On 23rd June, he writes to Tanya informing her that his friend Volodya Kurchavov has died. By July, he is telling her all about the Octet (Opus 11) he's writing. ("I'm gradually becoming more of a modernist.") On 12th November he tells her that Malko will conduct the symphony; meanwhile he's busy writing out the orchestral parts. On 16th January 1926, he is correcting scores (and again, unlike his adult self, complaining about this drudgery). 1st April finds him fretting over a second round of corrections to orchestral parts. On 20th April he tells Tanya that there will be only three full rehearsals: 6th-8th May. Though Shostakovich reckons Malko a good conductor, he fears that he is incapable of presenting the symphony the way it should be. ("Even the slightest deviation from my wishes is painfully unpleasant.") On 28th April posters for the concert go up and the composer is having cold feet. After the premiere on 12th May 1926, however, he is able to bask in his glory - and relax a little. He writes to Tanya on 21st May that he is "amused" by the reviews of the symphony in "the red press". As for her, she is taken completely by surprise by the work's success. Sofia Khentova relates that, on 20th March 1925, Tanya had attended a recital of music by Shostakovich which included the Trio (dedicated to her), as well as the Fantastic Dances for piano, the Suite for Two Pianos, and the Opus 9 pieces for cello:

"The performances didn't go well, as the better Conservatoire students refused to have anything to do with this unknown music by an equally unknown composer. Afterwards, Tanya did her best to comfort the 'sobbing' composer. If anything, this experience gave him the impetus to finish his First Symphony and, in early May 1926, Glivenko came to Leningrad for the première. Sitting in the Great Hall of the Philharmonic with Shostakovich's sister Maria, she was stunned by the work's triumphant reception. They were quite shy women and as a souvenir they secretly took a poster from the artists' dressing room."[\[4\]](#)

As for interpretation, Leningrad pianist and musicologist Mikhail Druskin sees the First Symphony as an expression of the two contrasting sides of the composer's character. On the one hand, we hear his "youthful charm... abundant sense of humour... keen eye for the ridiculous, often noticing the absurd where others paid no attention". On the other hand, there is Shostakovich's tragic sense: "In his adolescence, he experienced hardship: he lost his father early, suffered deprivation and ill health, and had to take mundane jobs to help the family. These sufferings were reflected in his First Symphony, with its dramatic collisions."[\[5\]](#) The composer's son Maxim hears the symphony in vivid illustrative terms:

"You must conduct it two ways. In the first movement, the happy, young Shostakovich is running down the Nevsky Prospect on a Sunday. In the second movement, it is a rainy, gray, cold day. Both are Quixotic adventures... The opening should be compared to *The Nose*. Wake. Yawn. Stretch. The trumpet is the opening yawn... Others may have a different interpretation. No one knows. That's what musical life is about."[\[6\]](#)

Maxim pictures the first movement as a march, "the beginning of a journey". The second movement is "'On the Road', as if from an old fairy tale (the pianist seems quite nervous); back on the road; fairy tale music, very grand." The third movement he hears as "one long phrase". As to the finale, he echoes his father in preferring it to the other three movements: "There is no room for cuts or for changes. I like it very much. It works very much like a film. The fast material means a lot of time is passing quickly. With the sound of the timpani, you're back to real time..." Maxim conceives the First Symphony as a *jeu d'esprit*, a work of youth looking back on mixed but generally better times: "In his Piano Sonata No. 1, 'October' [written next after First Symphony] he showed he was aware that the good wouldn't last."^[7] Others hear something deeper already present in this symphony. Violinist Yakov Milkis sees it as "the first chapter of a book where you know that a great drama will unfold. Your interest has been captured, and you remain in suspense awaiting the terror that lies ahead."^[8] Lev Lebedinsky goes considerably further, describing the work as "an alarm, a forecast of the terrible future".^[9] Speaking to Elizabeth Wilson between 1988 and 1989, he amplified this: "As a true democrat, he [Shostakovich] deeply detested the communist system, which continually threatened his very life. In his first major work, his First Symphony, he already challenged the forces of evil. I was the first to note that the timpani in the last movement sound like a depiction of an execution on a scaffold. When I remarked to Dmitri Dmitryevich, 'You were the first to declare war against Stalin,' he did not deny it. Already, from his early ears, Shostakovich understood what was going on in our country and what was to come."^[10]

Symphony No. 2 in B major, Opus 14 (1927) - "To October"

Shostakovich's Second Symphony is usually said to have been composed early in 1927, the year of the 10th anniversary of the October revolution for which it was commissioned. However, in a letter to Tanya Glivenko dated 21st December 1925, he informs her that he has already begun composing his Second Symphony: "I'll finish it in 1926. Maybe it will be performed." It is impossible to tell whether this "Second Symphony" bears any relationship to the work he eventually catalogued under this title.^[11] The first reference to the Second Symphony as we know it is in a letter to Tanya dated 21st March 1927: "As for the music for the 10th anniversary of the October revolution, I already have some ideas. At the very end I've decided to introduce factory hooters tuned to a certain key." While writing the symphony he keeps breaking off to compose additional pieces for his *Aphorisms*, Opus 13. On 20th March he is sarcastic about the conductorless (and thus "politically correct") Persimfans orchestra's chances of performing his First Symphony: "It will probably be very unpleasant to be present at their rape of my symphony." Of the Second Symphony, he reports that he has started to compose it and that the beginning is "very difficult - I cannot play it. Today I, one of my friends, and my mother, all three of us, somehow played this section. It sounds good. It's a continuous din." On 28th May Shostakovich is "in a terrible hurry" to finish the symphony. It has to be ready by 28th July - another two months (indicating that his progress with it has not been rapid): "I'm tired of occupying myself with it... Because of it I've lost my peace of mind. [Alexander] Bezymensky has written abominable verses for it. I'm afraid that I won't be able to handle them." He adds that if he doesn't manage to finish the symphony, he'll send her a telegram to this effect so that she can come and bid him farewell - whereupon he'll hang himself! After

finishing the Second Symphony, Shostakovich met Nina Varzar at Detskoye Selo and wrote no more letters to Tatyana Glivenko until 1930-1.

When she spoke to Elizabeth Wilson in 1989, Tanya Glivenko confirmed that Shostakovich had considered Bezymensky's propagandist poem for the Second Symphony "quite disgusting".^[12] Nikolai Malko, who conducted the première on 5th November 1926, speaks similarly of these verses: "Shostakovich did not like them and simply laughed at them. His musical setting did not take them seriously, and showed no enthusiasm whatever."^[13] This, of course, casts doubt on the usual assumption that in the Second Symphony Shostakovich was manifesting a sincere expression of Communist faith.^[14] Manashir Yakubov, who claims that Shostakovich wrote "compositions quite crystalline in ideological respect", gives only one example of this: the Second Symphony. Confusingly, he contradicts himself by saying that the work cannot, even retrospectively, be categorised as Socialist Realist: "Probably he hoped that people would hear behind the generalised pictures of violence and the groans of the people something different from what Communist ideologists wanted to hear."^[15] Daniel Zhitomirsky, who later became an admirer of Shostakovich, disliked the work when, as a RAPM musicologist, he heard Shostakovich play it to Nikolai Zhilyaev in the winter of 1927: "The musical language seemed to be artificially complex, and the composer made no concessions to the tastes and the habits of the 'proletarian listener'." Later Zhitomirsky disliked the work for other reasons: "The aim which motivated the composer (or had been instilled in him by official propaganda) to glorify the October Revolution was a false aim. It was a child of our illusions of the 1920s... The picture of revolution depicted in the symphony was extremely schematic; it did not originate out of contact with real life, but out of the Marxist textbooks of the time."^[16] In answer to whether the Second and Third symphonies reflect "an idealistic Leninist period" in Shostakovich's life, his son Maxim concedes - obscurely, since this has always been the critical assumption about these works - that "It is becoming a popular scholarly posture". He adds, in explanation, that: "Leninism, in a nutshell, is the imperative of the good to destroy everything in its path. He [Shostakovich] believed in the sanctity of human life. Shostakovich did not think much of his Second and Third symphonies."^[17]

Symphony No. 3 in E flat major, Opus 20 (1929) - "May Day"

Nothing of significance has emerged about this controversial work since 1990. In general the period 1928-34 in Shostakovich's life is badly underdocumented. He is known to have disliked this symphony, though precisely when he arrived at this feeling is unknown. His son Maxim recalls: "Once when I wanted to conduct the Third, he looked at me and said, 'Couldn't you conduct something else?'"^[18]

Symphony No. 4 in C minor, Opus 43 (1935-6)

There is no source for the composer's inner view of his work after his letters to Tatyana Glivenko. Most of what we can glean about his last thirteen symphonies derives from observations made by those who knew or worked with him. Probably the most important misconception about the Fourth Symphony is that Shostakovich withdrew it voluntarily, either because he was afraid of the consequences of it being played during the developing Terror of 1934-9, or because he was unhappy with the way rehearsals were going, or because he was dissatisfied with the work itself. Writing in 1990, Daniel Zhitomirsky gave a different version:

"Following the publication of the *Pravda* piece [28th January 1936], articles viciously condemning Shostakovich appeared all over the country. It was this condemnation that sealed the fate of the Fourth Symphony, finished later that year and immediately put into rehearsal with the Leningrad Philharmonic under Fritz Stiedry. According to a friend of the composer, the atmosphere during these sessions was ominous: 'A rumour had been spreading in musical and extra-musical circles that Shostakovich, ignoring his critics, had written a diabolically clever symphony crammed with formalisms. One day, during rehearsal, we received a visit from the Secretary of the Composers' Union, V. E. Iokhelson, accompanied by another important figure from the local Party HQ. Shortly afterwards, the director of the Philharmonic, I. M. Renzin, politely invited Dmitri Dmitryevich to his office. On the way home, Shostakovich was silent for a long while, finally saying in an even but toneless voice that the symphony would not be performed; it had been withdrawn on Renzin's recommendation.'" [\[19\]](#)

The "friend of the composer" to whom Zhitomirsky refers was Isaak Glikman, whose introduction to his *Letters to a Friend* is the source for this account. The notion that Shostakovich feared Fritz Stiedry would be unable to cope with the demands of the Fourth is denied by Glikman and by Mark Reznikov, a violinist from the Leningrad Philharmonic of the time. On the other hand, Alexander Gauk's anti-Stiedry line has been reiterated by Flora Litvinova with her recent claim that Shostakovich himself was unhappy with Stiedry's approach. Another Leningrad Philharmonic violinist, M. S. Shak paints a picture of a tense relationship between Shostakovich and Stiedry during rehearsals. [\[20\]](#) The composer's son Maxim adopts a modified version of the anti-Stiedry line ("The orchestra was nervous because of the difficulty"), but diverges from Glikman in maintaining that Shostakovich voluntarily withdrew the work. [\[21\]](#) As for the composer's belief in the Fourth Symphony itself, Kyrill Kondrashin testifies as follows:

"During the war, when everything was burned for heating, the score was thought to have been lost. Fortunately it proved possible to reconstruct it, and I asked Shostakovich whether he had any interest in having it performed. (The task was complicated by the numerous errors the existing score contained; I needed his advice.) Shostakovich took the material and studied it for a couple of days before announcing that he was still pleased with the symphony and happy to have me perform it." [\[22\]](#)

Issak Glikman confirms that Shostakovich expressed great satisfaction with the Fourth Symphony upon re-examining it in 1962: "It seems to me that in many respects my Fourth Symphony stands much higher

than my most recent ones!" [23] As for the work's alleged "grandiosomania" of which Shostakovich had spoken in the 1950s, his son Maxim responds with irritation: "No. No. It's a bad rumour. It's not true... He was very happy when Kyrill Kondrashin performed it. He was *very* happy. It's a great symphony. One of the greatest of his symphonies. Show me one bar you could take off. I couldn't find any one bar in the symphony, any cut. Because he is a great master of form, of the whole. The construction of the Fourth is fantastic! Big thing: he needed a big symphony for his big ideas. But everything is in place." [24] Shostakovich's revisions to the text of the Fourth as reconstructed in 1962 were, as Maxim's view suggests, very minor. Kondrashin records that he asked Shostakovich numerous questions during the rehearsals: "Whenever something went wrong, he waited for a pause, and asked the orchestra and the conductor to excuse him, blaming himself for the faults. All his observations were very precise. "I wrote that *piano*, but it'd sound better *mezzo-forte*" - that sort of thing. All these nuances went into the official edition." [25] (Maxim adds: "I have so much faith in my father's musicianship and genius that I feel that the revisions in *Lady Macbeth* and Symphony No. 4 have to be improvements. Therefore, those versions are preferable." [26])

Shostakovich is known sometimes to have lost confidence in himself and his work under pressure. However, his estimation of the Fourth Symphony in 1962 was so high that claims that he lost faith in it in late 1936 (and that this prompted him to withdraw it) are ostensibly weakened. That he feared the symphony's reception in the context of its time is more plausible. Apart from being formally incompatible with the demands of Soviet symphonism under Socialist Realist *diktat*, the work was too obviously at odds with "Soviet reality" itself. "When you listen to the Fourth," says Maxim Shostakovich, "you feel the breath of his time..." [27] Interviewed by Louis Blois in 1989, Maxim was more explicit about this, describing the Fourth as "dedicated to [evidently meaning a portrayal of] the policies and apocalypses of the Soviet regime". [28] According to Maxim, his father "thought it [the symphony] would be his end". The work is, in his view, "absolutely devoid of happy resolution - which has no relation to pessimism... The Fifth is less pessimistic than the Fourth. In the Fourth, there is no exit... The finale is dark." Vladimir Ashkenazy compares the Fourth and Fifth as follows:

"I think there is a distinct border, a watershed, between the Fourth and Fifth. My guess is that... there was a spectacularly talented young composer in the Fourth Symphony. And I think in the Fifth Symphony there is already a man who has suffered a lot, who developed a way of expressing himself. In the Fourth it is not yet self-expression. It's just the reaction of a very interested individual to the world around him." [29]

The question of whether Shostakovich withdrew the Fourth Symphony voluntarily or was ordered to do so cannot ultimately be resolved in the absence of official documentation of the affair, which may or may not exist. Clearly Shostakovich was aware that the work sailed dangerously close to the wind. Speaking to Flora Litvinova on the occasion of their last meeting, he reportedly told her: "You ask if I would have been different without 'Party guidance'? Yes, almost certainly. No doubt the line that I was pursuing when I wrote the Fourth Symphony would have been stronger and sharper in my work. I would

have displayed more brilliance, used more sarcasm, I could have revealed my ideas openly instead of having to resort to camouflage." [30] Given the circumstances in the other arts in Russia at the time, it appears on balance to be most probable that the Fourth Symphony was effectively forbidden by the authorities, as Glikman describes and as both Zhitomirsky and Mravinsky [31] believed.

An interesting light is cast on the circumstances surrounding the Fourth Symphony by the First Symphony of Gavriil Popov, issued in a recording on Olympia (OCD 576) in 1995. Originally composed between 1928 and 1932, this work faced a protracted peer review during which its composer waited a year for a verdict and spent a further year making alterations to it. Eventually the symphony was premiered in 1935, whereupon it was attacked by the head of the Leningrad Bureau for Control of Cultural Events and Repertoire as "reflecting the ideology of classes hostile to us". The Leningrad Composers' Union (at that time still a place where rival views could to some extent be genuinely debated) witnessed a succession of heated arguments about the political correctness, or not, of Popov's First. The final outcome was a grudging rehabilitation that did not extend to any further performances. According to Inna Barsova, [32] the effective banning of Popov's First Symphony marked the beginning of the clampdown on musical expression associated with Stalin's Terror (1935-9): "Composers ceased writing serious music and turned to film music, theatre music, and folklore. The musical creativity of Shostakovich nevertheless remained free until 1936, both in his choice of concepts and in his musical technique." Shostakovich, who confessed himself "a great and ardent admirer" of Popov's First, [33] seems to have taken it as something of a model for his own Fourth Symphony, which bears several similarities to Popov's work (e.g., the codas of the first and the second [12:27 et seq.] of Popov's movements and bars 11-12 of the theme of Popov's Largo [0:26-0:33]). Popov likewise admired the first half of the first movement of Shostakovich's Fourth, which the composer played to him on piano at Detskoye Selo on October 31st 1935 ("very caustic, strong, and noble"). [34] In a sense, these two symphonies can be said to have been hand-in-hand in running full-tilt into Stalinist censorship during 1935-6, Shostakovich's probably forced withdrawal of the Fourth echoing the fate of the work which had to some extent inspired it: Popov's First.

On the subject of interpretive details, Maxim Shostakovich makes the unusual suggestion that "there is the prescience of war in Symphony No. 4, much like the bombers in Symphony No. 5...". [35] (See below, Fifth Symphony.) Vis-à-vis the percussion at the end of the second movement, he thinks the intention is to show "the passage of time... A clock or heartbeat". [36] Gennadi Rozhdestvensky offers an alternative view: "For me, and I think for Shostakovich, the association is prisoners tapping out messages to one another on the hot-water pipes in jail." [37]

Symphony No. 5 in D minor, Opus 47 (1937)

The central thrust of recent Russian commentary on the Fifth is the importance of placing the work in its historical context: 1937 - the height of Stalin's Great Terror. To greater or lesser extent, all of this comment assumes that the Fifth Symphony is concerned with experience, personal or universal, of the

Terror. The most remarkable story recently told in connection with the Fifth Symphony is Veniamin Basner's account (received at first hand from the composer) of Shostakovich's interrogation by an officer of the NKVD in 1937. While this is probably spurious (see Journal No. 6 [Winter 1996], pp. 25-7), it is not to be dismissed as a wanton fiction. Several of his relatives and many of his colleagues were "purged" during this period.[\[38\]](#) An intensely sensitive man, Shostakovich may have so feared his imminent demise that he lost his ability to discriminate between what happened in fact and what only occurred in his tormented imagination. (This, again, was a common syndrome under the Terror.)

Despite his presumably terrible fear after Tukhachevsky's arrest - a time when, as Maxim assures us, the composer sat up at night with a suitcase waiting for the NKVD to come for him - he still managed to go on composing the symphony: specifically, the Largo and the Finale.[\[39\]](#) Of the Largo, Israel Nestyev, often allied with Shostakovich's enemies in the Composers' Union, has recently said: "Even now I perceive this music as a requiem for the millions of innocent victims of Stalin's regime." He also acknowledges Shostakovich's unique and heroic achievement: "Not a single other artist - no painter, dramatist, or film-maker - could think of using their art as a means of expressing protest against Stalin's Terror. Only instrumental music was able to express the terrible truth of that time."[\[40\]](#) The violist Fyodor Druzhinin of the Beethoven Quartet adds (with reference to the Fifth Symphony): "People who lived in Shostakovich's epoch have no need to dig in the archives or to marvel at the evidence of repressions and executions and murders. It is all there in his music."[\[41\]](#)

Maxim Shostakovich has outlined his interpretation of the Fifth Symphony. With regard to its subtitle and the effect of his father's public disgrace in 1936, he is unequivocal: "Critics felt he was 'corrected, improved, and clarified.' On the contrary, he chose clearer language to insure clear communication. The Fifth Symphony is his 'Heroic Symphony'." For Maxim, the symphony's opening measures are "stormy" and "intense", as if the composer is saying: "Listen to me! I am going to speak now!" (This is "deep melody, not song. He is thinking about the time he is living in.") Maxim's account of the work continues as follows:

"Fig 9: More intimate musical language. All develops very slowly. The theme requires much time to show the atmosphere of that time... Fig 17: Stormy allegro intrudes. Attack of evil. Music preceding is human, warm, kind. It asks 'Why aren't we kind to each other?' With the allegro, the attack of negative forces begins and grows. Not as much as Fig. 27. It climaxes at Fig. 36, the hero being torn apart. After Fig. 39, everything is a requiem for that man who would have lived a different life if he did not attack the evil... The critics call the 2nd movement a Mahlerian waltz. I strongly disagree. Mahler was in his tradition, but this is not a waltz. It is the aggression of a soulless negative force. A machine of destruction... Fig. 57, violin solo, is a child's voice from beneath a soldier's boot. It is not a waltz. The flute repeats the solo, a defiant fist still raised... Fig. 61, the force begins again, and the movement finishes with the victory of evil...[\[42\]](#) 3rd Movement is the highest achievement of lyricism in all of Shostakovich's work. Very intimate. Shostakovich

divides the violins into three parts to increase the number of voices... It is the last night at home of a man sentenced to the gulag; but the problem is eternal! It could be a man before his execution! I see a man who spends his last night before execution with his family. He hears his children breathe. He feels the warmth of his wife. But he does not cry! Fig 89. The regret of a strong man, 'Why! Why me!' Compare it with the 'Sonnets of Michelangelo' - 'When, O Lord?' - but there are no tears! It is a question of a strong man. Shostakovich was not sentimental. He was masculine. Strong. His range of feelings was tremendous... Fig 90, the 'celli solo breaks your heart... Fig 92, climax... The story of the hero's feelings subsides. He is still, and his family is sleeping next to him... The finale. An intruding storm. Different associations. A struggle in which the hero wins. This movement is built on forward accelerating motion. It cuts off at Fig. 112. The intrusion of a lyrical episode comparable to the 3rd movement... It's not really quiet. There is the premonition of something... Fig. 121, prediction of war. Drums and low horns are low-flying bombers... Conclusion: If it is not military, then it is something evil threatening Shostakovich personally... Fig 128 to the end. It says again and again, 'No. You will not be able to do anything to me.' It is not happiness. It is not victory. It is the determination of a strong man to BE...[\[43\]](#)

Maxim points out an important misprint in the coda to the Finale: "Fig 131: eighth note equals 184; not quarter note. It is very useful to look at and think about. And guess that it is not right.... It should be eighth note! Slow!" This fact - recently corroborated by Sir Charles Mackerras[\[44\]](#) - confirms that the effect Shostakovich meant to convey, rather than one of hectic triumph, was instead of the numbing unanimity of drilled crowds. Kurt Sanderling: "The enforced enthusiasm of the masses is meant as a gesture of defiance and self-affirmation - not as a victory for the regime, but as a victory against it."[\[45\]](#) (Fyodor Druzhinin calls this a "tragic apotheosis").[\[46\]](#)

Another aspect of the Finale was revealed by musicologist Gerard McBurney in an interval talk for Radio 3 in 1994. Quoted at Fig. 113 et seq., the song "Rebirth" - from the Pushkin cycle, Opus 46, written immediately before the Fifth Symphony - is also quoted in the first four notes (A-D-E-F) of the Finale - notes corresponding to the words "A barbarian artist" in Pushkin's text: "A barbarian artist, with sleepy brush/Blackens over a picture of genius/And his lawless drawing/Scribbles meaninglessly upon it./But with the years the alien paints/Flake off like old scales;/The creation of genius appears before us/In its former beauty./Thus do delusions fall away/From my worn-out soul,/And there spring up within it/Visions of original, pure days." McBurney's thesis is that Shostakovich used Pushkin's poem, itself an Aesopian text written under conditions of Tsarist censorship, as a way of encoding the true meaning of the symphony's otherwise inevitably debatable Finale. Stalin (or perhaps his cultural *apparatus*) is the "barbarian artist" who blackened over *Lady Macbeth* in the *Pravda* editorial of 28th January 1936 and in 1937 forced Shostakovich to veil his own intentions in the Fifth Symphony. Pushkin's lines offer multiple resonances for Shostakovich's predicament: the "lawlessness" of the barbarian artist's drawing corresponds to the Stalinist justice system's indifference to legal process[\[47\]](#); "original, pure days" can

be heard as alluding to the pre-Communist era; "thus do delusions fall away" anticipates both the misunderstanding the Finale is bound to endure and its eventual correct explanation once the Pushkin allusions are grasped. (It is worth noting, too, that the word *chisti* - which means "pure" in the sense of having been cleaned and restored to its original state, and thus echoes Pushkin's initial painting metaphor - is directly related to the Russian word for "purge", *chistka*, now infamous in the term "ethnic cleansing".)

Of course, no code of the foregoing sort would have been needed had Shostakovich been free to end the symphony in any other way than *fff* in D major. To Boris Khaikin, late in 1937, he said: "I finished the Fifth Symphony in the major and fortissimo. It would be interesting to know what would have been said if I'd finished it pianissimo and in the minor."[\[48\]](#) As for the symphony's reception, Kurt Sanderling, in the audience for the Leningrad première, speaks as follows:

"Probably this is the first time that Shostakovich addressed himself to the dominant theme of his life: anti-Stalinism... The audience was very receptive to Shostakovich's message, and after the first movement we looked around rather nervously, wondering whether we might be arrested after the concert... The vast majority of the audience knew perfectly well what it was all about. Maybe this explains why it was such a resounding success. It faithfully reflected the sentiments uppermost in our minds."[\[49\]](#)

Mstislav Rostropovich describes the official reaction to the symphony: "The government would have been delighted to execute him [Shostakovich], but it so happened that the ovations after the Fifth Symphony lasted more than 40 minutes. They had never seen such an audience success. And of course the government knew that, so they put a face on it, saying 'We've taught him and now he's writing acceptable music.'"[\[50\]](#) Vladimir Ashkenazy: "In my humble opinion I think they hailed the Fifth Symphony only because of the D major at the end."[\[51\]](#) Nor was this official acceptance a foregone conclusion. Mikhail Chulaki, a composer who later joined the choir of condemnation of Shostakovich in 1948, recalls that early bureaucratic reaction to the Fifth revolved around the apparently sincere belief that the enthusiastic reactions the work was drawing must somehow have been "fabricated" by "wreckers" out to sabotage the People's music.[\[52\]](#)

Inna Barsova quotes also from Liubov' Vasilievna Shaporiny's diary for 21st November 1937 concerning the premiere of Shostakovich's Fifth Symphony: "The audience was beside itself and gave a frenzied ovation - a deliberate protest against the persecution to which poor Mitya has been subjected. Everyone repeated one and the same phrase: 'He answered and he answered well.' D.D. came out pale, biting his lip. I think he could have broken into tears. Shebalin, Alexandrov, Gauk came from Moscow - only Shaporin wasn't there... I met Popov: 'You know, I've become a coward. I'm afraid of everything. I even burned your letter.'" (Like Shostakovich, Popov began to drink heavily around this time.)

Rostropovich puts all this into perspective: "Shostakovich was the uncapped historiographer of our lives.

He made a mirror of all that happened to us. That's why he's so near to the heart of every Russian." Had the composer expressed his thoughts in words, he adds, he would have ended up behind bars - "but music is too abstract, especially for idiots. That's what it was, our government: complete idiots! But when you understand what our life was like under the theory of Communism, the abstract in Shostakovich becomes much more actual." [\[53\]](#)

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[1] The city was renamed in honour of Lenin in February 1924, but Shostakovich refuses to call it Leningrad. On 2nd March he quotes Lenin's observation that film is the most useful of the arts, adding that he prefers the useless ones: music and ballet. On 26th April and 3rd June 1924, he gives his address as "Saint Leninburg".

[2] In the same letter he mentions having done some music for "the 10th anniversary" (of the October revolution). He wrote it "in a hurry" and wonders what people will think of it.

[3] Elizabeth Wilson, *Shostakovich: A Life Remembered*, p. 46. [Hereafter referred to as EW.]

[4] Khentova, "A Russian Love Story Sold at Sotheby's", *Musical Life* (1992), No. 3. [See *DSCH XXI*.]

[5] EW, op. cit., p. 41.

[6] "Notes by Maxim", transcribed by John-Michael Albert (1990), *DSCH Journal* No. 4. [Hereafter referred to as JMA.]

[7] JMA, op. cit.

[8] EW, op. cit., p. 314.

[9] Interviewed by Irina Nikolska, *melos* 4-5 (Summer 1993). [Hereafter referred to as Nikolska.]

[10] EW, op. cit., p. 335.

[11] On 18th June 1926 he reports starting on a piano concerto.

[12] EW, op. cit., p. 61.

[13] *A Certain Art*, p. 204.

[14] Apart from some pro-Lenin remarks made in letters to Tanya Glivenko early in 1924 - and contradicted by other Lenin references later in the same year - there is little evidence of any political interest, let alone enthusiasm, in the Glivenko letters 1923-1931.

[15] Nikolska.

[16] EW, op. cit., p. 72.

[17] JMA, op. cit.

[18] JMA, op. cit.

[19] *Daugava*, 3-4. [See *DSCH XVIII-XXI*.]

[20] See EW, op. cit., pp. 115-120.

[21] JMA, op. cit.

[22] Interview with Pierre Vidal. [See *DSCH XIII*.]

[23] *Letters to a Friend*, pp. 10-13. (Glikman's Shostakovich always talks in this earnest and formal - not to say bowdlerised - way, as if dictating to posterity a harmless version of his views suitable for young adolescents.)

[24] Interviewed by John Riley [*DSCH XVIII*].

[25] Interview with Pierre Vidal. [See *DSCH XIII*.]

[26] JMA, op. cit.

[27] JMA, op. cit.

[28] *DSCH XIV*.

[29] Interview with John Riley, 1992 [*DSCH XX*].

[30] EW, op. cit., p. 426.

[31] EW, op. cit., p. 139.

[32] Barsova, Inna, "Between 'Social Demands' and the 'Music of Grand Passions' [The Years 1934-37 in the life of Dmitri Shostakovich]", paper, University of Michigan, 28th January 1994. Hereafter referred to as Barsova.

[33] Per Skans' sleevenote to Olympia OCD 576.

[34] Barsova, op. cit.

[35] JMA, op. cit.

[36] Interview with John Riley, 1992 [*DSCH XX*].

[37] *The Independent*, 6th April 1991.

[38] In 1936, his former companion Elena Konstantinovskaya and the Shostakovich family friend Galina Serebryakova were arrested. In 1937, his mother-in-law Sofia Varzar, brother-in-law Vsevolod Frederiks, and uncle Maxim Kostrikin were arrested, and his sister Maria exiled to Frunze. The musicologist Nikolai Zhilyaev was arrested and executed soon after Tukhachevsky. During 1938, Boris Kornilov, author of words to "Song of the Meeting" from *Counterplan*, was arrested (and later done away with), as was Adrian Piotrovsky, author of *Rule Britannia* and librettist of *The Limpid Stream*. In 1939, Meyerhold was arrested, tortured, and executed.

[39] According to Grigori Fried (EW, op. cit., p. 122), Shostakovich brought the first two movements to Zhilyaev's communal flat in Moscow soon after finishing them. (He was on his way back from a journey to the south and was due that evening to return to Leningrad.) Zhilyaev thought what he had seen "quite wonderful". If Shostakovich composed the Largo in June after Tukhachevsky's death, Zhilyaev, himself arrested around this time, could have seen no more of the score.

[40] Nikolska, Irina, interviews about Shostakovich, *melos* 4-5 (Summer 1993), pp. 65-87.

[41] EW, op. cit., p. 390.

[42] Kurt Sanderling concurs: "This is not a boisterous scherzo, but a grim and biting parody." Interviewed by Hans Bitterlich, 1992. (Sleevenote, Berlin Classics BC2063-2.)

[43] JMA, op. cit.

[44] *Classic CD*, November 1995. In *DSCH Journal* No. 6 [Winter 1996], Sanderling adds: "We understood what he was saying. And it was not the 'Triumph' of the mighty, of those in power. There was no need for further explanation."

[45] Interviewed by Hans Bitterlich, 1992.

[46] EW, op. cit., p. 390.

[47] See Solzhenitsyn, *The Gulag Archipelago*, Vol. 1, pp. 229-431.

[48] EW, op. cit., p. 127.

[49] Interviewed by Hans Bitterlich, 1992.

[50] Interviewed by Edward Rothstein, *The Independent Magazine*, 12th November 1988.

[51] Interview with John Riley, 1992 [*DSCH XX*].

[52] EW, op. cit., pp. 132-8. Richard Taruskin's alternative account of the reception of the Fifth Symphony ignores Chulaki's testimony altogether. (See Ian MacDonald, "Thoughts on David Fanning's 'Shostakovich Studies', *DSCH Journal* No. 5 [Summer 1996], pp. 10-29.)

[53] Interviewed by Mark Pappenheim, *BBC Music Magazine*, [February 1995], pp. 16-20.

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Daniel Zhitomirsky

SHOSTAKOVICH

THE PUBLIC AND THE PRIVATE:

reminiscences, materials, comments

Part 1: A Case of Mistaken Identity

Daugava (1990, No. 3)

English version by Tatjana M. Norbury and Ian MacDonald

These days it's hard to imagine what Shostakovich's music must have meant to his contemporaries from the mid-'20s onwards - those for whom it embodied both the growth of the artist and the march of events in Soviet Russia in his time.

The context of life has changed. As ever, it falls to succeeding generations to interpret the past, and today's listeners have different criteria, needs, and expectations. Ideas about Shostakovich have become blurred - diluted in the endless stream of scientific and literary debate and academic study. Yet his music owes its origins to intense impressions and experiences far more dramatic and momentous than those of everyday life; in fact, such is the range of those influences that the styles, genres, and techniques he used in depicting them virtually defy analysis. Above all, it was by the light of Shostakovich's music that we, his contemporaries, survived our special and indescribable hell, through which he led us like some latterday Virgil. From Shostakovich and his music we learned the truth about our way of life - which, in that suffocating atmosphere, was equivalent to a steady supply of oxygen.

Miraculously, this relief was available to us even during the terrible decade of the '30s; indeed, it became available to such a degree (if only in music, especially "wordless" music) that it was inevitable that Zhdanov should eventually have put a stop to it in 1948. That it was possible at all was due to the fact that, in music, "ideology" is not spelt out in letters of the alphabet - also, and more crucially, because it was written by Shostakovich. I know of no other Russian artist who dared to make similar public statements in those years. Certainly, there were powerful voices in the literary world, but as a rule they did not reach our ears. Many poets and writers were arrested, eliminated, or gagged. Only much later did we come to know the power and significance of the magnificent works of Platonov, Akhmatova, and Bulgakov, while the era of Solzhenitsyn was still far in the future.

I've used the plural "we" several times because these were the impressions and experiences of millions. Here are some comments from a few of the composer's contemporaries: "Shostakovich doesn't try to keep his work balanced; instead he invariably draws us into the catastrophe of contemporary reality." (Maria Yudina) [1]; "His music shakes, staggers, overwhelms us; abruptly, with a single whispered note, it plunges us into a dreamlike world... An ominous rumble calmed by an unearthly voice; cracks of thunder between death-chants and hymns to life; the silence after the eruption of a volcano; tender reassurances amid the rumble of tanks; dreams of a brighter future under falling shells." (Jean-Richard Bloch) [2]; "I always feel he's saying exactly what I'd say, and in the way I'd say it, had I the magical gift of expressing myself in music." (A. G. Gabrichevsky) [3].

While many important facts about Shostakovich have emerged in the extensive literature on him, much remains obscured, disguised, or distorted. The reason: decades of censorship - restraints which became not merely imposed but innate, invading everyone's mind and breeding a habit of strict self-censorship. Such symptoms often appeared in reviews of Shostakovich's music. Not even the composer was free of it, as witness his comments on his own works in many of his official statements (which, alas, have duly found their way into biographies, dissertations, and commemorative articles). Now, however, it is not only feasible but essential that the whole truth about Shostakovich be disclosed - the truth about an artist, who, in a terror-stricken age and with unparalleled force and power, chronicled the Russian tragedy of the 20th century; who, by depicting the gigantic suffering of our people, challenged tyranny, making us see what life was really worth and where and how brightly the flame of humanity's hope still burned.

Of course, the West could have recognised Shostakovich's achievement long ago, since countries free of fascism had neither ideological police nor restrictions on information. Shostakovich's music was known and his talent not infrequently praised; at times he was treated sympathetically. However, the central aspects of his work were never addressed. [4] There were good reasons for this. The radical celebrities and free-thinkers of Western Europe had fooled themselves into believing fairy tales about Stalin's "socialism", their romantic idealism proving easy prey to the devious lies churned out by our propaganda machine. In the same way, the real facts about Shostakovich simply never reached the West. His Seventh Symphony became adopted by the entire civilised world solely because it was assumed to be an attack on Hitler. At the time, it was expedient to overlook other, equally serious, problems - such as those dealt with in all of Shostakovich's mature symphonies. Clearly, it would not have done to upset the fragile East-West accord by acknowledging any disturbing reports or expressions of dissent. Unfortunately these problems (such as Stalin's mass murders after the war) persisted. Furthermore, they were audible in Shostakovich's music, and this, starting with his Eighth Symphony, caused growing anger in government circles. The eventual consequence was the disastrous blow to Russian music dealt by the 1948 directive.

If Western critics misunderstood him, Shostakovich was no better comprehended by Western musicians. In the opinion of Schoenberg, "he had great talent, but let politics influence his style too much" [5]. The

maturing of Shostakovich's style was heard as a renunciation of trailblazing and a return to traditionalism. Stravinsky: "Dmitri Shostakovich - a talented young composer. I know some fine works of his. However, *Lady Macbeth* has an abominable libretto. The spirit of the work comes from the past and the music itself from Mussorgsky." [6] This statement dates from the mid-'30s. The avant-garde of the post-war period would have used even harsher terms. Shostakovich's music was squarely against their interests.

In fact, his only aim was "to write about life" and, to do this, he subordinated all innovations in style. In other words, he wished to reach the people: the humble, the indifferent, the confused, the oppressed. During the years immediately after the war, the priority of the Western avant-garde was to create a "new world of sound": mathematical tone-structures, electro-acoustics, mechanistic music, micro-polyphony, serial pointillism, and so on - the art of an ultra-rational civilisation. In my view, the psychological driving force of this allegedly progressive idiom was post-war scepticism.

This scepticism - born of a life crippled by war, tragedy, pain, poverty, political tyranny, moral relativism, and limitless disillusionment - impelled the creative avant-garde into beguiling experiments with pure novelty, gymnastic exercises for the intellect, and extravagant fashions in taste. As time went on, this trend (along with the inevitable disorientation it precipitated) gradually broke down, forming a new layer of cultural sediment - and one can only hope that a renewed interest in one of the century's great composers will soon bloom from it. Recently, the ground has begun to be cleared both at home and abroad: humane principles and cultural values are beginning to be rediscovered. We already have a clearer picture of those minor prophets whose concept of contemporary music amounted to little more than a desert of naked rationalism, a pantomime of paradox and absurdity, a cathartic despotism of the unconscious, and a surrender to frankly primitive sensations - rudderless rafts in the maelstrom of modernity's frenzied hubbub.

It goes without saying that most of the good music lately produced in our country - what little there is of it - follows the precepts of Shostakovich. It is, therefore, crucial to understand his legacy by examining his life and work free of bias or "corrections". My contribution is the present essay, which I offer merely as food for thought.

"Only after my death"

At the end of the 1970s, there appeared in many countries, translated into various languages, a book entitled *Testimony: the memoirs of Dmitri Shostakovich as related to and edited by Solomon Volkov*. To Russians, this book has, till now, remained a mystery - and not by accident. Soon after its publication, it became the target of a volley of abuse. "A wretched job", "a disgraceful concoction", "an attempt to blacken our country and Soviet culture" - these are some of the insults hurled at it in just one of the hostile articles which appeared in our national press. Vigorous measures were taken to ensure that this unique thing - a confession of Shostakovich's innermost thoughts, a painful, bitter, and provocative story

of survival ranging over several decades - was immediately and absolutely discredited, and thus eradicated from our minds.

Encountering the above-mentioned "review" ten years ago, I was hardly surprised. After all, in 1948, similar torrents of abuse had been directed at Shostakovich and his colleagues - not to mention many of his followers, including myself - all of whom had subsequently been outlawed for the crime of "formalism". The review was even less of a surprise in that I knew that Solomon Volkov had emigrated to the United States in the mid-'70s, thereby classifying himself in Soviet terms as a "fugitive" and "deserter" - judgements against which there was no right of appeal in those days (excommunication and damnation followed automatically).

Now, at last, Volkov's book was in my hands. I quickly realised the two main reasons for the official hate campaign. First: the bile and sarcasm of the book's tales of dictatorship and victimisation, its exposure of the amorality of Stalin and Zhdanov, and its naming of various hypocrites and informers (whose machinations I, too, had had the opportunity of experiencing). Second: the caustic portraits of those who had helped to persecute the composer. It did not require great insight to see that these same villains would have had a vested interest in the official smearing of *Testimony* in 1980. (I recall a phrase from Galina Vishnevskaya's recent memoirs: "How quick the authorities are to cover up the tracks of a great man, gradually murdered!" [7] Just such a "covering-up of tracks" was used in the attempt to discredit Volkov's book - as was the immediate and world-wide publication of a collection of statements, articles and gramophone records, designed to re-establish the "official" Shostakovich.)

I read the book with excitement, unable to put it down. I reread it, reflected on it, compared it with my own materials (diaries, letters, and clippings). I checked it with statements made by Shostakovich's friends and, finally, with my own memories. From every angle, I found myself contemplating the same picture - exactly what I had seen happening around him, even inside him, at the beginning of the '60s. I wrote such details down whenever I had the chance of meeting or contacting Dmitri Dmitryevich. I got to know the workings of his mind: its sensitivity, its power. I was familiar with his tricks of speech: short sentences; apt, pithy replies; well-aimed witticisms; entire scenes of parody enacted for his closest friends (whenever he was in "good form").

The text and style of *Testimony* are discontinuous and barely sketched. Themes mingle and interrupt one another, often resurfacing or lapsing into further digressions. This is no considered history, but an often excited improvisation prompted by the rush of sudden ideas and memories. Devoid of conventional balance, it concentrates on experiences that left their mark on the narrator's soul; thus, facts jostle with gossip and hearsay, the latter obviously requiring further verification. In short, the book is not an analysis but a living story - and how fascinating to know what Shostakovich remembered and had always wanted to say! There are so many revelations - about the musical scene of his time, the Conservatoire, his plans and hopes, the crisis at the beginning of the '30s, the making of his major works from *Lady Macbeth* onwards; but above all, about those he knew - teachers, friends, contemporaries,

influential acquaintances of all kinds: Glazunov, Kustodiev, Sologub, Meyerhold, Zhilayev, Stravinsky, Zoshchenko, Prokofiev, Scriabin, Myaskovsky, Sollertinsky, Yudina, Tikhachevsky...

There's an almost frightening dissatisfaction in many of these portraits, either in the form of personal grudges or in an intrinsic lack of rapport with many of his contemporaries. Indeed, the overall tone of the book is conspicuously dejected, especially in those pages dealing with the final years of his life. *Testimony's* critics accused Volkov of travestying Shostakovich's personality; he, they insisted, had always been so polite, tactful, and benevolent. And so, in fact, he was. But hadn't the same critics witnessed equally perfect manners in others who, from time to time, had also voiced rather shocking personal opinions? There's a book by Nicolas Slonimsky (already in several editions in the West) entitled *The Lexicon of Musical Invective*. It's a collection of critical opinions by composers like Beethoven, Chopin, Berlioz, Debussy, Mahler, Prokofiev, Strauss, Stravinsky, and others. Nobody would dream of calling this publication a fake - that, unfortunately, could only have happened in our country and in our sad times of bitter memory.

In August 1948, Shostakovich composed the song-cycle *From Jewish Folk Poetry*. I looked up the entry in my diary: "18th October. Dress rehearsal of 'Jewish Folk Songs' at Dmitri Dmitryevich's place for a circle of close friends. Performers: Slava Richter, Nina Dorliak, Tamara Yanko, and the tenor Belugin. Both performers and audience greatly impressed. Author himself happily excited. The cycle is rehearsed twice. Première to take place in two days' time and all of us looking forward to it." But it was not to be. First came casual warnings, followed by unexplained delays - then, finally, explicit prohibition decreed from "above". In the end, the première actually took place seven years later (in Leningrad on 15th January 1955) - that is, when the Chief Director of Ideological Threats was no longer alive.

The end of the '40s signalled the emergence of Stalin's anti-Semitism. The Jewish Anti-Fascism Committee was broken up and its members arrested; Jewish poets were shot; the actor Solomon Mikhoëls was secretly murdered and his creation, the Jewish Theatre of Moscow, destroyed. There followed the affair of the so-called "Doctor's Plot" [in which Jewish physicians were accused of trying to poison Stalin - Ed.]. Finally, in 1956, came the "thaw". With the terror of recent years still fresh in everyone's mind, I remember how, during the first performances of Shostakovich's "Jewish" cycle, people exchanged frightened looks on hearing, in the final song, the line "Doctors, doctors are what our sons have become!". At about the same time I read in *Novoe Vremya (New Times)* a statement made in Shostakovich's name: "Reply to an American Music Critic". The tone was angrily, arrogantly didactic:

Even the title of the American review - Shostakovich Has Earned the Right to Greater Freedom - is objectionable. I want you to know, Mr. Taubman, that we in the USSR are used to greater freedom than people in any of the bourgeois countries: freedom from exploiters, from bribery, from bourgeois publishers, etc. I can assure Mr. Taubman that I've always heeded the voice of public opinion, so vital to me in my creative work. [8]

Is comment necessary? We have here a typical example of the "false personality" thrust upon the composer by official propaganda. Most of the objections to Volkov's memoirs were based on the complete failure of its Western accusers to distinguish the real Shostakovich from the prestigious official figure. (I'll return to the faking of Shostakovich's "statements" later, as I have some ideas of my own on this subject.)

The hideous conditions in which we were forced to live for seemingly endless decades, in perpetual fear of trespassing against anything "ordained", had inevitable psychological consequences. Shostakovich obviously found it somewhat strange to talk about himself without employing the usual stereotyped official phraseology. Volkov describes this aspect of the making of *Testimony* as follows:

I began by asking questions, which Shostakovich at first answered briefly and almost reluctantly. Occasionally, I had to repeat the same question, phrasing it in a different way. Shostakovich needed time to "come out", to warm up. Gradually his pale face would gain colour and he'd grow more animated. I, meanwhile, would go on with the questions, taking notes in a sort of shorthand I'd developed during my time as a journalist. The idea of recording on tapes was discarded mainly because Shostakovich would stiffen before a microphone, becoming transfixed like a rabbit before a snake—a reflex reaction caused by his "command performance" official radio speeches... It was clear to both of us that the text couldn't be published in the Soviet Union. Several enquiries made in that direction had resulted in failure. I therefore took the necessary steps to send the notes to the West. Shostakovich agreed to this; his only request was that the book be published after his death. "Only after my death, after my death," he would say again and again. In November 1974, Shostakovich invited me to his home. We talked for a while, then he asked me about the manuscript. "It's in the West," I replied, "and our agreement is in force." Shostakovich replied: "Good"... At the end of my visit, he gave me a photograph with the inscription "To dear Solomon Moiseyevich Volkov, in fond remembrance. D. Shostakovich. 16.11.1974." [\[9\]](#)

Volkov kept his word - *Testimony* was published abroad four years after the composer's death. But fate, having played so many cruel tricks on Shostakovich, had one more in store: no one in his homeland would admit its authenticity. The simplest and oldest method of mind-control - the notice "Forbidden!" - had been deployed... and duly obeyed.

There's much to be argued in Volkov's work; certain facts require analysis and verification. However, I'm convinced that no serious scholar of Shostakovich's work - and, in particular, of his life and times - should disregard this source.

Of hypocrites and manipulators

The attitude of our so-called higher authorities towards Shostakovich was always conditioned by two main impulses, at once diametrically opposed and interrelated. First: irritation with the spiritual independence of artists and their jealous conservation of personal privacy (which, apart from anything else, made them hard to keep tabs on). All artists were dangerous and insufferable! Second: their usefulness in contributing to the prestige of Soviet culture, in achieving better international relations, and as mouthpieces for various forms of disinformation and counter-propaganda. Shostakovich was of course completely opposed to any of this, chiefly because it went against every idea he was trying to convey in his main works, defenceless and traducible as they were. Such official statements had to be dragged out of him and, consequently, most of his creative life was conducted against the threat of "pressure". This took the form of strangely abrupt alterations in the critics' attitudes to his work; sudden bouts of delirious official approval (invariably accompanied by warning stares); off-the-record orders; even straightforward abuse - and then back to square one and the most extravagant praise. It is instructive briefly to examine the many ups and downs Shostakovich endured during those times, when to produce any music at all meant spending half one's time warding off the state.

The first half of the '30s witnessed the triumph of *Lady Macbeth* in both Leningrad and Moscow, bringing floods of critical acclaim. Then, on the 28th January 1936, came the infamous article "Chaos Instead of Music". (Unsigned, this *Pravda* piece was generally interpreted as yet another government directive. According to popular rumour at the time, later confirmed by Shostakovich, the author of the article was the journalist D. I. Zaslavsky - his co-author and sponsor: Stalin himself.)

Following the publication of the *Pravda* piece, articles viciously condemning Shostakovich appeared all over the country. It was this condemnation that sealed the fate of the Fourth Symphony, finished later that year and immediately put into rehearsal with the Leningrad Philharmonic under Fritz Stiedry. According to a friend of the composer, the atmosphere during these sessions was ominous: "A rumour had been spreading in musical and extra-musical circles that Shostakovich, ignoring his critics, had written a diabolically clever symphony crammed with formalisms. One day, during rehearsal, we received a visit from the Secretary of the Composers' Union, V. E. Iokhelson, accompanied by another important figure from the local Party HQ. Shortly afterwards, the director of the Philharmonic, I. M. Renzin, politely invited Dmitri Dmitryevich to his office. On the way home, Shostakovich was silent for a long while, finally saying in an even but toneless voice that the symphony would not be performed; it had been withdrawn on Renzin's recommendation." [\[10\]](#) (The première of the Fourth had to wait a further quarter of a century, eventually taking place in Moscow in 1961 under Kyrill Kondrashin.)

1937. Fifth Symphony. Again, despite the odds, this was an enormous success with both public and press.

1941. Seventh Symphony. Even greater recognition, this time worldwide.

1943. Eighth Symphony. In spite of Shostakovich's growing fame, the première of the Eighth - in the

Great Hall of the Moscow Conservatoire under Yevgeny Mravinsky - was darkened by a cloud of suspicion emanating from the halls of higher authority. The first reviews were spiked and all comment postponed. Here is my diary for 4th November 1943: "Première of Shostakovich's Eighth. Leaving the Great Hall, I hurried to the editorial office of *Komsomolskaya Pravda*. My review was read, reread, corrected, re-typed, and sent to be typeset. During all this, the chief editor was on the phone to someone evidently very important and, rather oddly, waiting for special permission to print my article. Wherever this secret decision was being taken, it was obviously still in the making. But why? Hadn't Shostakovich's patriotic Seventh made him world-famous? Hadn't several Party newspapers printed favourable advance reactions to the Eighth in September? ...

"The clocks moved to 12, then 1, then 2 a.m.; still no answer. From the editor's behaviour, I deduced serious trouble: someone at the top was angry. At 3 a.m., I decided to go home - not easy, since there was no public transport (it was wartime, we had a curfew). I walked and walked, peering anxiously about, listening for patrols, as I pondered what had happened. Actually it wasn't that strange. At the front, our troops were winning. In his radio communiqués, the voice of our Leader and Teacher was becoming increasingly confident and convincing. The predominant tone of newspaper coverage was of fanfare and rejoicing; each evening, the sky was lit by fireworks in popular celebration of victory. In the Eighth Symphony, though, everything was rather different. Who on earth could have doubted that Shostakovich approved of Hitler's defeat? But the fact remained that no rejoicing was audible in his Eighth Symphony at all... On arriving at the Komsomolka the following morning, I didn't find my review..." In a comment anticipating the Zhdanov era, one of Shostakovich's rival composers remarked of the Eighth: "It's so one-sided. It sees only the dark side of life. Its composer must be a poor-spirited sort not to share the joy of his people."[\[11\]](#) Other verdicts were even harsher: there was talk of the composer's "blindness", of his "withdrawal from reality". The tone of the following was typical: "Enough of these symphonic diaries - these pseudo-philosophic symphonies hiding behind their allegedly profound thoughts and tedious self-analysis."[\[12\]](#)

But on with our survey.

1945. Ninth Symphony. Understood by only a few within a small inner circle, its essential message was one of great dissatisfaction: "Was it this we hoped for after victory?" Critical reaction was cautious, reviewers hedging their bets by trying not take sides. (The success and prestige of the Seventh was, after all, hard to discount.) Perhaps, some suggested, the composer had intended his miniature, chamber-like Ninth as a sort of relaxation after such "difficult" affairs as the Seventh and Eighth? But the Ninth was by no means unequivocally "silly and gay". Leo Tolstoy once wrote of "perpetual anxiety" - a state in which one can never be free, not even for a second. "It's poignant to recall," he wrote, "how I used to think I could create a happy, honest little world for myself, in which I'd live quietly and peacefully without errors or regrets, free of confusion... But to lead an honest life one has to fight, meet strife and struggle head on, make mistakes, start and fail and start all over again, forever winning and losing. As for peace of mind - that's just a sour delusion of the soul."[\[13\]](#) These lines describe the mood of the Ninth perfectly. From the composer's futile attempts to create something ceremonial, there had emerged this "merry" symphonic score - yet, within it, Tolstoy's "perpetual anxiety" strives and struggles to find

some way out. And struggle it does: in its searing sarcasm and sadness; in its moments of lyricism, whose pure humility repudiates everything that has trammelled and distorted it for so long.

In the years soon after the war, Shostakovich's official life became very intensive: speeches, articles, interviews, press-conferences, plenary sessions of the Union of Soviet Composers, congresses, jury-service for competitions... Dmitri Dmitryevich's friends were worried that he was dissipating his energies; anyone could do what he was doing, but only he could handle the main thing: his music. Marietta Shaginyan berated him: "I disapprove of your extracurricular activities as Secretary of the Union of Composers. All these endless official engagements and public appearances. Gracious, I hear you've even been indoctrinating school-children!" [14] However, official approval, as so often before, was hanging by a thread.

Finally, out of a clear sky came a thunderbolt.

10th February 1948: the All-Union Communist Party Central Committee's "Resolution on the opera *The Great Friendship* by V. Muradeli." Much ink has been spilled on this so I'll resume only the pertinent facts. On this occasion, Muradeli was merely an innocent fall-guy. Irredeemably mediocre, his opera could hardly have inspired the ensuing onslaught against "formalism". Another blameless victim was Aram Khachaturian - a talented composer who had committed no ideological heresies, being in all respects the happiest of the happy. It was clear to everyone that the main object of attack was Shostakovich. (Prokofiev, too, was suspect, despite the fulsome praise conferred on *Romeo and Juliet* and *War and Peace*.) In other words, the Resolution's blacklist was basically a tactical manoeuvre - standard practice in government directives of those days. The custom was that the real target had to be camouflaged, thereby arranging things so that the attack on the deserving and the famous would not immediately be noticed (especially not in the West). The fact that the name framed in the Resolution was Muradeli's testified only to the ignorance of its authors and their complete lack of acquaintance with the country's musical life. [15]

The Resolution and its ensuing events brought down a deluge of disapproval and abuse on Shostakovich. Some members of the Composers' Union, frantically trying to curry favour with the authorities, attempted to expunge from the record every official recognition the composer had ever received. One claimed that "had things happened in real life as they do in the Seventh Symphony, we would never have won the war!" [16] Particularly abrasive was the contribution of Vladimir Zakharov: "Why waste time arguing about this Eighth Symphony? From the popular point of view, it can hardly be considered a musical work at all!" [17] Speaking of the qualifications for being deemed worthy of membership of the Union of Composers, this same Zakharov declared: "It's vital that we quickly shed all our inherited, traditional, and corrupt ideas about the allegedly 'great' and 'super-great' luminaries of the Soviet musical scene. It's imperative to scrutinise and re-assess the complete works [My emphasis. - D. Zh.] of such composers from an up-to-date standpoint." [18]

Shostakovich repented publicly, thanking the comrades profusely for showing him the right path. Immediately after the Conference, however, he started working on *Rayok*, a vitriolic parody of the 1948 "anti-formalist" campaign itself. According to Manashir Yakubov, researcher of the *Rayok* manuscript, the names of the main characters - Yedinitsin and Dvoikin - leave no doubt as to who had inspired them: Stalin and Zhdanov. Later, the composer added a third character, Troikin, personifying the figure of Shepilov.[\[19\]](#)

The following is Shostakovich's view of the events of 1948:

They rounded up the composers who immediately began tearing each other's throats out - a deplorable spectacle and one I would rather forget. Actually there's little that can still surprise me, but this is the one occasion I really hate to recall. Stalin instructed Zhdanov to compile a list of the 'main offenders'. Zhdanov worked with the zeal of an experienced torturer, setting one composer against another... There followed meeting after meeting, conference upon conference. The whole country was in an uproar, the composers more than anyone: it was like a dam breaking with dirty, muddy water rushing in from all sides. Everyone seemed to have gone mad and suddenly to have an opinion on music... The papers published letters from grateful workers, unanimously thanking the Party for sparing them the torture of having to listen to Shostakovich's symphonies. The Committee 'responded to the wishes' of the workers and issued a blacklist naming the Shostakovich symphonies which were to be taken out of circulation. It contained most of them.[\[20\]](#)

For the composer, however, the new ethos of abuse and exclusion soon began to mingle with a modified resumption of his former fame and official standing. This happened within a relatively short period, with the minimum of ceremony, and according to the most time-honoured of Machiavellian principles: 1. The ruler must not bind himself to any promises, solutions, or opinions; 2. The power and perspective of authority is based on the fact that people possess a surprising capacity for forgetting what was said yesterday and rapidly adapting to what is being said today.

1949. Shostakovich got a phone call from Molotov with a request to travel to the United States to attend a Conference for World Peace. Shostakovich said he couldn't. Later, he recalled: "Obviously a worthy cause. Everyone knows peace is better than war, so struggling for peace is clearly noble. But I refused. After all, I was a formalist-a representative of everything anti-national in music. My music was banned, yet here I was being asked to trot off, pretending everything was fine!"[\[21\]](#)

There then followed a second telephone call - this time from Stalin himself. I've reconstructed the conversation from notes made by Nina Vassilyevna Shostakovich (who was on the party-line throughout) and from Dmitri Dmitryevich's own version, as related to Solomon Volkov.

"Good day, Dmitri Dmitryevich. Stalin here."

"Good day to you, Iosif Vissarionovich. I'm at your service."

"First of all, we'd like to know how you feel, how's your health?"

"Thank you very much, I feel very well, very well."

"We'd like to ask you a favour."

"I'll be happy to oblige, if it's within my powers."

"We're quite sure it will be. It's about your trip to the United States. Why don't you want to go? Are you ill?"

"That's right, I can't go. I'm ill. There's also the question of my colleagues' music not being played, and mine neither. I'd be asked about it in America - and what could I say?"

"What do you mean, it isn't being played? Why isn't it being played, for what reason?"

"Well, there's the decree by the Committee. Also the blacklist."

"On whose orders?"

"Most probably one of the leading comrades."

"No, we didn't give any such order. The Committee people must have made a mistake, given the wrong order. We'll look into the matter. The comrades will be hearing from me. We'll take care of that problem, Comrade Shostakovich."

"Thank you, thank you, Iosif Vissarionovich."

"What about your health?"

"I can't fly, I get airsick."

"Why? From what? We'll send you a doctor. He'll find out why you feel sick."

"Thank you, Iosif Vissarionovich."

"We wish you success and good health. If you need anything, don't hesitate to call us."

The foregoing exchange may seem dry, stripped as it is of subtle nuances. In fact, according to Dmitri Dmitryevich's memoirs, Stalin's tone, though courteous, was nagging and persistent. The pressure proved irresistible. From 25th-28th March, Shostakovich attended the New York conference. His speech was published in all the Soviet newspapers and, in this speech, the chief perpetrator of "everything anti-national in music" declared: "Formalism is a type of art without love for the people, in which form overrules content. It is art resulting from a pathologically disturbed, pessimistic view of reality and from lack of faith in the powers and ideals of humanity. This reactionary and nihilistic world-view..."[22] After this, came the delegates' farewell party at Madison Square Garden when almost 30,000 people heard Shostakovich play his piano arrangement of the scherzo from his Fifth Symphony. He later observed of this New York trip: "I answered all those stupid questions, worrying all the time about giving something away..."[23]

1962: the authorities at every level are pounding their heads over how to avoid getting burned with the Thirteenth Symphony, a situation made stickier on this occasion by the participation of another notorious recidivist: the poet Yevgeny Yevtushenko... Why 'Babi Yar'? Why reopen the "European question"? - Especially since, as *Literaturnaya Gazeta* has obligingly pointed out, Russians and Ukrainians also died there. ("Couldn't the symphony be played without its first movement?" suggests the Minister of Culture of the R.S.F.S.R., brightly.) 'A Career', on the other hand, is quite incomprehensible. Whom exactly is it supposed to portray? High state officials? And really - why draw the world's attention to the state of our stores? ("I'm shivering as I queue up for the cash desk"; "There's a smell of onions, cucumbers, a smell of 'Kabul' sauce", and so forth!)

"Fears are dying in Russia," Yevtushenko had written - but fear was in the bones of everyone associated with the Thirteenth Symphony. The composer's long-time friend Yevgeny Mravinsky mysteriously declined the composer's invitation to conduct it (the première took place instead under Kyrill Kondrashin in Moscow). Pressed by the Party, the original candidate for soloist, B. Gmyrya, refused the part; on the day of the performance, the bass V. Nechipaylo also refused to sing. Official pressure was likewise applied to ensure the elimination of most of the Thirteenth's "offending" verses.[24] About this, Marietta Shaginyan wrote to the composer: "If I were you, I'd react differently, but then I'm a born fighter... How strange all this will seem to our distant descendants!... Will they still recognise you as the musical genius of the 20th century?"[25]

The fact is that many things will appear strange to Shostakovich's distant descendants - and not just to the distant ones; to those still living, too. A perfect illustration of this are the words that officially commemorated the end of Shostakovich's long-suffering existence in 1975 - by which I mean their pompous and peremptory tone (not to mention their shameless hypocrisy). Who was Shostakovich? Why - "a faithful son of the Communist Party; an eminent social and government figure; a citizen-artist who devoted his entire life to the development of Soviet music, to cementing the ideals of socialist humanism and internationalism, to the fight for peace and the future union of all countries..." Thus ran the official obituary, signed by Brezhnev, Suslov, Sherbitsky, Grishin, Rashidov, and Romanov; and

also by many considerably more familiar with Shostakovich's fate: Kabalevsky, Karayev, Kondrashin, Mravinsky, Ordzhonikidze, Sviridov, Khachaturian, Khrennikov, Eshpay.

And what was Shostakovich's place in musical history? "Together with Sergei Prokofiev, he defined the course of modern art", having been "a model of a real, leading contemporary artist", his music "a hymn to man" helping people to "understand our times". (From official speeches at Shostakovich's funeral.) Plenty for our descendants to wonder about there, all right - especially if they overlook the rules of the game which one had to follow during the era of "true socialism". Very possibly our bemused descendants will ask themselves: what in God's name is the meaning of high-falutin stuff like "defined the course of modern art", "a model of a real, leading artist", etc.? And how come those mouthing and listening to this garbage didn't die of shame? After all, they knew, they had memories. Indeed, many of them had made a complete career out of maligning the deceased and would have been perfectly happy to have seen his neck in a noose.

In 1936, official publications had savaged Shostakovich, saying his style was "topsy-turvy", his music "a muddle of sounds", insisting that he'd had fallen into "extreme alienation" with his "rough naturalism". Another twelve years on, the same rubbish was trundled out at the 1948 congress. A further decade later, Khrushchev's resolution, while "correcting" the resolution of 1948, nevertheless affirmed that Zhdanov had been "right in issuing this seminal directive on the development of Soviet art", approving the "just condemnation of mistaken 'tendencies'".[\[26\]](#)

What a job for our poor descendants, disentangling all these contradictory facts (supposing, of course, that truth retains any significance in their time). Maybe they'll wonder what Shostakovich really thought, did, and said when free of official pressure and the need to worry about the authorities. As a matter of fact, his true portrait can be discerned in his major works - and, while most of his official public statements were forgeries, I am glad to be able to offer here a few lines from his recently published memoir, the sincerity of which I have not the slightest doubt:

The Seventh Symphony became my most popular work. It saddens me, though, that people don't always understand what it's about; yet everything's so very clear in the music. Anna Akhmatova wrote her *Requiem*. The Seventh and Eighth Symphonies are my 'Requiem'... I wrote my Seventh Symphony, the 'Leningrad', quickly. I simply had to write it. War was all around us. I was in the midst of the people, I wanted to capture in music the image of our country at war... I heard more nonsense about my Seventh and Eighth than about any of my other works. It's amazing how these stupidities survive. Sometimes I'm astounded how lazy people can be when it comes to thinking. Everything written about those symphonies in the first few days is still repeated without question, even though there's been more than enough time for a little cogitation. After all, the war ended a long time ago, nearly thirty years... The Seventh Symphony had been planned before the war and so can in no way be understood as a reaction to Hitler's attack. The 'invasion

theme' has nothing at all to do with the German invasion. When I composed it, I was thinking of other enemies of humanity. It goes without saying that I abhor fascism, but not just German fascism - all forms of it. Nowadays, the pre - war period is recalled as idyllic. Everything was fine, people say, until Hitler came. Hitler was a criminal, there's no doubt of that - but so was Stalin. I feel eternal sorrow for those Hitler murdered, but I feel no less grief for those killed on Stalin's orders. I suffer for everyone who was tortured, torn to pieces, shot, or starved to death - and there were millions of them in our country before the war with Hitler even started. The war certainly brought endless new suffering and destruction, but I've never forgotten those terrible pre - war years. That's what all my symphonies, beginning with the Fourth, are about - including the Seventh and the Eighth... I've nothing against calling the Seventh the 'Leningrad' Symphony. But it's nothing to do with the siege. It's about the Leningrad that Stalin destroyed... Most of my symphonies are tombstones. So many of our people died in unknown places. Nobody knows where they're buried - not even their relatives. Where do you put the tombstone for Meyerhold? For Tukhachevsky? Well - you can put it in music. I'd be willing to write a composition for every last one of the victims. But that's impossible - and that's why I dedicate my music to them all.[\[27\]](#)

These excerpts from the book *Zeugenaussage (Testimony)*, may seem highly unusual to Russian readers. The book is a summary - a broken narrative of the composer's thoughts confided in the strictest secrecy, in great haste, and on the understanding that they be published only after his death. How many of his thoughts and ideas must still be living in the memories of his contemporaries! They shouldn't be allowed to disappear.

One would need to be made of stone to be impervious to all the dogmas force-fed to the generations of this century. Shostakovich pretended to think "correctly", to adopt text-book truths and time-serving traits (though note how he mocked the "irreproachably correct" Rimsky-Korsakov!). He behaved as if everything was in order and that he wasn't himself torn by fears, contradictions, and doubts. But the greatest debt his admirers owe Shostakovich is to relinquish this "official" image. It bears no resemblance to reality and to retain it is to perpetuate a calamitous error of judgement. Did not a similar case of mistaken identity once pull the deeply serious Gogol down from his pedestal and turn him into Gogol the trivial jester? Fortunately no one can ever thwart the justice of time, nor silence the voices of integrity and truth.

[Part 2.](#) [Back to Contents.](#) [Back to Shostakovichiana.](#)

Zhitomirsky Notes

[1] M. V. Yudina, 1978, p. 253.

[2] *D. Shostakovich*, 1967, pp. 62, 64.

[3] *Soviet Music*, 1989, No. 6, p. 89.

[4] In 1989, the French magazine *Le Monde de la Musique* was forced to admit: "Two decades had to pass after the end of the war for Shostakovich's music to be even slightly rehabilitated in the eyes of the Western musical world; and then only after learning of new aspects of his powerful creative personality." (*Soviet Music*, 1989, No. 9, p. 54.)

[5] *Arnold Schoenberg, Letters*, Mainz, 1958, p. 231.

[6] Igor Stravinsky: publicist and interlocutor, 1988, p. 125.

[7] Vishnevskaya. "Solzhenitsyn and Rostropovich". *Youth*, 1989, No. 7, p. 82.

[8] *Novoe Vremya*, 1956, No. 6, p. 29.

[9] From Zhitomirsky's translation from the German edition (*Zeugenaussage*).

[10] Isaac Glikman. "I'll go on writing music, all the same." *Soviet Music* (1989), No. 9, p. 47.

[11] Conference on the Activities of Soviet Musicians, Central Committee of the All-Union Communist Party (6), Moscow, 1948, p. 97 (speech by Viktor Belyi).

[12] First All-Union Congress of Soviet Composers. Shorthand notes. Moscow, 1948, pp. 40-43 (speech by Tikhon Khrennikov).

[13] L. N. Tolstoy. *Collected Works*. Moscow, 1948, Volume 12, pp. 237-38.

[14] *Soviet Russia*, 2nd April 1968.

[15] Muradeli was unlucky - or, rather, extremely lucky, since the Revolution brought him greater fame than he could otherwise have dared dream of - for a special reason. Stalin didn't like his opera. Firstly, the libretto contradicted Stalin's line on Caucasian politics.

Secondly... but better to let Shostakovich tell the story: "The main problem was the lezhginka. The opera portrayed life in the Caucasus, so naturally it was crammed full of national songs and dances. Stalin, of course, was expecting to hear his favourite local tunes. Instead, he heard this lezhginka which Muradeli, in a fit of absent-mindedness, had made up himself. And it was this "original" lezhginka that threw Stalin into a temper... Muradeli began putting in appearances at various work places and social organisations. He went before the people and repented his sins: I was a so-and-so and such-and-such, a formalist, a cosmopolitan, and what's more I wrote a rotten lezhginka. But, in the nick of time, the Party showed me the way, and now I, Muradeli, the former formalist and cosmopolitan, have stepped onto the righteous road of progressive realistic creativity. And, furthermore, in future I am determined to write lezhginkas fully worthy of the auspicious epoch in which we live!" (*Zeugenaussage*, p. 164.)

[16] First All-Union Congress of Soviet Composers, p.304.

[17] Conference on the Activities of Soviet Musicians, p. 20.

[18] First All-Union Congress of Soviet Composers, p. 359.

[19] As Secretary of the Central Committee, Dmitri Shepilov oversaw the Second Composers' Congress in March 1957, which confirmed the conclusions arrived at by the First Congress in January 1948. Shortly afterwards, he was himself purged. (Ed.)

[20] *Zeugenaussage*, pp. 166-7.

[21] *Zeugenaussage*, pp. 167-8.

[22] From the collection *D. Shostakovich, About Himself and His Times*, Moscow, 1980, p. 136. There is an amusing anecdote in connection with "formalism", dating from 1959. During the state exam at the Moscow Conservatoire, a student, sitting right in front of the President of the Examining Board, Dmitri Shostakovich, was relating how formalism had been exterminated in 1948, and this extermination "corrected" in 1958. While the student was obviously highly embarrassed, Shostakovich maintained an irreproachably straight face throughout, only towards the end betraying his amusement with a slight but perceptible quiver of his lips.

[23] *Zeugenaussage*, p. 162.

[24] Kondrashin. "Preparations for the première of the Thirteenth Symphony: working with Shostakovich." *Musikalnaya Zhizn*, 1989, No. 17.

[25] *Soviet Russia*, note 14.

- [26] "On correcting Errors in the Appraisal of the Operas *The Great Friendship*, *Bogdan Khmelinsky*, and *From the Bottom of My Heart*." Party Resolution dated 18th May 1958.
- [27] *Zeugenaussage*, pp. 157, 174-5.
- [28] A reference to Bulgakov.(Ed.)
- [29] "Aesopian language". A standard Russian phrase signifying cryptic, symbolic speech. (Ed.)
- [30] *Zeugenaussage*, pp. 121-22.
- [31] Shorthand report, p. 345.
- [32] *Moskovskaya Pravda*, 24th April 1958.
- [33] *Zeugenaussage*, p. 223.
- [34] Dmitri Rabinovich. *Dmitri Shostakovich - Composer*. 1959, p. 96.
- [35] Orlov. *Shostakovich's Symphonies*. Moscow, 1961-2, p. 221.
- [36] *Zeugenaussage*, p. 161.
- [37] *Zeugenaussage*, pp. 204, 218.
- [38] I still have in my archive some of the articles I wrote for Shostakovich: a speech at the bicentenary of Bach's death (Leipzig, 1950); a similar one for an occasion dedicated to Beethoven (Berlin 1952); an article entitled, "On some Vital Questions concerning the Musical Creative Process - notes made by a composer" (*Pravda*, 17th June 1956); and a speech at the Second Congress of Composers (1st April 1957).
- [39] Shostakovich once spoke, with the greatest respect, about a quite remarkable deed by the pianist Maria Yudina. Stalin had taken a shine to a particular Mozart piano concerto (No. 23) which he heard her play on the radio. Having received a specially made copy of this performance from the Radiokomitet, the Leader ordered her to be sent 20,000 roubles. Maria Veniaminova's reply was as follows: "I am very grateful, Iosef Vissarionovich, for your help. I will pray night and day for you and beg God to forgive you your sins against your people and country. God is merciful, he'll forgive. As for the money, I shall give it to a charity at the church I go to." (*Zeugenaussage*, p. 213.) Shostakovich rightly called this

letter "suicidal". The warrant for Yudina's arrest was duly prepared, but on this occasion, for some reason, Stalin did not sign it.

[40] Vishnevskaya. "Solzhenitsyn and Rostropovich." *Yunost*, 1989, No. 7, p. 82.

Daniel Zhitomirsky

SHOSTAKOVICH

THE PUBLIC AND THE PRIVATE: *reminiscences, materials, comments*

Part 2: A Double Life

Daugava (1990, No. 4)

English version by Katia Vinogradova and Ian MacDonald

He lived a double life: his first "outer" and official; his second, an inner life not merely "personal" but concerned, too, with the preservation of universal human values. Yet, while the spirituality of the latter naturally opposed the forces conditioning the former, I must admit I would have preferred never to have seen among Shostakovich's works *The Song of the Forests*, his ballet *The Bright Stream* (idealising life on a collective farm in the '30s), nor, indeed, his cantata *The Sun Shines Over Our Motherland* (composed in 1952 against the background of the final wave of Stalin's Terror). Neither do I wish to remember that the author of *The Days of the Turbins* and *The Master and Margarita* wrote the play *Batum* (heroising the young Stalin). [\[28\]](#)

Many people lived this bizarre life - indeed, everyone involved with the arts (except for the sycophants and pawns of authoritarian power). But should we be shocked at this, snobbishly censoring such behaviour, confusing misfortune with guilt, judging the past by the standards of today? It was easier then to fall prey to the sort of illusions that could become bulwarks of faith (even if these were undermined every now and then by the voice of conscience). One felt a kind of social hypnosis, a dread that paralysed the will; indeed, at times this became an almost tangible wall of fear which stopped you from seeing what was right in front of you. Frequently, this "outer" life became governed entirely by the principle of expediency, confining itself to a safe minimum of expressions of loyalty and excluding any involvement with matters of conscience (unless doing so was essential in order to survive). This meaningless ritual conferred on the other, "inner", life both its independence and its insecurity - for it was essential to hold back concerning the more important, personal, things. Such resolutions did not always remain intact: they seemed often there to be broken by an irresistible urge to express one's inner self through Aesopian language [\[29\]](#) (as a result of which it wasn't difficult to find oneself in lethally dangerous situations).

Following the infamous Zhdanov resolutions of 1946-48, delegations of foreign "friends" were regularly invited to Moscow. Those charged with greeting such parties were obliged to reassure them that

everything in Soviet life was beautiful and to lend verisimilitude to this mirage by means of "personal impressions". Shostakovich recalls:

I saw many such delegations... Akhmatova and Zoshchenko were summoned to one of them. It was an old trick. They had to demonstrate to the guests that they were alive, in the best of health, and fantastically grateful to the Party and Government. As for the 'friends', they could think of nothing more tactful to ask than 'What is your opinion of the historic decree of the Central Committee and of Comrade Zhdanov's speech?'... Now I ask you: would you think it polite to ask someone how they felt if a scoundrel had just spat in their face? But that's not all. These questions were being put in the presence of that very scoundrel. Anna Akhmatova rose and explained that Comrade Zhdanov's speech and the 'historic decree' of the Central Committee were totally accurate and fair. She did the right thing. It was the only possible response to these witless, insensitive strangers. What else could she have told them? That life in our country was like lodging in a madhouse? That she loathed Zhdanov and Stalin and felt only disgust for them? Yes, Akhmatova could have said all this - and she would never have been seen again. [\[30\]](#)

In music, Shostakovich created his own kind of double life. In his main works, he strove for truth: about the times, about people, about himself; moreover, for those with ears to hear, he spoke out on these subjects not at all discreetly, openly addressing both his compatriots and the world at large. Simultaneously, this same man of conscience displayed exemplary amenability towards any bureaucratic hack-work foisted on him. Contemporary records of this sort of thing should not, however, be hastily locked in the bottom drawer - to do that would be to miss something interesting. For instance, at the Composers' Union meeting in January 1948, Shostakovich made two speeches. In the first he was very brief, speaking little about himself, clearly embarrassed by the blatancy of the charade. In the second (apparently after backstage pressure) he "behaved himself". This is what he said: "I've always listened to criticism and have always tried to do my best in my work. I'm listening to criticism now and I'll carry on listening. Meanwhile I'd like to get hold of the text of Comrade Zhdanov's speech. I'm sure others here feel the same. Closer study of this remarkable document ought to be of great help to us in our work."

In the same vein, here is a sentence from Shostakovich's speech at the First All-Union Congress of Composers in that same year: "As for myself, I must report that working so much in the field of symphonic and chamber-instrumental music has had a very bad effect on me." [\[31\]](#) Spoken by the supreme symphonist of our time, remarks like these cannot fail to have sounded bitterly ironic to most of the delegates (even to the dimmest bureaucrats and their most seditious toadies). According, however, to the rules of the game, this sort of stuff was classifiable only as praiseworthy self-criticism. Ten years later, I read in one of our national newspapers the following deposition signed by Shostakovich: "As a musician, I'm profoundly grateful to the beloved Communist Party for its very warm concern for Soviet music and its representatives. Wise leadership from the Party has been the basis for the creation of many beautiful musical works." [\[32\]](#) Less than four years after the publication of this edifying aperçu, the same "wise leadership" was turning itself inside out to stop anyone in the country hearing the national genius's Thirteenth Symphony!

I heard and still remember well Shostakovich's notorious "repentance" at the Composers' Congress of February 1948. Apparently his entire creative life had been one long tale of bad luck and unfortunate mistakes. After the damning article in *Pravda* in 1936, he had, he explained, tried to develop his creativity in "a different direction", and, after much effort, thought he'd managed to purge most of the "sinful" elements from his music. This, though, turned out to be another delusion and once again he "slid into formalism and began to speak a language alien to the people". Consequently, though his *Poem of The Motherland* had seemed to him to fulfil everything that Socialist Realism required, it turned out to be yet another ignominious "failure". Once more it had become clear to him that the "Party is right". Yet again he would have to "work hard". He was "deeply grateful for the Party's great concern for all artists", etc.

Since we're on the subject of sarcastic parody, here's what he really felt and what he told his friends shortly before his death: "About 'friends and humanitarians', the issue is clear. There can never be friendship with these so-called humanitarians. We are diametrically opposed. I trust none of them. I dispute their right to question me." And, on the subject of his ideological bosses, who supposedly taught him how to write music: "I never took their pontificating seriously and never will. All I retain is the weight of bitter experience that is my grey and miserable life - and the fact that my students share this experience and thus share my outlook brings me no pleasure." [\[33\]](#)

Our business is to rejoice

If ever there was a time to be happy it was surely the spring of 1945. The most appalling war was drawing to an end and Levitan's voice, reading the news-bulletins on the radio, was increasingly bullish. More and more fireworks lit up the skies and the chorus of voices praising the Great Leader grew ever more fanatical. Being obviously co-equal with God, he had single-handedly rescued all races, all nations, and world culture too. That summer, an atomic bomb exploded over Hiroshima.

Staying at the composer's house in Ivanovo that August, I met him daily in a small summer-house next to his shabby, shed-like dacha. My friends and I set up a crude table: a plank nailed on two poles hammered into the ground. It was upon this makeshift work-surface that Shostakovich wrote his Ninth Symphony. Some lines from my diary: "For a few days there was no one at the 'table'. D.D. and Nina Vassilievna had gone to Moscow. When they returned, I went to meet them at Ivanovo station. On the way back, D.D. told me about a 'uranium bomb' and an unimaginably terrible disaster that it had caused. Nina expertly outlined to me the splitting of the atom. Gloomy, tense, and at the same time excited, D.D. spoke in short, rapid phrases, his animation tangible in his taut voice, preoccupied expression, and pale face. We walked towards their dacha in silence. Lost in contemplation of the horror of Hiroshima, I suddenly found myself babbling compulsively about our hopeless future. Cutting me short, Shostakovich gazed loftily into the sky and said: 'Our business is to rejoice'." I remembered this remark for the rest of my life - and not least because, as I say, he was then writing the Ninth.

In this work he side-stepped the demands of "duty" and, contrary to official expectations, spoke in his own voice. As far back as spring 1944, in conversation with a Moscow music critic, Shostakovich had said: "I'm thinking about my Ninth Symphony. I'd like to use a choir and soloists in it as well as an orchestra - if I can find the right text. But I'm worried I'll be accused of trying to copy Beethoven." [34] According to Genrikh Orlov, "in the winter of 1944-5 it became common knowledge that Shostakovich was working on his Ninth. Some musicians had heard the first pages of the new symphony - a victorious, heroic major theme in brisk tempo. In private conversations, Shostakovich confided that he'd been working enthusiastically. The exposition of the first movement took a couple of days, the development no more than a week. Then, suddenly, he stopped. He didn't say why; in fact, he avoided all mention of it. About a year later, he at last admitted that he'd started 'another' Ninth and hadn't yet brought this new one 'to an end'". [35] In the summer of 1945, the newspapers published TASS reports about a new Shostakovich symphony "dedicated to the triumph of our great victory" - but in August, on a home-made table in the village of Ivanovo, something quite different was being written.

Thirty years later, the composer finally spoke about all this:

I'm sure Stalin never had any doubts that he was a genius and an intellectual giant. Even so, once Hitler was defeated, his egomania ran riot. He was "like the frog who blew up to the size of an ox"... Those close to the Stalin-frog were careful to worship it. In fact, the entire world seemed to be worshipping Stalin and I soon found myself coerced into this sordid supplication, too. The situation was, as they say, clear: we'd won the war and the empire was consequently bigger. Anything beyond that was beside the point.

What was required from Shostakovich was an apotheosis:

The choir and soloists would have to glorify the great Leader... He was expecting to be able to point at it proudly and say: "There it is - our own national Ninth Symphony". Actually, I must confess to having encouraged the dreams of our Leader and Teacher by announcing a plan for just such an apotheosis. I tried to pull the wool over their eyes and this rebounded on me. When the real Ninth was performed, Stalin was enraged. He was mortified that there was no choir, no soloists, no apotheosis - in fact, no incense offered up to the Deity at all. It was just music, which Stalin didn't understand and whose meaning was suspect, to boot. [36]

The key word here is "suspect". In its modest scale, the Ninth was clearly opposed not only to the original idea of an official Victory Symphony, but also to the whole bloated cult of mass-festivities which had inflated out of all proportion since the war. I recollect very clearly how I perceived the work's multiple play of meanings: carefree jollity and carnival bravado turning into tragic burlesque; a strain of lyric innocence rising above a world of falsehood and vulgarity; grief and civil courage merging in a grave soliloquy. This was no grandiose tragedy, but rather the call of unhealing memory: "Let's bow our

heads. Let's not forget the victims and the black days of the past."

The rules of the game

The catalogue reads: "D. D. Shostakovich. *Notes and bibliography* (1965)..." Listed here are dozens of articles and speeches printed in his name. Examples: "*Moscow, Hope of Mankind*"; (1950); "*On the Road of Nationalism and Realism*" (1952); "*The Will of the People*" (1953); "*We are Creators*" (1955); "*To Stir Our Hearts*" (1957); "*Following the Guidance of the Party*" (1962). Everyone knew these things were slung together by journalists and merely signed by Shostakovich. It was routine.

In his conversations with Solomon Volkov, Shostakovich mentions this practice very briefly and without much comment: "I'm often asked why I did this or said that, signed this article or that official statement... People are different and each deserves a different answer... They ask me why I signed that stuff, but nobody bothered to ask André Malraux why he eulogised the excavation of the White Sea Canal which cost hundreds of thousands of lives." [\[37\]](#)

It was naturally impossible to do without Shostakovich's help when preparing biographical material or other topics relating to him. In these circumstances he either participated very formally or kept a low profile - and this I can swear to on the basis of my own literary "collaborations" with him. [\[38\]](#) At no time did he ever offer any thoughts on what I was writing, either before or after publication. For example, in the case of my article "*On some Vital Questions*", he came round to my place in Ogarev Street and listened very attentively to what I read him. Only once did he comment. I'd written: "A composer's urge to expand the range of thoughts, feelings, and colours in his creative palette rarely evokes an enthusiastic response. Dogmatists are extremely suspicious of any attempt, however mild, to innovate in this way. Any poetic touch, if not perfectly conventional, provokes severe reservations." After that, I'd added: "Every effect of this kind needles them like a nail in a chair." At this point, Dmitri Dmitryevich politely interrupted: "I request you, Daniel Vladimirovich, please delete the phrase about a nail in a chair." And that was all!

I recall how Shostakovich's speech about Beethoven was composed. I arrived at his apartment with a ready-typed text - followed, hot on my heels, by various VIPs from the Committee Related to the Arts. I then read "Shostakovich's speech" loudly and clearly, whereupon the Ministry bosses delivered their profound opinions. They wished it to be known that they knew much more about Beethoven than was included in "Shostakovich's speech" - especially on such essential topics as "Beethoven and the Revolution" and "The Love of Beethoven in the USSR". There followed dozens of "important instructions" and I jotted them all down conscientiously. Meanwhile D.D. sat in a distant, dark corner near the front door, saying nothing. What did he know about Beethoven? Besides, his views were being decided for him by the state. It was evening and next morning he was due to fly to East Germany. There was no point in interfering. I spent the whole night at the typewriter in Dmitri Dmitryevich's study. At dawn, he woke me. For the sake of propriety, he skimmed through my text: "Thank you, thank you very

much, excellent!" With a brush-like gesture, he scratched his head. "Sorry - must rush!" And off he went.

I recall all this and cannot but admit that I took part in this falsification. I knew for a fact that Dmitri Dmitryevich's mind was infinitely more incisive and original than any of those prepared texts. The only consolation I have is that I tried to write in a way which I believed would have been his style of writing. I know very well that he tolerated those falsifications neither out of laziness nor carelessness.

In private conversation, Dmitri Dmitryevich spoke extraordinarily vividly and expressively, employing a characteristic and very personal style based on pithy phrases which were almost always aphoristic. His articulation was highly emphatic, each word given its precise place and weight. Just as distinctive were the humour and sarcasm which often glinted through his apparently imperturbable seriousness. Indeed, his creative nature was clear in every aspect: in his sharp hints and loaded allegories; his verbal mimicry of characters and acting out of scenes; even in his deadpan jokes. (He would often repeat his jokes as an encore for friends, enriched with new twists and turns. He hated bland repetition, whether in speech or music.)

On the official platform, he was very different. Here are some of my notes from the '50s: "I've been listening to a speech by Shostakovich - with increasing irritation, albeit some sympathy. What an ugly, alien language he was being asked to mouth! Banal journalistic clichés, middlebrow quotations, endless ponderous verbosity. And the way he read it! Muddling syllables, ignoring punctuation - in fact, generally carrying on as if completely ignorant of the rules of grammar and intonation. It was like listening to a semi-literate schoolboy answering a question about which he knows absolutely nothing. As an official speaker, he is pure self-parody." Now, years later, I better understand the significance of those public performances (though I'm still not sure whether they were premeditated or simply spontaneous reactions to the idiocy of the situation). He read his "prepared" texts like that partly because he hated the whole ordeal and wanted to separate himself from it, and partly because doing so mimed his detachment from the official banality he was surrounded with. And one had to admit that the result was very expressive in its way! (Although, at the same time, it was impossible to be absolutely sure that it was being done on purpose.)

Another thing which I believe helped him separate his inner life from the imposed official life and its associated trivia was his cultivated courtesy. It worked with all kinds of people; but it was a very precise courtesy which never lapsed into obsequiousness or formal politeness. Mostly, it was merely a way of maintaining a distance.

Many people were puzzled by the composer's double life. It puzzled them because the real Shostakovich so obviously strove after truth with a tenacity and frankness verging on the self-immolatory. Quick to mend any breach in the wall of falsehood, our ideological overseers doggedly strove to maintain the

public image of him as monolithically orthodox and reliably "correct". His enemies, those who envied him, were always trying to lure him into contradicting himself, catch him indulging in "tragic subjectivity", or expose his "suspect" ideological positions on this or that subject. (Some of these same people had, in earlier, so-called "brighter" days, feigned discipleship, trading on his generosity to further their own ambitions.)

It has to be said that neither Shostakovich's musical genius nor his great strength of spirit were enough to save him from the ordinary human fears that filled his days and nights. He feared for the life and fate of his loved ones; he feared violence, humiliation, and torture; he feared poverty and the withdrawal of his rights. As for his expressed desire, nevertheless, to be "like everyone else" - i.e., utterly defenceless, hopelessly enslaved, hanging by a hair over a void - in this I see only his singular spiritual integrity. [39] In fact, I've been thinking about this for some time, which is why I read the following lines from Galina Vishnevskaya's memoirs with particular pleasure: "Not disposed to close his eyes on a vile reality, Shostakovich saw clearly that we were all players in a disgusting farce - and that, once you'd agreed to be a clown, you had to carry it on to the end. In that way, you took responsibility for the abomination in which you lived and which you could never openly oppose." [40]

Having accepted the rules of the game once and for all, he followed them without embarrassment - hence his speeches in the media and at meetings, and his signature on "protest letters" (which, as he admitted, he signed without reading, caring nothing for what people might say). He knew that the time would come when this verbal husk would fall away, leaving only his music to speak for him in a language more vivid than words. His real life resided in his creativity and there was no way anyone could intrude there. Whatever thoughts he needed to express he was able to convey by means of his music, and it's that music which will survive for centuries - that and the tormented, spiritually crippled face of the greatest composer of the 20th century. No matter what lying programmes Soviet musicologists stuck on his symphonies, his audiences knew perfectly well what they were about.

Despite enduring a lifelong abuse of his talent, Shostakovich often remained loyal even to those who let him down. It is hard to imagine how, with his refined and nervous temperament, he resisted the temptation of suicide. What power rescued him from it? Could it be that he feared God? God, after all, does not accept the soul of one who takes his own life. "Three lilies, three lilies on my grave without a cross," sings The Suicide in his Fourteenth Symphony. At the work's rehearsal it was disturbing to watch him listening to this song with such obvious inner torment.

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Testimony pro *Testimony*

"It's true. It's accurate.
Sometimes, for me, there is too much rumour in it,
but nothing major. The basis of the book is correct."

MAXIM SHOSTAKOVICH

conductor, composer's son
BBC-2 TV interview 1986

"I am an admirer of Solomon Volkov.
There is nothing false there [in *Testimony*].
Definitely the style of speech is Shostakovich's - not only
the choice of words, but the way they are put together."

GALINA SHOSTAKOVICH

composer's daughter
Interview with Allan Ho and Dmitry Feofanov 1996

"It's all true."

RUDOLF BARSHAI

conductor, friend of Shostakovich
BBC Radio 3 interview 1983

"Everything in *Testimony* is true. Everything."

IL'YA MUSIN

conductor, friend of Shostakovich
Gramophone 1997

"I have no doubt that it's true."

KURT SANDERLING

conductor, friend of Shostakovich
DSCH1996

"Basically everything that is stated there is true."

MSTISLAV ROSTROPOVICH

cellist, conductor, friend of Shostakovich
Interview with Elizabeth Wilson 1989

"Authentic from its first to its last letter."

ANDREI BITOV

novelist
Shostakovich's Gulag and Memorial 1991

"I have no doubts about the authenticity of these confessions."

VERA VOLKOVA

musicologist
melos 1993

"I regard this book as one of the most important publications devoted to the composer, and its authenticity does not raise any questions.

There is no doubt about it. I am ready to put my signature under every word of it. This is the truth about Shostakovich."

LEV LEBEDINSKY

musicologist, friend of Shostakovich, co-author of libretto to *Rayok*
melos 1993

"I read the book with excitement, unable to put it down. I reread it, reflected on it, compared it with my own materials (diaries, letters, and clippings). I checked it with statements made by Shostakovich's friends and, finally, with my own memories. From every angle, I found myself

contemplating the same picture - exactly what I had seen happening around him, even inside him, at the beginning of the '60s."

DANIEL ZHITOMIRSKY

musicologist, friend of Shostakovich

Daugava 1990

"It was with the greatest agitation that I read Shostakovich's memoirs, prepared by Solomon Volkov. Much of what comes as a surprise to the Western reader was not a surprise for me. I knew many things and guessed many others."

KYRILL KONDRASHIN

conductor, friend of Shostakovich

The Interior Shostakovich 1980

"The conductor Kyrill Kondrashin has wholeheartedly endorsed the book and I have been privately informed through a reliable source in the Soviet Union that it is indeed authentic."

GERALD ABRAHAM

musicologist

The Times Literary Supplement 1982

"Most of *Testimony*, I'd say, corresponds to the truth."

YURI TEMIRKANOV

conductor

DSCH 1995

"What I read in that book is what I hear in his music. To me that's the important issue. The *spirit* is true."

SEMYON BYCHKOV

conductor

BBC-2 TV interview 1991

"My views are identical with Ian MacDonald's views (on *Testimony*). He really understands what happened, and in the end he says what I said and what Rostropovich and Vishnevskaya said, and what Maxim said in the end. As far as the character and image of Shostakovich are concerned, I'm sure *Testimony* is true to life."

VLADIMIR ASHKENAZY

pianist, conductor

DSCH 1991

"Exceptionally important in acutely describing how the composer found himself entangled in the mechanisms of a totalitarian system, and his dependence on the foibles of a morally corrupt musical milieu directed by Tikhon Khrennikov. Even if we contest its authenticity, its value is no less inestimable for those interested in musical biography..."

KRZYSZTOF MEYER

composer, friend of Shostakovich, author of *Dimitri Chostakovitch* (1994)

Ibid.

"In the light of all we know today about the inhuman terror the communists maintained in Russia for seventy years, you may say that *Testimony* is a rather moderate document. This lack of criticism in the wide political perspective speaks in favour of the book's authenticity."

TORSTEN EKBOM

musicologist

melos 1993

"The book by Solomon Volkov was considered an authentic document without any reservation during the last few years of the Soviet system.

The legend that circulated earlier, insinuating that the book was a falsification, was completely disposed of, though it is

still disturbing some Western minds."

DETLEF GOJOWY

musicologist, author of *Dimitri Schostakowitsch* (1983)

melos 1993

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"To understand that music, they'd have to forget about their Party card."

Rostislav Dubinsky's *Stormy Applause: making music in a workers' state*

Rostislav Dubinsky was first violinist of the Borodin Quartet from its formation in 1946 to 1975, after which he made his way to America where he founded the Borodin Trio with his wife, pianist Luba Edlina, and cellist Yuli Turovsky. Dubinsky's memoir of musical life in the Soviet Union *Stormy Applause* was published in 1989. Now out of print, it was never widely reviewed and remains little known. As bitter as *Testimony*, it tells much the same story from a different angle. Yet its insight into the anti-semitism, professional corruption, political arm-twisting, and general fear which permeated the Soviet cultural scene during the period it describes (1949-75) offers a vital complement to the parallel narrative in *Testimony*. Anyone unaware of the extent of the resentment and Aesopian irony current in the musical community under Soviet rule will find this book illuminating.

In a passage describing a visit by the Borodins to Moldavia in 1956, Dubinsky recounts a concert performance of Shostakovich's Fourth Quartet:

"The first row was occupied by leading Moscow composers, with Shostakovich himself in the center. Sitting in front, he probably thought no one could see him, and his face unwittingly reflected what he had wanted to say with his music. But I saw his face: the contorted mouth and the eyes of a pursued, wounded animal. His face was the strongest impression I remember of the whole festival, a sharp contrast to the officially lacquered lie with which the authorities covered their crimes. Twice in his life - in 1936 and in 1948 - Shostakovich had suffered a 'civil execution'. Stones flew through his windows, accompanied by shouts of 'Formalist', 'Traitor', 'Trotskyite', and even 'American spy'. The natural end of this 'ideological' campaign should have been physical execution, but by some miracle that didn't happen. The expectation of violent death, however, became the main theme in Shostakovich's music and was stamped forever on his face.

"We played the fourth quartet with this subtext of life and death. We were in no danger: the music was officially permitted, and the notes, after all, were only innocent sounds, all sorts of F-sharps and B-flats. Even Mozart and Beethoven played with them! Notes are not words, not yet - even in the USSR! But playing now to Shostakovich about Shostakovich, we felt we were not obedient Soviet court musicians but fearless unmaskers of evil and hypocrisy. It's easy to be brave when there's no menace, but what kind of courage must it take when you risk your life for the truth!

"The final pianissimo, like a last sigh, flew off into the hall and returned to us as a barely audible echo. We tried to prolong the silence, but the audience interfered. Destroying the

fragile world of brief truth, uncertain applause broke out in the hall. We rose slowly, bowed very low to Shostakovich, and left the stage. The applause died out without gaining strength.

" 'Well, to hell with all of you,' swore Berlinsky softly.

"'I agree,' I answered. 'To understand that music, they'd have to forget about their Party card for half an hour.'"

After the concert, the Borodins joined Shostakovich and other composers and musicians for a meal in a restaurant. Drink flowed freely and an oaf in a black leather jacket tried to join their table, only to be thrown out after proposing an anti-semitic toast. (To which Shostakovich replied "What filth!".) Afterwards the company called for the Borodins to play the quartet again:

"We each took two instruments and two music stands and headed downstairs without speaking. Four chairs were already waiting for us in a corner of the room. I opened my case, got out the violin, checked the tuning... And suddenly I felt an unusual lightness and freedom in both hands. What was it? Surely not a glass or two of wine? If so, then such a creative path threatened to become extremely dangerous.

"I looked at my colleagues. Alexandrov was tensely tuning his instrument and probably cursing me. Shebalin and Berlinsky had clearly drunk to excess, and it showed. The former wisely did not try to tune his instrument, but repeated that he was a 'sportsman', while the latter's hands were visibly uncoordinated. He tried his solo from the second movement, and at one point his fingers turned up on one string while his bow was on another. He laughed and turned to Shostakovich.

"'Dmitri Dmitrievich, forgive me if something is not just so...'

"'Everything will be "so", don't worry, everything will be "so"...'

"We began to play. In the first movement there were problems. Someone was always late, and it proved impossible to lead the quartet; instead, it was led by whoever played the slowest. The second movement went better. A peculiar, drunkenly rhythmical balance, from which it was dangerous to diverge, had settled in the music. We played fairly successfully up to the recapitulation, where the initial melancholy melody reappeared. Several voices began to sing along with us...

"It really means something if people sing Shostakovich's music!

"They sang along again in the scherzo, which we played in manner of a street gang's song. With the discordant voices there appeared a particular musical effect, which would be

impossible to write into a quartet score. This seemed to please Shostakovich, because he also started singing... This was unexpected and even frightening. I never heard Shostakovich sing before or after that evening.

"Gradually the quartet got used to the drunkenness, and by the 'Jewish' finale we were all playing confidently. After the incident with the man in the black leather jacket, it rang out in a somewhat different key... There was neither applause nor praise, only the long silence that is necessary after such music."

On another occasion in the early 1960s, Dubinsky describes rehearsing Shostakovich's Second Piano Trio with his wife Luba Edlina and Valentin Berlinsky, the quartet's cellist:

"At our first rehearsal I felt the change right away. A beautiful woman was with us, and for that reason my colleagues had shaved painstakingly, put on cologne, and dressed with taste. They smiled and spoke pleasantly. Furthermore, without Alexandrov, Berlinsky seemed like a different person. There was now a non-Party majority in our piano quartet, and it was possible to relax for a while. This was especially noticeable when we rehearsed the Shostakovich Trio in E minor. Berlinsky said that the officially accepted program of the work did not correspond exactly to reality. My wife and I only glanced at each other.

"The trio was written during the war, right after the Seventh or 'Leningrad' Symphony. Soviet musicologists explained the complete absence of optimism in these works as the result of the treacherous attack of the Germans on the peace-loving Soviet Union and the ensuing war, unequaled in its brutality. They conveniently forgot that the first movement of the Seventh Symphony already existed a year before the war, back when Stalin was still Hitler's faithful friend. And really, how could one openly say that Shostakovich's music depicts the destruction of Russian thought and culture, their gradual ruin, which Stalin began and Hitler only wanted to complete?

"To translate the sounds into words is an ungrateful task, all the more so because every listener interprets music in his own way. But if, after the performance of the trio, the whole audience is depressingly silent and doesn't hurry to applaud, does it not suggest that the much-abused composer has been heard and understood?

"And yet, if one wants to express the music of the trio in words, its very beginning sounds like an anxious premonition of misfortune. It overwhelms the listener without mercy, and eventually, in the second movement, in the scherzo, there bursts forth a fiendish, destructive dance of death. In the third movement, the passacaglia, one hears blood-curdling piano chords. Is it not the sound of a hammer on a railway track which tells the prisoners of the concentration camp that 'one more day in the life of Ivan Denisovich' has

started? While this evil sound reverberates across the hall, the violin and cello weep and pray for the people who perished.

"The finale increases in tension, achieving in chamber music the rarely attained dynamic *fff*. When it seems that all means of expression are exhausted, the violin and cello unexpectedly become mute. As if in deathly agony, a wail escapes from a throat strangled by an iron hand. The trio ends with the initial Jewish motif, disappearing into nothingness, like a question mark about the fate of the whole nation. It was the courageous act of an artist who dares to tell the truth and who, for this, in four years' time would be condemned to silence."

In 1970, the Borodins played for David Oistrakh, then recovering from illness:

"We got our instruments, set up our music stands, and sat down. In an artificial voice, as if addressing an audience from a stage, I said, 'We shall play the third quartet of Shostakovich in F major, Opus 73, in five movements, the fourth and fifth to be performed without interruption. The quartet was written in 1944.'

"Oistrakh looked at us, smiling. We started to play...

"The Third is Shostakovich's best quartet, written in his wartime period. A lot of sorrow had accumulated for the Russian intelligentsia during these years of Soviet rule, from the 1917 revolution until the beginning of the war in 1941. And it was only during the war that it found its emotional outlet. This was particularly true in music. Like Shostakovich's Seventh Symphony, this quartet was officially touted as anti-Fascist. But it was in essence anti-Soviet, a disturbing musical tale about the destruction of Russian culture.

"The first movement of the quartet is a perfect sonata allegro, the last bright day before an irremediable misfortune. The second: gathering clouds and the approach of disaster. The third: the wild triumph of evil. The fourth: a funeral march, a prayer for those who have perished. The fifth: a sorrowful, moving story about Shostakovich himself and his pain and anxiety about the future of humanity.

"We never played any concert as we did that evening for that one sick man. In the fourth movement Berlinsky, who was seated facing Oistrakh, started making signs to me. I glanced at Oistrakh. He was lying with his eyes closed, tears running down his cheeks. Tamara brought him some medicine, but he gently pushed her hand aside. In the finale, where the last muted chord is like an unearthly choir against whose background the first violin rises higher and higher and disappears, we made a long diminuendo, and the silence that followed was like a confirmation of the music."

The Borodins also played the Eighth Quartet to Shostakovich himself in 1960:

"Hello, how are you? Thank you for coming,' he said convulsively shaking all our hands. Four music stands were waiting in the room. Shostakovich sat down in an armchair and waited impatiently. We quickly opened our cases, took our places, and immediately began playing.

"The five-movement Quartet No. 8 in C-minor, Opus 110, is played without interruption. The slow fugato, with its theme, 'D-S-C-H'; the furious scherzo, with the Jewish melody from his own second trio, Opus 67; the agitated waltz; the requiem for those who perished; and once again the original bitter fugato con sordino, with his initials.

"As he listened, Shostakovich picked up the score and a pencil, and then put both aside, his head bent. What he must have felt at this moment, we could only guess. Having openly said at the beginning of the quartet, 'This is myself', he sat before us, tormented, listening to his story about himself, his musical confession, the sorrowful cry of a soul, where each note weeps with pain.

"We tried hard not to look at him. We began the fourth movement, which imitated either bombs falling from above and exploding on the earth or just hearts breaking. Then came the old Russian song 'Tormented by Heavy Bondage', and finally the culmination of the quartet, which came from his opera *Katerina Izmailova*. In the last scene, when the prisoners are being moved across a Siberian river, Sergei, for whose sake Katerina has sacrificed everything on earth, betrays her with Sonetka. The impact of the scene is that the entire audience, the orchestra, and all the characters see this; even the gendarme spits at Sergei and Sonetka; only Katerina alone knows nothing and is happy to meet Sergei. The insolent Sonetka appears, and slowly the irremediable catastrophe reaches Katerina's consciousness. She throws herself into the icy water, pulling Sonetka with her. Thus it happens in the opera. The same melody sounds different in the quartet: here, it is the loneliness of the composer himself and his premonition of his inevitable end.

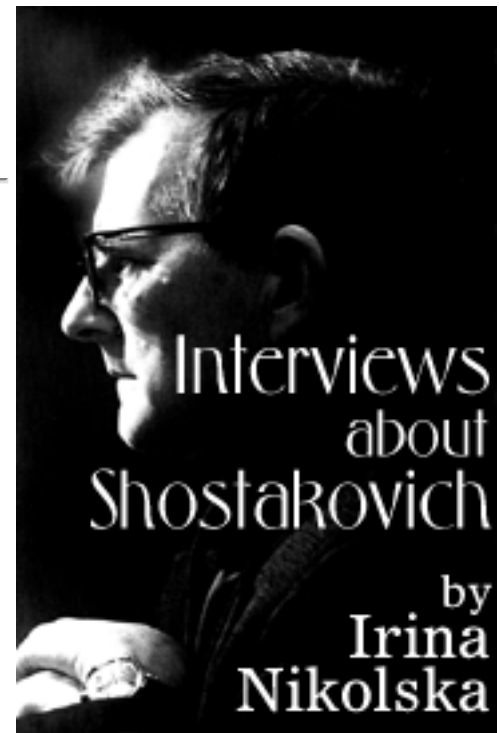
"We finished the quartet and looked at Shostakovich. His head was hanging low, his face hidden in his hands. We waited. He didn't stir. We got up, quietly put our instruments away, and stole out of the room."

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Summarised by Ian MacDonald

The musicologist Irina Nikolska conducted several interviews with former Russian colleagues, students, and admirers of Shostakovich, published in Summer 1993 in a *festschrift* devoted to the composer in the Swedish magazine *melos*. Apart from questions on aspects of Shostakovich's life and work, all of the interviewees were asked for their views on *Testimony*. Like Daniel [Zhitomirsky](#), the late Lev Lebedinsky (1904-1992) was very enthusiastic:

"I regard this book as one of the most important publications devoted to the composer, and its authenticity doesn't raise any questions or doubts in me. I am ready to put my signature under every word of it. This is the truth about Shostakovich."



Pressed further, Lebedinsky said that the book corresponded with his conversations with the composer and hinted to Nikolska that he had helped in its creation.

Vera Volkova (b. 1947), a professor at the Nizhny Novgorod conservatoire, was more measured:

"My perception of Shostakovich's music is quite consonant with the image created in the composer's memoirs by Solomon Volkov. I don't doubt the authenticity of the confessions set down in the book, though I offer no proofs except my own psychological feeling and Shostakovich's music itself.

"However, it's beyond doubt that the picture of the composer reproduced in Volkov's book is one-sided. There are a lot of convincing testimonies about a quite different Shostakovich: soft, lenient, and benevolent. To my mind, though, there is no insoluble contradiction in this. Both portraits are authentic, though Volkov's is certainly more provocative.

"The sharp and gloomy Shostakovich presented by Volkov didn't reveal himself to everybody. It seems to me quite natural that the composer who was seriously ill and experienced terrible persecutions and disappointments would more readily expose the accumulated offences, irritations, and weariness of his inner life to a journalist who won his trust than to anyone else.

"Isn't all this audible in the very music of Shostakovich? It shows the paradoxical

combination of deep love and compassion alongside caustic irony and cruel sarcasm. Probably he was like that, this great and complex artist of our ill-starred era."

The Moscow critic Israel Nestyev (b. 1911) echoed Volkova's view, choosing his words carefully: "This book is known to be a reflection of Shostakovich's views - and, indeed, genuine conversations of this musicologist with the composer are included in the book." (It is unclear whether "this musicologist" means Volkov or Nestyev himself, following the hint of Lebedinsky.) "At the same time," Nestyev continued, "parts of the book would never have been approved by Dmitri Dmitryevich and he would never have agreed to publish them in his lifetime."

The musicologist Marina Sabynina (b. 1917) declared herself personally unenchanted by Solomon Volkov and thought *Testimony* reflected the "desperate gloominess" of Shostakovich's later years too much. She also thought Volkov had got parts of it from other "pupils" of Shostakovich. She was not, however, disposed to reject the book, whose picture of Shostakovich is congruent with her own.

Only former Shostakovich pupil Boris Tishchenko (b. 1939) implied an outright rejection of *Testimony*, saying of Volkov: "I think it non-ethical to mention this name in a conversation about Shostakovich." Tishchenko ventured few statements other than to praise his teacher's character and said nothing about Shostakovich's political beliefs. (Nikolska calls Tishchenko's view of the composer an "idealised interpretation".)

Yakubov's angle

Manashir Yakubov (b. 1936), curator of the Shostakovich archive and editor of the Shostakovich Edition, had most to say about *Testimony*. According to him, the reason the book hasn't been published in full in Russia is that Volkov fears it will be revealed as "not completely authentic". Referring to the *exposes* of Laurel Fay and Genrikh Orlov, Yakubov claims Volkov interviewed Shostakovich only three times - insufficient for a long book. (Tishchenko talks of one interview. The KGB disinformation campaign against Volkov claimed four.) According to Yakubov, Shostakovich's inscription noting "conversations about Meyerhold, Zoshchenko, and Glazunov" was meant to indicate that nothing was said about anyone or anything else.

Like Sabynina, Yakubov guesses that Volkov had other informants and nominates Lev Arnshtam and Lev Lebedinsky. (He ascribes the "irritable and spiteful" tone of the book to the latter.) Yakubov does not - perhaps because he knows Volkov's additional sources were reliable - reject the main burden of *Testimony*, and when he gives examples of specific fabrications, he descends to the level of trivia, querying two unimportant contentions about Khrennikov and the story about Berg visiting Leningrad.

Yakubov's final verdict on *Testimony* is that it is "one-sided" - yet his own view of Shostakovich is multifaceted to the point of self-contradiction. For instance, he claims that the composer was "an internal *emigre*, like many other members of the intelligentsia - but at the same time he was a patriot harbouring a belief in some ideas of the revolution". An "internal *emigre*" was the Thirties term for a dissident - and a dissident who kept faith with aspects of the revolution was rare to the point of non-existence. Yakubov seems to be hedging his bets here, unable to rationalise apparent contradictions in Shostakovich's behaviour.

For instance, he asserts, against most other recent Russian witnesses, that the composer wrote "compositions quite crystalline pure in ideological respect", and gives as an example the Second Symphony. However, he then says the work cannot be categorised as Socialist Realist: "No wonder it was condemned and not performed for decades." As for *Katerina Ismailova*, Yakubov denies that the work represents a "broken" Shostakovich: "They wanted to make an obedient person out of him, but they didn't succeed."

Yakubov is without doubt a leading authority on the documentary aspect of Shostakovich's career, but in concluding that the composer was trapped in the contradictions of his situation, he may merely reflect his own uncertainty about his hero's character and intentions.

Sabynina's Shostakovich

From an older generation, Marina Sabynina is quite definite that Shostakovich was a radically disaffected figure. Testifying to his scornful attitude to the 1948 congress and directives concerning Socialist Realism, she recalls him as an amusingly ironic observer: "He was able to disengage himself from the events of Soviet reality, to soar above it."

Whilst waiting with her outside the Small Hall of the Moscow Conservatoire on one occasion, Shostakovich (confidentially) greeted the appearance of each member of the academic council with an "extremely pointed remark and a mimic portrait-parody". (It is worth comparing this with my interpretation of the finale of the Fourth Symphony in *The New Shostakovich*, pp. 115-6.)

As for his official works, Sabynina is unequivocal in describing these as "compromises which repelled him as an artist and were bitter and humiliating for him". In this connection, she mentions the scores for such "repulsive, hypocritical movies as *The Unforgettable Year 1919*, *The Fall of Berlin*, and *The Meeting on the Elbe*". According to her, Shostakovich had to write these things, even though doing so "violated" him, because he had no other source of income at that time. Of such "falsely patriotic" choral works as *The Sun Shines Over Our Motherland* and *The Song of the Forests*, she observes that they have "very little in common with his real style".

Sabynina nominates the Twelfth Symphony, with its "cinema *cliches*", as one of the composer's bitterest

compromises "because the films and cantatas are, thank God, forgotten, but the Twelfth Symphony, alas, is put on the list of his symphonies and included in solemn retrospectives". The Thirteenth, she insists, was a deliberate rebuttal of it. As for the Eleventh, its third movement "could be associated with the mass executions of the Soviet era and Stalin's reprisals, while the first part, with its melodies of pre-revolutionary songs of hard labour and exile, recalls the victims of the Gulag - the millions who perished in concentration camps and prisons".

Referring to her book on Shostakovich's symphonies (1976), Sabynina admits to having had to throw out "whole passages" in order to get it published:

"I would have liked to show truthfully the tragedy of this genius who suffered persecutions from rude, uncouth nonentities who tried to crush and trample him - a man who had to buy the right to be himself with humiliating concessions. But it was impossible to speak it outright, so against my will and by force of necessity I resorted to hints, allusions, and innuendos."

On the conceptual level, she observes that foreigners tend to hear Shostakovich's work as "pure" music divorced from its social context, so missing its "dramatic" character. (To Israel Nestyev, the composer was "a born dramatist".)

Lebedinsky's contentions

Lev Lebedinsky shared Sabynina's view of Shostakovich, describing him as "a fighter". When Nikolska asked him what he meant, he replied:

"There is an opinion going around that Shostakovich was not a sufficiently active participant in the social life of the country - but it's profoundly wrong. His blows against Stalin's regime were powerful ones, though the public didn't guess it."

Citing the Eighth and Tenth symphonies as peaks of the composer's "political struggle", Lebedinsky asserted that "Shostakovich shows in them his real concepts. At the same time he takes all necessary measures to preserve himself against retaliation by keeping within the framework of purely instrumental music."

On the subject of the Eleventh Symphony, Lebedinsky claimed that Shostakovich told him it was "about the present, not the past":

"For me, the Eleventh Symphony displays the image of 'Stalin's prison'. It exposes Stalinism by way of a parable."

The Twelfth he saw as "a denunciation of Leninism": "It contains a characteristic soliloquy where Lenin's speech is presented in the form of a parody."

Lebedinsky saw Shostakovich's music as analogous to Akhmatova's *Requiem*, dating his mature (anti-Stalinist) development from the Fourth Symphony.

Other views

Israel Nestyev agrees with Sabynina that Shostakovich composed certain works "through compulsion... as concessions to officialdom". Recalling the slow movement of the Fifth Symphony, he says:

"Even now I perceive this music as a requiem for the millions of innocent victims of Stalin's regime."

Nestyev acknowledges the uniqueness of this: "Not one other artist - no painter, dramatist, or film-maker - could think of using their art as a means of expressing protest against Stalin's Terror. Only instrumental music was able to express the terrible truth of that time." According to Nestyev, Stalin told the theatre director Nemirovich-Danchenko that Shostakovich was "probably a gifted person - but too Meyerhold-like".

Vera Volkova calls Shostakovich "a musical dissident", describing his music as "an exciting psychological document of our recent history". Her encounter with Shostakovich began at a festival devoted to the composer in Gorky (aka Nizhny Novgorod) in 1964:

"Our young heads were at that time thoroughly indoctrinated by the official propaganda which constantly harped on the 'formalistic deviations' in the composer's work. As for Shostakovich's music, we knew only several cheerful marches, songs, and overtures.

"Suddenly a world of unforeseen, irresistible musical beauty and unprecedented intensity of feeling was flung open for us. People were crying at the festival concerts, for the first time perceiving without prejudice or doubt the tragic revelations of the Fifth, Seventh, and Eleventh symphonies. Liberated from prohibition, Shostakovich's music became a symbol of the severe truth of our time..."

For Volkova, Shostakovich's central message was that "we are all guilty". In the Seventh Symphony, she sees the seeds of the "invasion theme" in the "'peaceful' and 'cosy' themes of the exposition", pointing to "the 'internal' source of evil - native and familiar because it is in ourselves".

Shostakovich's attitude to Mravinsky

The most popular bone of contention concerning the details of *Testimony* is Shostakovich's attitude to Mravinsky. Nestyev gives this as an example of the sort of contentious material he believes the composer would have left out of the book: "Probably at a tea table in an intimate circle he said what he disliked about Mravinsky, but he would never have agreed to publish it."

Lebedinsky claims that Shostakovich thought Mravinsky's interpretations "not deep enough". Tishchenko disagrees with this, but Sabynina confirms that relations between the two artists got "colder" in later years. Yakubov maintains that their relationship had long been idealised and exaggerated - that there was no personal sympathy between them and that Shostakovich disliked Mravinsky's perfectionism.

Their break-up occurred (as Kondrashin claimed) over the Thirteenth Symphony. Mravinsky allegedly "forgot" the score while going on holiday and then pleaded that he didn't have time to learn it. "Dmitri Dmitryevich," says Yakubov, "didn't forgive it." Despite this, according to Yakubov, the estrangement later healed to some extent.

***Realpolitik* in the struggle over Shostakovich's identity**

Elements of an ongoing power struggle over Shostakovich's image are apparent in Yakubov's remarks about Lebedinsky and Zhitomirsky.

Much like Yuri Levitin (as reported, with accompanying rebukes, by Lev Mazel in *Sovetskaya Muzika*, 1991, No. 5), Yakubov attempts to discredit Lebedinsky and Zhitomirsky for their view of Shostakovich as "an internal dissident" by referring to youthful pieces by them in which they considered him an orthodox Soviet artist. The spuriousness of this argument is too flagrant to require comment.

Lebedinsky, in particular, comes in for criticism - probably because of the conflicting claims over the authorship of *Rayok*. (Yakubov confirms that the first part of the cantata was written in 1948 and not, as Lebedinsky maintained [*Tempo* No. 173, June 1990], in 1957.)

Much of Yakubov's commentary on *Testimony* is no more than nitpicking. The reason for this, apparently, is that the circle of younger writers around Irina and the Shostakovich archive see it as important to establish themselves as guardians of the truth about him. (Questions of copyright may also be involved.)

Thus, for this faction, the less equivocal view of the composer as an out-and-out dissident - expressed in *Testimony* and seconded by his older contemporaries - must be subtly undermined. (Volkov, obviously,

is the primary target.) It is unfortunate that this distorting element should have supplanted the similar distortions of Shostakovich's image during the Communist era.

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The Legend of the Eighth Quartet

Three decades of misrepresentation

It was once a standard component of the Shostakovich-as-Communist myth that his Eighth Quartet was a protest against war and (Nazi) fascism provoked by its composer's shock at seeing the ruins of Dresden in July 1960. While still peddled in sleeve-notes, this idea seems increasingly dubious. Writing in 1989 in *The New Shostakovich*, I suggested that the quartet was indeed a piece of protest music, but a protest instead against the Communist Party into which Shostakovich was then in the process of being forcibly enrolled.

This guess was confirmed by the composer's colleague Lev Lebedinsky in his letter to *Novy Mir* (1990, No. 3). The Eighth Quartet, writes Lebedinsky, was meant as a last testament, following which Shostakovich had intended to [kill himself](#) rather than face the shame of being misrepresented to the world as a Communist. Only the urgings of his friends dissuaded him from suicide.

Clearly, this new explanation of the Eighth Quartet makes better sense than the old one, accounting (as the latter did not) for the work's pointedly autobiographical content. As for its sub-title, this, too, conceals another meaning. For years before the slogans and placards against "fascism" (ie., Communism) appeared during the coup of August 1991, Soviet Communists had been called fascists by their dissident opponents. Following the "bodyguard of lies" method employed by him to protect the hidden agenda of several earlier works, Shostakovich seems to have invoked the standard post-war East European formula of a "Memorial to the Victims of Fascism" to cover himself against Soviet reprisals whilst indicating his true intentions to his fellow dissidents.

Possibly this idea occurred to him while he was in Dresden in July 1960, perhaps after visiting such a memorial. There is no need, however, to believe that the quartet was composed (as distinct from being merely written down) in those legendary three days. If the new explanation of the genesis of the work is correct, Shostakovich must have been thinking about it for some time - indeed, if his usual practice is anything to go by, he had almost certainly composed most of it in his head before arriving in Dresden.

If this is true, why did he choose that time and place in which to write it down? It is conceivable that this much of the old legend of the Eighth Quartet is authentic: that though the music itself had already been



composed, it was the sight of Dresden in ruins that galvanized Shostakovich into committing it to paper. On the other hand, there is the more prosaic possibility that staying at the ministerial guest-house at Gohrisch merely offered the composer a convenient break in which to do some writing and that the sight of Dresden played no part either in the conception of the music or in spurring it to be set down.

Evidence to support this alternative conclusion is provided by an article in *Sächsische Neueste Nachrichten* (13th August 1975) in which the journal's music critic Hermann Werner Finke asserts that Shostakovich first visited Dresden while in East Germany for the Bach Festival held at Leipzig during the week of 23rd-29th July 1950. During this stay in the city, according to Finke, Shostakovich amongst other things attended a concert by the Oborin-Oistrakh-Knushevitsky trio at Dresden's Great Hall and visited the Academy of Music and Theatre on Mendelsohn Avenue. As to how much of the city he saw, the itinerary sketched by Finke implies at least a day's activity - and since the round trip from Leipzig to Dresden is one hundred and fifty miles (suggesting that the composer must have stayed in Dresden overnight), the likelihood that Shostakovich's East German hosts could have spirited him in and out of the city without letting him see the state it was in (or, indeed, that they had some motive for doing so) seems small.

Having in all probability seen the full extent of the ruination of Dresden in 1950, it seems unlikely that Shostakovich would have found a similar experience in 1960 traumatic in itself, let alone the shocking stimulus to creation crucial to the old legend of the Eighth Quartet. What may actually have happened is that Dresden in 1960 reminded Shostakovich of Dresden in 1950 - and hence of himself in 1950, arguably the loneliest, most politically repressed period in his life. Since such an explanation accords convincingly with the quartet's autobiographical and anti-Communist nature, I would suggest that it is true.

In which case, can we persuade the broadcasting automatons who still retail the old "official" line on the Eighth Quartet to cease referring to the war in connection with this work and start talking about Shostakovich's life under Stalinist Terror? (And, in particular, to stop trotting out the *canard* that the three-note pounding in the fourth movement mimics gunfire or bombs falling - rather than the almost certain reality: that it represents a fist pounding on a door in the middle of the night.)

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Note

See the depositions of Lebedinsky and Isaak Glikman in Elizabeth Wilson's [*Shostakovich: A Life Remembered*](#), pp. 335-341.

On 7th September 1960, a week before the ratification of Shostakovich's candidate membership of the Communist Party, an article "by" him appeared in *Pravda* welcoming Suslov's redefinition of the theory of Socialist Realism and condemning 12-tone music as formalist. Couched in the usual faceless officialese, the piece included an interesting digression about the theatre director Konstantin Stanislavsky (1863-1938) who, in old age, displayed his customary unquenchable thirst for knowledge by teaching himself "the philosophy of dialectical materialism" and "the laws governing the development of society".

Like Gorky vis-à-vis prose and Mayakovsky vis-à-vis verse, Stanislavsky was chosen by Stalin during the Thirties to be a figurehead of Soviet orthodoxy in the theatre by whom all other theatrical practitioners might be judged (and, where necessary, condemned). In order to qualify for this role - what Mikhail Heller (*Cogs In The Soviet Wheel*, p. 96) calls a "mini-leader" - it was necessary that Stanislavsky be presented as definitively orthodox; hence the edifying fiction that he devoted his final years to studying Marxism-Leninism. Evidently this loaded reference was included in "Shostakovich's article" in order (1) to project him as an equivalent official "mini-leader" in music, and (2) to justify his peculiar sudden interest in the Communist Party after having had nothing to do with it during his previous 54 years - i.e., "Just like Stanislavsky!" (A similar official legend was created around the ageing Myaskovsky during the late Forties.)

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Kondrashin's Shostakovich cycle



Kyrill Kondrashin (left, with Shostakovich) was principal conductor of the Moscow Philharmonic Orchestra from 1960 to 1975. A friend of the composer for 40 years, he saw him as "the moral conscience of music in Russia" and made a close study of his symphonies, which he insisted were "inseparable from the events of the composer's life". (For Kondrashin's views on Shostakovich's symphonies, see the accompanying [statement](#).) Formerly available on Le Chant du Monde and now reissued on Melodiya, Kondrashin's cycle offers a vital insight into Shostakovich's world.

Symphonies Nos. 1 and 12 [*Melodiya 7432119848-2*] **(*)

Russian productions are often oddly balanced and the giant clarinet that leaps out at the listener at the beginning of Kondrashin's 1973 recording of the First is typical - although none of these discs suffers from the spotlighting inflicted on Rozhdestvensky's Olympia series. Fortunately, Kondrashin's fader-aided soloists are always characterful, his general line being, where necessary, to trade beauty of tone for dramatic expression. Within these parameters, his First is one of the best, the finest current alternative being Bernstein [*Sony SMK 47614*]. While some conductors try to impose sincerity on its ambiguous *Adagio*, no version of the Twelfth attempts much in the way of unusual interpretation. Kondrashin drives the fast music as furiously as Mravinsky on Praga [*PR 054217*]; it's a toss-up as to which is top of the list. (Ignore recommendations for Ogan Durjan's Philips version, which squares the rhythms and falls flat in the *Adagio*).

Symphonies Nos. 2 and 14 [*Melodiya 7432119844-2*] **

Kondrashin's remains the sharpest Second, with more impulse and closer detail than his rivals. Igor Blazhkov's 1965 premiere recording [*Russian Disc RDCD 11195*] moves as propulsively, but is comparatively prosaic. The securest Fourteenth is still Barshai's 1970 studio version, currently unavailable. Surpassing it in intensity, although roughly recorded and slightly blemished in accuracy, is the same conductor's superb live version with Vishnevskaya from 1969 [*Russian Disc RDCD 11192*]. Kondrashin comes in a fair third, his main attraction being the dramatic bass of Yevgeny Nesterenko.

Symphonies Nos. 3 and 5 [*Melodiya 7432119845-2*] *(*)

Kondrashin's Shostakovich is marked by rapid tempos and his Third Symphony drives the fast passages hard. Fortunately he is sensitive to the ominous mood of the slower music, and his recording is the best of a field which otherwise offers only Rostropovich [*Teldec 4509-90853-2*] as competition. Kondrashin's Fifth, though, is rather too impulsive, thwarting penetration and preventing atmosphere. In this symphony, Ancerl and the Czech Philharmonic [*Supraphon 1110676-2*] ideally combine clarity and passion, while Rozhdestvensky [*Olympia OCD 113*] is, theatrically, in a class of his own.

Symphony No. 4 [*Melodiya 7432119840-2*] ***

No need to hesitate. This première recording is a historic document - an untamed masterpiece resurrected after 26 years of suspended animation in a blazing performance unmatched since it was made in 1962.

Symphonies Nos. 6 and 10 [*Melodiya 7432119847-2*] *(*)

Kondrashin's Sixth is controversial. Stressing its anger and tension, his *Largo* is far from the gloomy icescape favoured by his slow-moving Western rivals. If Mravinsky is definitive here, Kondrashin beats him in the fast movements, revealing their irony by pushing them less frantically. Mravinsky's 1965 recording is deleted, though a fair facsimile, made in Czechoslovakia in 1955, is available [*Praga PR 254017*]. Kondrashin's live 1968 version with the Concertgebouw (*[Philips 438283-2]*, coupled with Nielsen's Fifth) intensifies the tempo traits of his studio date. Perhaps because of his anxiety to reproduce every nuance of the score (he is almost alone in stressing the squeezed *crescendos* in the scherzo), Kondrashin's deeply engaged Tenth lacks his usual spontaneity, though it's well worth studying. Mravinsky's 1954 mono version [*Saga EC3366-2*] is uniquely masterful, while Skrowaczewski [*IMP Classics PCD 2043*] leads the digital field.

Symphony No. 7 [*Melodiya 7432119839-2*] ***

For Kondrashin, Shostakovich's music was "essentially about the struggle against fascism - that eternal evil which, though it may change its name, seems indestructible, sustained by the impulses of brutality". By this, he meant not just Nazism but also Stalinism and similar political abominations. "One can no more ignore this background in the Seventh and Eighth symphonies," he insisted, "than one can overlook the programme of Tchaikovsky's Fourth." The last of his cycle to be recorded (in 1975), Kondrashin's Seventh is a sombre, introspective performance in which the pointedly *faux naïf* voice of the *yurodivy* features strongly - a real experience rather than a showpiece or pseudo-tragedy. The best CD Seventh is Karel Ancerl's 1959 studio version [*Supraphon 111952-2*] - though the disc's ambience lacks the immediacy of the original LPs. Kondrashin's is a thoughtful and illuminating second choice: the best Russian Seventh.

Symphony No. 8 [*Melodiya 7432119841-2*] ***

This is quintessentially one of Mravinsky's symphonies; of his three versions, only the 1982 one [*Philips 422442-2*] is currently available. From 1961, Kondrashin's studio recording of the Eighth was the first in his cycle and remains among the finest of the alternatives. An angry - and very fast - live performance, taped in Prague in 1969, is available on Praga [*PR 250040*].

Symphonies Nos. 9 and 15 [*Melodiya 7432119846-2*] *(*)

Kondrashin "owns" the Ninth almost as much as the Fourth and Thirteenth, each of which he premiered. His studio reading of 1965 is a classic, while his live version with the Concertgebouw - his conception virtually identical after 15 years - is only slightly less tight and incisive, for which a more rounded sound and an outstanding bassoonist readily compensate [*Philips 438284-2*]. These are the best Ninths on disc. (Avoid Istvan Kurtz's often-praised version which fatally distorts the second movement.) Probably charged by his father's presence, Maxim Shostakovich's 1972 première recording of the Fifteenth remains top choice and his finest 45 minutes. Sadly, it's deleted. Kondrashin doesn't match Maxim in the first *Adagio*'s climax and pushes the first *Allegretto* to the limit of articulation. The rest, while very

good, lacks his usual compelling quality, as if he hadn't completed his inner picture of what it meant.

Symphony No. 11 [*Melodiya 7432119843-2*] **(*)

Kondrashin believed the Eleventh and Twelfth were "associative as well as illustrative; that is, they throw out a bridge between historical events and the present". By "the present", he meant things happening around the time they were composed - in the case of the Eleventh, the Soviet repression of the Hungarian Revolution and the (ironically, simultaneous) release of millions of political prisoners from the Gulag. His Eleventh - very fast - comes third behind Mravinsky's great 1960 studio version (Melodiya, deleted) and the same conductor's live 1967 date in Prague [*Praga PR 254018*].

Symphony No. 13 [*Melodiya 7432119842-2*] ***

Like his Fourth, Kondrashin's 1967 version of Shostakovich's first openly dissident symphony remains unequalled, although his live 1962 recording [*Russian Disc RDCD 11191*] runs it close. His 1980 performance with John Shirley-Quirk (Philips, deleted) is of lower intensity but offers better sound.

*** = worth buying ** = worth trying * = completists only

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The Interior Shostakovich

Statement by Kyrill Kondrashin

*read at a symposium held
at Bucknell University, New York
9th September 1980*



Translated by Antonina W. Bouis

There are two types of symphonic music. In one type, programme music, the content lies "on the surface." In order to convey the content to the audience, the conductor must somehow add the music to a known plot. As a rule, the performer and the audience have less trouble orienting themselves in such music. Music written by the rules of "pure" symphonic composition is another matter. It is felt that such music cannot be "deciphered" verbally, and it elicits individual associations in each listener. Does that mean that in this case the interpreter must refuse to search for a biographical subtext and merely follow the metamorphoses of pure musical forms?

I am an adherent of connecting musical images with events from life. Not every work can be "decoded" in detail, of course, but I feel that a conductor can better sense the form and significance of a work if he feels, behind the movements of musical thought, emotions and feelings that can be put into words. Sometimes he even finds a programmed logic that is close to a plot. This also helps him to read more quickly the appropriate emotional state for the concert he is about to conduct.

Naturally, the performer can only speak for himself and cannot pretend to have a literal solution of the composer's intention. But without question, the richer the interpreter's creative intuition, the closer his reading will be to the thoughts and feelings of the composer; similarly, the stronger the interpreter's hypnotic suggestion, the closer the associations of the orchestra and audience will be to his vision - and thereby the emotional effect, born of the spiritual collaboration between performer and audience, will be more powerful.

The work of D. D. Shostakovich is inseparable from the events of his life. That is why, until now, it spoke more to the hearts of audiences in his homeland than outside it. But we may now speak of a renaissance of Shostakovich in the West, since the facts of his life have become known here as well and have forced people to look at his music with new

eyes.

I have had the opportunity to conduct all fifteen of Shostakovich's symphonies. Some of them can be called programme music. This includes, first of all, the works that incorporate a chorus or solo singers. In these, Shostakovich's music strives to convey the meaning of the poetry, even though it often conceals poetry that is not very good (or poorly translated) and says much more to the listener than the sung text. Two symphonies, the Eleventh and Twelfth, have titles given by the composer: "The 1905" and "The 1917." (The "Leningrad" subtitle of the Seventh was not the composer's.) Here, the music describes events well-known to the listener - yet even these symphonies are associative as well as illustrative; that is, they throw out a bridge between historical events and the present.

The majority of Shostakovich's symphonies do not have titles and at first glance appear to be plotless. Nevertheless, contemporaries associate each of his symphonies with a specific period in the life of the composer. And this allows the listener to transform the development of musical thought into emotions close to the human heart and into direct plot situations.

I had the good fortune to conduct the première of the Fourth and Thirteenth symphonies, *The Execution of Stepan Razin*, and the Second Violin Concerto (with David Oistrakh). I met Shostakovich many times and we spoke of music and various problems. He was seven years my senior - an enormous gap when you are young, and inconsequential when you are over fifty. I worked in Leningrad when Shostakovich lived there, and then in Moscow, where the composer moved after the war. The historical cataclysms that gave life to Shostakovich's music passed before my eyes as well, and they were part of my life, too.

Several of his symphonies elicited such vivid associations with our reality that I developed them to full programme detail. Dmitri Dmitryevich knew about my "decodings". He himself did not like to discuss the subtext of his music and usually said nothing, although he did not contradict me either. Since he was usually pleased with my performances, I believe he had no objection to such an approach to his music.

It was with the greatest agitation that I read Shostakovich's memoirs, prepared by Solomon Volkov. Much of what comes as a surprise to the Western reader was not a surprise for me. I knew many things and guessed many others; but there were new things in it even for me, things that made me look at some of his works differently.

This will probably lead to a re-evaluation of some of my interpretive concepts, since there is a definite connection between a performing interpretation of music and what we know about the composer's inner motives and reasons. A striking confirmation of this position is the music of the great symphonic composer of the twentieth century, Dmitri Dmitryevich Shostakovich.

Kyrill Kondrashin
1914 - 1981

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Kurt Sanderling

Looking back on Shostakovich: I

Born in at Arys in what was formerly East Prussia in 1912, Kurt Sanderling is, at 85, the oldest living conductor to have worked with Shostakovich.

Sanderling was principal conductor of the Berlin Symphony Orchestra between 1960 and 1977. Recently Berlin Classics has been reissuing digital remasterings of some Shostakovich symphony recordings he made with the BSO between 1977 and 1989, including the Eighth. Normally not disposed to answer questions about his interpretations, he allowed Hans Bitterlich (with him, above) to interview him in connection with the Berlin Classics series. Some of his answers appear below.



Sanderling began his Soviet conducting career in 1937, later becoming assistant to Mravinsky with the Leningrad Philharmonic in 1941, a post he held for the next nineteen years. In 1960 the Soviet authorities sent him to East Berlin to develop the Berlin Symphony Orchestra in competition with Karajan's Berlin Philharmonic. Sanderling has won a considerable reputation in the West since the fall of the Berlin Wall in 1989, and is still active with the Los Angeles Philharmonic Orchestra.

Ernest Fleischmann, former manager of the London Symphony Orchestra and now executive director of the LAPO, spoke about Sanderling to Norman Lebrecht in 1991:

"I think back to Pierre Monteux, who played viola in string quartets for Brahms, had firsthand relationships with Debussy and Stravinsky, conducted the first and 50th-anniversary performances of *The Rite of Spring*. He gave something very indefinable and absolutely lasting to the LSO - in the same way that Sanderling is giving to our orchestra. I see a parallel, and we are the richer for it."

Lebrecht reported as follows (*Classical Music*, 18th May 1991) on Sanderling's rehearsals with the Los Angeles Philharmonic of Shostakovich's Eighth Symphony:

"Restrained and energy-efficient on the concert podium, he becomes a different man in rehearsal, loquacious to the point of garrulousness, acting up like a Hollywood ham in a surging current of communication. When a flute and harp fail to grasp his intentions, he detains them at the end of the session, pacing wordlessly back and forth until the players

comprehend the weariness and boredom he is trying to make them convey.

"He is the only conductor I know who talks freely about the musical and non-musical aspects of Shostakovich - and the only one whom the orchestra will tolerate doing that,' says Ara Guzelimian, artistic administrator of the Los Angeles Philharmonic. 'Everything he talks about, he's been there, he's lived it,' confirms Michael Nutt, a British violinist. 'He'll say: this is the despair, this is the tyranny, this is the marching army, and you'll know he has got it from the source'.

"At one point, Sanderling tells the orchestra that the piccolo solo in the second movement of Shostakovich's Eighth Symphony represents a young army officer who has been given an unexpected weekend pass and goes whistling away down the road. A bassoon solo is a puffed-up party *apparatchik* swaggering off on his first trip abroad.

"There is reason to suspect that Sanderling came closer to the tormented composer than the lofty Mravinsky, who directed the prestigious symphonies but let his colleague take over subsequent performances. He refuses to discuss his relationship with Shostakovich or write about it, unwilling to exploit something that was precious and private.

"Only in the seclusion of his green room and the creative furnace of rehearsal hall will he recall personal and musical encounters, the acute memory of Shostakovich looking over both shoulders to see no one else was around before daring to utter a comment about his own work. He never spoke in the presence of more than one person.

"Sanderling is prepared to assert that everything Shostakovich related from his own experience in the disputed Solomon Volkov memoir is essentially accurate."

A Jew, Kurt Sanderling was educated in Germany between the wars, moving to Berlin in 1926, where he studied piano. At the age of 19, he began to perform at chamber recitals and worked as a répétiteur at the Berlin State Opera until Hitler came to power in 1933, whereupon he was dismissed as a "non-Aryan". In 1936, fearing for his life, Sanderling emigrated to the Soviet Union, arriving in the Soviet Union soon after the start of the ideological campaign against Shostakovich. To Hans Bitterlich, he recalled:

"As a newcomer, I failed to understand how dangerous it all was, believing that it could affect only his work as a musician. Shostakovich found himself ostracised overnight even though Stalin, in characteristic ambivalence, kept the composer supplied with lucrative commissions for film music to ensure his financial survival. The press was full of the most venomous invective at the time."

Sanderling, who was at the Moscow première of Shostakovich's Fifth Symphony on 29th January 1938,

considers the work to be "probably the first time that Shostakovich addressed himself to the dominant theme of his life: anti-Stalinism":

"The audience was very receptive to Shostakovich's message, and after the first movement we looked around rather nervously, wondering whether we might be arrested after the concert... The vast majority of the audience knew perfectly well what it was all about... It perfectly reflected the sentiments that were uppermost in our minds.

"The closing section of the symphony is the only part that may give rise to misunderstanding. It was wrongly interpreted in some quarters as describing the jubilant mood of a party congress. But as the observant listener will notice, the enforced enthusiasm of the masses is meant as a gesture of defiance and self-affirmation. Not as a victory for the regime, but as a victory against it."

Describing the second movement, Sanderling observes that "this is not a boisterous scherzo, but a grim and biting parody". As for the symphony's character as a whole, he sees it as "the music of a solitary figure who finds himself at the mercy of powers beyond his control." Shostakovich's Seventh, too, is, in Sanderling's opinion "far more ambiguous than its somewhat declamatory style would suggest." As with the Fifth, "it must, of course," he says, "be seen in the context of the time when it was written."

Evacuated from Moscow to Novosibirsk in 1943, Sanderling was present while the Leningrad Philharmonic rehearsed the Eighth Symphony. (This was where he first met the composer.) The symphony was prefaced, both in Novosibirsk and later in Moscow, with a speech by Shostakovich's close friend Ivan Sollertinsky. Sanderling recalls:

"He made no attempt to find an excuse for the work, but with incredible eloquence and sophistry gave it an interpretation that brought it into line with the political requirements of the day. Sollertinsky said the symphony reflected the horrors of war but offered the bright vision of a world of peace. This was, of course, sheer nonsense, as he was perfectly aware that the central theme was not the horrors of war, but the horrors of life, the life of an intellectual of his day.

"My interpretation of the third movement is that it depicts the crushing of the individual. The fourth movement is the most introspective of this symphony, and maybe of his entire symphonic output. It shows the author, the individual, in a state of solitary helplessness."

On 15th February 1995, Sanderling spoke in similar terms to Hans Bitterlich about Shostakovich's Fifteenth Symphony, composed nearly thirty years after the Eighth:

"I must point out the unbelievable misunderstanding to which this symphony was publicly

exposed through false information given by the composer. For most of his life Shostakovich suffered from the justified fear of being attacked on account of his music. In many of his works, in fact, his reserved attitude to the government in power - to put it mildly - can clearly be heard. Wherever this was particularly evident, he attempted in words - for music can of course be interpreted in many different ways - to give the true content of the work a different slant.

"Even at that time he could have expressed himself more freely but because of his trauma he spoke of 'childhood memories', even of a 'toy shop' in the first movement; this is in fact appropriate, but in a quite different, dreadful sense. In this 'shop' there are only soulless dead puppets hanging on their strings which do not come to life until the strings are pulled. This first movement is something quite dreadful for me: soullessness composed into music, the emotional emptiness in which people lived under the dictatorship of the time.

"From my experience as a conductor I can say that this symphony makes the greatest impression of all on audiences. They feel the monstrosity of its content, in particular the last movement which is a tearful, deeply moving farewell to life. At the end when the percussion starts twittering and chirping, I always think of the intensive-care ward in a hospital: the person is attached to various contraptions and the dials and screens indicate that heartbeat and brain activity are gradually expiring. Then comes a vast convulsion and it's all over. The listeners feel this too, or something like it, and are very shaken."

Asked about Shostakovich himself, Kurt Sanderling would say only this:

"It's not possible to describe a person in a few sentences and certainly not someone as contradictory as Shostakovich. Contradictory because, at the time, one had to lead two lives: one for the public eye, the other privately. Outside the Soviet Union, he was only too frequently judged by the way he had to behave and the sort of person he seemed to be in public, and the message he conveyed through his music wasn't understood."

Sanderling's Shostakovich lacks the attack of Mravinsky and Kondrashin, inclining to the more sombre and monumental approaches of Rostropovich with the Washington NSO (Teldec) and the composer's son Maxim in his series with the London Symphony Orchestra (Collins Classics). However, what Sanderling forfeits in impulse he gains in his care over the articulation of phrases and the dramatic characterisation of solos, in line with his specific views as outlined above. There is, also, a depth of feeling and sense of philosophical perspective to his performances which compensates for their occasional expansiveness. Slow as he sometimes is, there is rarely any feeling of deadness about the playing he conjures. Often, indeed, his seems the tempo *juste*.

Much like the readings of Rostropovich - in, for example, the Eleventh Symphony (Teldec 9031-76262-23) - Sanderling's versions will chiefly interest confirmed Shostakovich fans and, in particular, other conductors, who will learn much from their very detailed and meaningful attention to phrasing and timbre. They will appeal less to more general listeners and are, on the whole, not recommended as first-choice buys.

Erato has issued a recording of the **Fifteenth** Symphony made with the Cleveland Orchestra (2292-45815-2). Available (or soon to be) on Berlin Classics are the **Fifth** (0020632BC), the **Eighth** (0020642BC), the **Tenth** (0090182BC), the **Fifteenth** (0090432BC), and a coupling of the **First** and **Sixth** (0021812BC).

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Kurt Sanderling

Looking back on Shostakovich: II

This interview (recorded in Lyon, France, in October 1996) appears by permission of [DSCH](#).



When did you first come in contact with Shostakovich's music?

When I came to the Soviet Union, it was in the beginning of 1936, I met a conductor - Nikolai Anosov - and it was with him that I played a lot of pieces for four hands. And we played the First Symphony of Shostakovich on the piano. I was fascinated at once. We repeated this experience several times. Since then, my love and interest grew for Shostakovich's music.

Was he well known at that time in Germany?

No, he was pretty unknown in Germany apart from, to a limited extent, *Lady Macbeth*, thanks to the triumph of 1935. And in some places, his First Symphony had been played already. But certainly to my mind, he was somewhat of an unknown composer.

When did you first perform his music in public?

I was the second conductor to perform his Sixth Symphony. That was when I was chief conductor in Kharkov, in 1939, very shortly after the first performance. This was in the Ukraine. There was a Philharmonic, and I had been in charge for one or two years. I had heard this symphony under Mravinsky in Moscow. I was deeply impressed and I put it on in Kharkov at once.

And was it long before you met the composer?

This must have been in Siberia in the war. I remember he once came to Novosibirsk to visit the Leningrad Philharmonic and Mravinsky. He had a good friend there, the artistic director of the orchestra, Ivan Ivanovich Sollertinsky - I'd say his best friend. I met him there.

What was your first impression?

That's hard to say. What can I say? I knew I was going to meet a genius. But, you know, even geniuses have to eat, to drink, to go for walks and sleep!

The events surrounding Shostakovich's Seventh Symphony - its journey to the West, attempts by various conductors in the United States to be the first to perform it there - all this was of great significance not only to Shostakovich, but also to Russia and the rest of the allies. Do you think it's a symphony that is nowadays as easy to interpret in a modern context?

I wouldn't like to offer a verdict regarding this question. Personally I've always felt less close to this symphony - like some of the others, for that matter. I was always more impressed by the "poetic" Shostakovich than by the epic one. I have to say though, that I would include the Fifth Symphony as being in the former category. No, I was never so impressed by the Seventh or Eleventh symphonies. So it's difficult for me to answer this question. As to the question of its survival, time will tell. I think the middle movements, the second and third, are very good.

You have recorded some of the symphonies - numbers 1, 5, 6, 7, 8, 10, 15 - but not others. Why not numbers 13 or 14, for example?

Simply because I had a conducting son [Thomas Sanderling] who lived in Germany. He was the first conductor of these symphonies in Germany and I didn't want to disturb him!

What's your opinion about the so-called "double meanings" of some of the symphonies? For example the Fifth, we understand now, had a double meaning which the Russian people were likely to understand straight away. And as for the superficially straightforwardly programmatic Eleventh, Shostakovich wrote in his memoirs that the people could hear exactly what the music was really about. As an interpreter, how do you come to terms with the fact that there are these varying levels, with ways of "reading between the lines"?

I think that for us contemporaries who knew and worked with Shostakovich, it has never been difficult to interpret his works, along with their double meanings. For us, it was all very clear. Shostakovich would have loved to be the "Soviet Mussorgsky". And so he has shown himself as a teller of history in, for example, the Eleventh and Twelfth symphonies. Also, in the Fifth Symphony, with the so called "triumph" at the end - we understood what he was saying. And it was not the "triumph" of the mighty, those in power. There was no need for further explanation.

You worked with Shostakovich in rehearsals. Did he offer much in the way of advice, as regards interpretation? Or were his remarks principally technical?

He was present at several rehearsals of the Fifth Symphony - and the Tenth, also. Most of the time, he limited himself to "acoustic advice". He asked that one could hear this or that a little bit more - but, as a matter of fact, in public as well as in private, he spoke rather seldom about the content of his works. In his opinion, although he may have written the music, it was not his role to give a verbal interpretation.

But, I remember one of the first performances of mine of the Fifth Symphony in Moscow - he was there with Khachaturian. And I played the beginning of the finale a little bit more quickly, more aggressively

than most of the other conductors of the time - as, in fact, Shostakovich actually asks for himself. And after the rehearsal, the two of them came to the conductor's room. Khachaturian had very friendly words in general, but he asked me: "Isn't the beginning [of the finale] a little bit too fast?" But Shostakovich interrupted him: "No, no, let him play it like that." So, you see that he was open to various different interpretations of his works. He was not stuck with one tempo or one style.

You knew that when he came around after the concert saying: "Wonderful, great!" and so on, you could be sure he didn't really like it. But when he came and he said: "Good, but at this point I would have liked it to sound like this and at that point like that" - then you could be sure that he was really interested and he had enjoyed the performance.

You obviously knew Mravinsky very well. What did he bring to Shostakovich's music? What was the nature of their relationship?

Yes, I knew him very well... Well, first of all, one has to say that he had the deepest understanding of the meaning and of the sense of Shostakovich's music. To him, there was no doubt. At the end of his life, he played the symphonies he himself had premiered quite differently. Not in terms of content, but of form. Therefore the tempi, for example, that Shostakovich and Mravinsky gave for the premiere of the works, are no longer necessarily valid today. They have become sometimes a matter of heated discussion. Sometimes they are still "right" for us, but often we play them differently now. Look at my case: I played the symphonies - with the exception of the Sixth - about ten or twelve years after Mravinsky. And did them in a completely different way. That's quite normal. There is no incompatibility. Perhaps I'd have played it like that myself if I had conducted the premiere and if I had been influenced by what Shostakovich had already played on the piano to me. In general, I'd say, each work needs the sound of the orchestra to find its balance. I don't mean acoustic balance, I mean agogic balance. That's the case for Brahms, for Beethoven, surely for Tchaikovsky and also for Shostakovich.

You obviously were aware that from 1962 Shostakovich and Mravinsky had a relationship that one could consider became "cool" following the events surrounding the premiere of the Thirteenth Symphony. Did they nevertheless maintain contact during the 1960s and 1970s? How did you see them together? Had the relationship changed?

That's a difficult question. The relationship between Shostakovich and Mravinsky is a very difficult subject. There is no doubt that Mravinsky always worshipped Shostakovich. As for Shostakovich, he appreciated Mravinsky more as a marvellous interpreter of his symphonies than a personal friend. I think that in the case of the Thirteenth Symphony, Shostakovich was wrong by arguing that Mravinsky feared the political consequences of the premiere. I don't think so. I rather believe something else: Mravinsky was, in fact, a man of fear. I would argue that he was afraid for the choir and the soloist and the possible problems that might have arisen by their playing this work. This was, in my opinion, a supplementary factor that made his decision not to play the work. I don't think - and I knew him very well - that he was afraid himself of political consequences.

As for the conflict surrounding the Second Cello Concerto, at that time the Leningrad orchestra was just about to perform abroad - and this meant that, for two or three weeks, there were rehearsals only of these works which were due to be played during the concerts abroad. Mravinsky was not willing, at this time - indeed he was not capable - of thinking about several works at a time. And so, for Mravinsky, the question would have been: to go on tour with the Leningrad orchestra or not to perform the work at that special moment. In my opinion, when Shostakovich had finished a new work, everything else had to follow. But, that was a difficult, personal decision - and I don't blame Mravinsky for it.

You also knew Kondrashin very well. How do you see his relationship with Shostakovich? Did he approach the music in a very different way?

I don't know the degree of the personal relationship between them. This was after I had already left the Soviet Union. What I can say, is that I attended a deeply moving concert of Shostakovich's Eighth Symphony in Amsterdam by Kondrashin. It was moving and really exciting. And after the performance, I went to see Kondrashin and we hugged and started to cry, both of us. I learned just a few days later that Kondrashin decided himself not to go back to the Soviet Union. Hence the exceptionally emotional performance of the work. Apart from that, I had the occasion to be at a performance of Shostakovich's Sixth Symphony played by Kondrashin and his orchestra. I didn't enjoy that as much, it didn't really convince me. But you have to remember the best, and [referring to the Eighth Symphony] in this case, it was extraordinarily beautiful.

If Shostakovich had left the Soviet Union by, let's say, 1945, would his music have sounded the same? Would it have been the same music?

No, it wouldn't have been the same music. He and his music were conditioned by the world he was living in. By the way, he would never have left Russia - as Mravinsky would not. People seem not to understand. There is always a tendency to consider Russia and the Soviet Union as being the same thing. But that's nonsense. A "true" form of Russian mankind and Russian culture existed which were themselves dominated during a long period of time by a Russian dictatorship. Mravinsky and Shostakovich were "true" Russians - though their family origins were Polish.

Which of Shostakovich's symphonies is the most important to you? Which have you enjoyed performing the most?

Today the Sixth and Eighth are the closest to me. And I like to play the Fifth, too, because it has become a kind of autobiography to me. I have experienced all that myself. I arrived in the Soviet Union in 1936, I didn't understand anything of what was going on politically and I had a lot of difficulty understanding the language, as well. The Fifth Symphony was the first contemporary work with which I was confronted, and I got the impression: yes - that's exactly it, that's our life here. And so I have a special affinity with this symphony. In terms purely of music, I prefer the Sixth and Eighth - the Fifteenth also.

I think I am the conductor who has played the Fifteenth Symphony most times ever - it must be about

eighty times all around the world. And I have recorded it twice. That's a work which is very close to me, despite the fact, by the way, that I wasn't particularly close to Shostakovich at that time he wrote the work. I had already been living for some time in East Germany. But we kept in touch, and he paid me several visits there. I was probably the only person there he could speak to; he could be sure of being understood. I think there is no other work of his as radically horrible and cruel as the Fifteenth Symphony. It's a horrific work about loneliness and death.

The Fifteenth Symphony remains for most people strange and ambiguous, with the quotations from outside of Shostakovich's own world. Did he talk to you about the "messages" of the Fifteenth Symphony?

No, he never talked about his works - the meaning of his works. Not to Mravinsky, not to Kondrashin, and not to me, And even in the case of his friend Glikman to whom he wrote the famous letters - and who I knew very well - you can see that even to him he didn't mention anything about the meaning of the symphony.

Perhaps Maxim...

No, he'd know less than the others. To him, he said the least, for a very simple reason. You see, the education of children under a dictatorship is a very complicated affair. On the one hand, you have to teach them to be critical of what is happening, politically-speaking, and on the other hand you have to make them understand that one has to be careful when discussing such matters. And I think that he told him a lot less than he told, for example, his friends, because quite simply he didn't want to put him in any danger.

What are your thoughts on the book *Testimony*?

I have no doubt that it's true. Shostakovich himself told me a significant number of things that appear in the book. If I had any doubts, they would be with reference not to the events he lived out himself, but rather to stories told to him by others. It might be that, in these cases, there were things he wanted to believe. For example: he tells, in a very explicit way, that his private enemy, Khrennikov, pissed in his pants from fear during an audience with Stalin. I can well imagine that someone else told him this story and - even if it was not true - he found it so wonderful he wanted to believe it.

In 1949 you gave the first performance of a Shostakovich work following the terrible events of 1948 - the Zhdanov decree and so on. Was the concert your idea? Was it your will that finally reopened the door of Shostakovich's repertoire to the public?

I have to give the credit to the right person. I can't say it was on my initiative that it happened. But it was decided, somewhere among the upper levels of the government, that it was time to play Shostakovich again. And so it happened with the Fifth Symphony, which seemingly had the appropriate "apologetic character" required. The question became: where should it be played and by whom? They didn't want a

great maestro to perform it - in Leningrad, Mravinsky; in Moscow, Ivanov; and Rakhlin in the third important city, Kiev. So they had this idea: well, there is this co-conductor in Leningrad, who is rather well liked by Shostakovich, let's have him do it. This was for me, of course a great honour, I was moved, and thanked fate that I had been chosen to perform this "first performance". So, I can't say it all happened because of my initiative. By the way, Shostakovich didn't attend this concert himself. He stayed away despite the fact that he was in Moscow at that moment. Instead, he listened to it on the radio.

What was the atmosphere like in the hall?

Unbelievable, and after the concert there was a kind of demonstration. The public had understood - and was deeply moved. I must say, it was primarily Shostakovich fans who attended the performance; people who had wanted to be present when Shostakovich was played again officially. It was an unbelievable atmosphere. Kondrashin had a similar experience when he conducted the premiere of the Thirteenth Symphony in Moscow. He told me, too, about this very special atmosphere.

This interview first appeared in *DSCCH* Journal No. 6 (Winter 1996).

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Below: Yevgeny Zamyatin



Shostakovich, Zamyatin, Goldstein, and *The Bolt*

A hoax unmasked

In 1987 a paper by the expatriate Russian musicologist Mikhail Goldstein about a hitherto unsuspected relationship between Shostakovich and the anti-communist writer Yevgeny Zamyatin appeared among a dozen delivered to a conference^[1] held by the Slavic Languages Department of the University of Lausanne. Summarising this paper in *DSCH XXI*, I noted that several of Goldstein's controversial claims - contradicting the account given in *Testimony* - were factually suspect. One such - that the writer Yevgeny Zamyatin influenced Shostakovich in the conception of his ill-fated ballet *The Bolt* - can now be shown to be false.

New material on Zamyatin continues to be published and among documents recently made available in English by Gary Kern^[2] is testimony which directly contradicts Goldstein's assertions on this point. In a review of new Russian theatre written just after going into exile in December 1931, Zamyatin includes, in an attack on various works supposedly displaying the 'publicistic... treatment of industrialisation, the collective farms, and so on', the following remarks about *The Bolt*:

'On the stage, of course, we were shown a factory, there was a dance of the workmen at the furnaces, a dance of the "vrediteli" [wreckers], a dance of the "kulaks", and a sort of dance "apotheosis" - dances of different parts of the Red Army, including Red Cavalrymen who galloped wildly... while sitting on chairs. The result was by no means an apotheosis (since) the first night of the ballet happened to be its last.'^[3]

There is no question of Zamyatin's comments being taken out of context; he meant them and he meant them critically. Thus, either he had fallen out with Shostakovich (whose name he conspicuously fails to mention), or Goldstein's allegations concerning the writer's guiding role in the creation of *The Bolt* are false.

Solomon Volkov's very different version of their relationship is clearly more credible in this light. By the same token, Goldstein's account is seriously compromised. It is, for example, hard to imagine how Zamyatin and Shostakovich could have sustained a long correspondence after what would necessarily have been a serious break in their relationship during summer 1931. Unless these letters are to be found somewhere - and, if not, how did Goldstein know about them? - the only possible conclusion is that no

such break occurred because no such close relationship existed.

Is Goldstein's essay, then, a hoax? Apart from the reservations noted in *DSCCH XXI*, there are other reasons to suspect that this is so. For example, Goldstein's claim that Shostakovich had read 'several' of Zamyatin's books by the time of their alleged first meeting in 1924 is unsupported by the Glivenko letters, the evidence of which suggests that the composer's interest in contemporary literature dates at the earliest from 1925.

Similarly, Goldstein's allegation that Shostakovich was naively assertive in defending one of the country's most notorious individualists at the very height of the Cultural Revolution is both an anachronism and in itself essentially implausible. Had he really known Shostakovich in 1931, he would have been aware that such a claim was extremely unlikely to be true.

Was it possible for Goldstein to have faked these 'recollections'? Very easily. Most of the statements he attributes to Zamyatin are to be found, often verbatim, in the author's novel *We* or in his essays of the 1920s. As for the 'details' of Zamyatin's alleged role as *éminence grise* to Shostakovich between 1926 and 1931, for 'Zamyatin' read 'Sollertinsky'.

Why, though, would Goldstein have faked such a close relationship between Shostakovich and Zamyatin? Politically, an obvious motive would have been to present the composer as having been in close creative contact with a declared anti-Communist throughout the only period of his life in which his political affiliations are otherwise highly debatable.

Another motive would have been pure mischief. Solomon Volkov (letter to the present writer) describes Goldstein as a 'good-natured hoaxer' well-known as such in Russian musical circles: 'Once he invented a nonexistent composer, complete with forged symphony, etc.' As for Goldstein's memoirs, published in Russian in Germany in 1970, there is 'nothing of substance about Shostakovich and certainly not about Zamyatin'.

Naturally Volkov has to be considered an interested party in this case since it is chiefly his version of Shostakovich's relationship with Zamyatin which Goldstein's challenges. Yet more than enough independent evidence now exists to support Volkov's claim - indeed I personally have no doubt whatever that he is right and that Goldstein's piece is a hoax.

As for how much Shostakovich knew about Zamyatin's ideas during their collaboration on *The Nose*, we may safely assume that he was aware of the existence of *We* and of its contents - and that he was therefore 'collaborating' with a man both the Party and the Proletkult regarded as a 'betrayers of the revolution'.^[4] (This renders Goldstein's report of Zamyatin's remarks about the Second Symphony at

least provisionally plausible.[\[5\]](#))

Whether or not Shostakovich was one of those who read *We* in manuscript, we shall have to wait and see. (That he and Zamyatin had specific political interests in common is suggested by recent evidence that much of the novel's satirical detail derives from its author's study of the early Proletkult, in particular the writings of Alexei Gastev and Alexander Bogdanov.[\[6\]](#))

Shostakovich's contemporary approval of Ilya Ehrenburg[\[7\]](#) likewise indicates that he was probably well disposed to Zamyatin's critical views of Soviet society since Ehrenburg's novels of the period were comparably disenchanting. (As a friend and colleague of Zamyatin, Ehrenburg himself considered *We* to be 'magnificent'. His own *The Grabber*, a satire on NEP which includes deprecating remarks about Soviet institutions, was, together with Zamyatin's *We* and Pilnyak's *Mahogany*, banned at the beginning of the Cultural Revolution in 1929.)

Despite Goldstein's spoofing, then, the closeness of the young Shostakovich's thoughts to those of anti-Communists like Zamyatin and Ehrenburg is difficult to gainsay. How consistent he was in entertaining such views is, of course, another matter.

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Notes to "Shostakovich, Zamyatin, Goldstein, and 'The Bolt'"

It is suggested that the reader opens these notes as a New Window.

[1] Leonid Helier (ed), *Autour de Zamiatine*, L'Age d'Homme, 1989.

[2] *Zamyatin's 'We': a Collection of Critical Essays*, p. 286.

[3] *The Bolt* ran for one night at the Kirov (Maryinisky) Theatre on 8th April 1931.

[4] Zamyatin satirised Lenin in his anti-Bolshevik 'fables' written for the Left SR newspaper *The People's Concern* during 1918.

[5] According to Goldstein, Zamyatin reproached Shostakovich "violently" for acceding to the commission for the Second Symphony, voicing his utter disgust over Alexander Bezymensky's verses and calling the composer's setting "musical horseshit". Goldstein claims further that Shostakovich personally told him he and Zamyatin often discussed "the music of the future". "It was," Shostakovich allegedly recalled, "hard to distract Zamyatin from his futurological tendencies. According to him, the music of the future would be strictly regulated, crystal-pure, harmonically orthodox. As such, it would be the foundation of Marxist sanctity and servility. Minor keys, alien to the ideals of this ideal society, would disappear. They'd be regarded as class enemies. Major keys! Nothing but major keys! Music, even wordless music, would be strictly subordinate to the word. Every new symphony would arrive chaperoned by citations from Marx or Engels. Naturally we'd need a new generation of musical robots to fulfil these requirements to the letter." According to Goldstein's Shostakovich, Zamyatin enjoyed mocking the Proletkult view of music, ascendant in the USSR between 1929 and early 1932: "He liked to send up the socio-ideological sort of review we used to get in magazines like *Music and Revolution* and *Music and October* which were always full of profound articles expounding the role of Marxist doctrine in musicology."

[6] See Kathleen Lewis and Harry Weber, 'Zamyatin's *We*, the Proletarian Poets, and Bogdanov's *Red Star*', in Kern (ibid).

[7] Letter to Tanya Glivenko, 12th November 1925.

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Heroine or villainess?

Some suggestions about the character of Katerina Ismailova



Michael Tanner's review (published in Issue 45 of *Classic CD*) of the Deutsche Grammophon recording of Shostakovich's *Lady Macbeth* raises some interesting questions about the opera's meaning - issues amplified in David Fanning's thoughtful sleeve note to the same recording. However the controversy surrounding the opera is arguably somewhat exaggerated.

As a murderess, Katerina naturally arouses a complex response - yet, as Dr Tanner points out, such ambiguous characters are a fixture of 19th century Russian literature (Dostoyevsky, *passim*), as well as of post-war existentialist writing and much modern cinema. As Nicholas Till (*Mozart and the Enlightenment*) observes, even the morally didactic 18th century understood the role of protagonists like Katerina:

"For the rebels without cause of Sturm und Drang the problem was how the individual could maintain his personal integrity in a society that exerted all its powers to dispossess him of it. In many Sturm und Drang works an apparently criminal deed is seen as evidence of the possession of sincere emotion - the sign of a potentially great soul."

Shostakovich's avowed wish to present Katerina as "a positive personality" is partly accountable in terms of this tradition of alienated anti-heroes. Yet it is also clear that he identified passionately with her and did all he could to justify her, including caricaturing almost every other character in the opera. Why?

The answer lies in the context of the opera's creation (1930-32). Though David Fanning calls this period "one of the happiest of (Shostakovich's) life", he is contradicted by both *Testimony* and Lukyanova's biography. Moreover these sources are congruent with our knowledge of the Russian Cultural Revolution (1929-32), a chaotic interlude in which non-Party artists were, as part of a general drive against the bourgeois intelligentsia, violently persecuted. (See Chapter 2 of *The New Shostakovich*.) Surrounded as Katerina is by vicious, soul-destroying mediocrities similar to those who beset him during the opera's genesis, Shostakovich's identification with his beleaguered heroine isn't hard to understand. Clearly he needed to let off some avenging steam; hence anyone who is no friend of hers - meaning everyone else in the opera - gets short shrift. (For [several good reasons](#), the suggestion that he was here aiding Stalin's campaign against the peasants is risible.)

All of this, though, is of secondary importance to the composer's overriding wish to depict sexual love in a society which regarded it as anti-social. The sheer intensity of Katerina's passion, which must have struck a chord for the young Shostakovich during his fraught courtship of Nina Varzar, was unavoidably

subversive - and it was this troublesome "individualism" which Stalin wanted to extinguish in 1936. (The idea that the dictator was puritanically shocked by the opera's sex scene is difficult to reconcile with a man who, during 1927, visited the Vakhtangov Theatre no less than eight times to inspect the half-naked prostitutes on display in Bulgakov's "pornographic" bordello drama *Zoya's Apartment*.)

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Reasons being...

Like Solomon Volkov and Galina Vishnevskaya, I see *Lady Macbeth* as the artistic foundation of Shostakovich's moral individualism - a view which not only does the work no interpretive violence, but explains why he quotes from it at a key moment in his controversial Eighth Quartet. To claim - as does Richard Taruskin ("The Opera and the Dictator: the peculiar martyrdom of Dmitri Shostakovich", *The New Republic*, March 20th 1989, pp. 34-40) - that the opera was intended as an endorsement of Stalin's genocidal campaign against the kulaks in 1930, not only makes nonsense of the wider context of Shostakovich's life in the early Thirties, but raises the seemingly unanswerable question of why he should quote an alleged apologia for genocide in a quartet dedicated to "the victims of fascism".

For those who have not read Taruskin's article, he argues in it that the opera is "a profoundly inhumane work of art" in which its composer ("the Soviet Union's most loyal musical son") by various means "dehumanizes" his heroine's persecutors and victims so as to "perpetrate (the) colossal moral inversion" of legitimising her murders. *Lady Macbeth*, asserts Taruskin, is a politically-motivated travesty which presents all of its cast except Katerina as "class enemies" to be despised and destroyed. "Its chilling treatment of the victims," he concludes, "amounts to a justification of genocide."

Which is more likely? That Shostakovich in 1930-1 favoured the wholesale slaughter of Russian and Ukrainian countryfolk - or that, on the contrary, he felt that individuality itself was then under attack from Stalin's callous policies (themselves extensions of the equally callous policies of Lenin during 1917-22)?

Non-Party satirists like Bulgakov, Zamyatin, Olesha, and Zoshchenko were, long before 1930, convinced that Marxist collectivism was a disaster. Shostakovich knew these writers personally, collaborating with one (Zamyatin: on the opera *The Nose*) and exploring a major project with another (Bulgakov: an opera on his play about Pushkin, *Last Days*). There is nothing to suggest that the composer - like, say, Mayakovsky - opposed the non-Party "individualists"; on the contrary, the evidence is that he sympathized with them - which is presumably why he read their books, watched their plays, and socialised with them. In addition, his letters to his girlfriend of the Twenties, Tanya Glivenko, reveal that his favourite novel - a choice which endured throughout his life - was Dostoyevsky's *The Devils*, a satirical attack on revolutionary radicalism so outspoken that the Communist authorities banned it for sixty years.

That a man of such friends and opinions should, during the rabidly collectivistic Cultural Revolution of 1929-32, choose to turn Leskov's apolitical melodrama into a hymn to the expropriation of six million peasants is absurdly unlikely. Even supposing it was true, it

would raise further insoluble problems. Why, for example, should Shostakovich have concealed (as he did) the composition of this supposed apologia from the very powers it was presumably designed to please? And why make its alleged conformism so hard to spot that Stalin banned it?

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Below: Sergei Mikhalkov



A SOVIET PROPAGANDA PLAY

About Shostakovich's downfall in 1948

During a visit to Moscow in 1950, the French reporter Michel Gordey saw a performance of a play by Sergei Mikhalkov which had been awarded the Stalin Prize for drama in 1949. Entitled *Ilya Golovin*, it recounted ("with hardly any dramatisation", claims Gordey in his memoir *Visa to Moscow*), the story of Shostakovich's downfall as a result of the Composers' Union Congress of January 1948.

In the play, which, Gordey recalls, was well attended and enthusiastically received, the Shostakovich figure Golovin (a name suggesting the Russian words for "cerebral" and "villain") is first discovered at his luxurious *dacha* outside Moscow, enjoying a life of indulgent ease. The composer's wife adores smart gowns, treats her maid harshly, and complains that their Moscow apartment "has only four rooms" - a disclosure which, notes Gordey, raised indignant murmurs in the auditorium. (I.e., everyone in the audience was living in one or two rooms at the most.)

A critic flatters Golovin, pointedly quoting eulogies of his work published in America. Enter a servant with the day's copy of *Pravda* which, to his consternation, Golovin discovers contains an attack on his "incomprehensible and formalist" music and accuses him of "cosmopolitanism" (an anti-Semitic insinuation current at the time). As the critic hastily exits, Golovin's daughter, a "very earnest" Communist, informs her father that *Pravda* is right about him.

In Act II, Golovin, too cowardly to face his critics, hides miserably in his *dacha*, deserted by his friends and wife (who has fled to a Crimean spa). Since his works are no longer played on Moscow Radio, he tunes to the Voice of America which obligingly praises the "great composer who is being persecuted in the USSR" and plays a record of one of his latest symphonies (cue discordant orchestral noises off).

A friend appears: his patron, a Red Army general, who urges him to write music for the masses the way he used to. The general has even brought some singing soldiers with him who perform a melodious piece Golovin wrote in earlier, happier days. Listening with tears in his eyes, the composer sees the light and immediately sets to work on a tuneful piano concerto. (An excerpt from this, played over the loudspeakers, drew applause from the theatre-goers.)

In Act III, Golovin, a wiser and more modest man, returns from a congress for "fighters for peace" in Paris. After another melodious new piece by him is played, he tells his wife how moved he was to

witness in Paris an enormous demonstration in which "five hundred thousand men, women, and children cheered Stalin". Golovin then delivers a prolonged "harangue" in praise of Stalin and the play ends, drawing "frantic" applause.

Gordey, who had never witnessed anything like this before, was shocked both by the childishness of the play and the apparently wholehearted approval with which its audience greeted it (despite the fact that, as he notes, Shostakovich's music had recently been "exceedingly popular" in Russia). He was similarly amazed at the elevation of *Pravda* to the status of holy writ and, as a Frenchman, particularly struck by the play's peroration of ritual obeisance to Stalin which reminded him of the encomium to Louis XIV at the end of Molière's *Tartuffe* ("and also of La Fontaine's fables, with their compulsory 'morals'").

The most curious of Gordey's observations, however, is that the incidental music for the play, both discordant and melodious, was specially composed by [Khachaturian](#). However, it will be seen that, despite Gordey's assumption, Ilya Golovin does not represent Shostakovich alone, being actually a composite of Shostakovich and Prokofiev. (As for the play's author, Sergei Mikhalkov, his reward was being made First Secretary of the RFSFR Writers' Union, a post which, Khrennikov-style, he thereafter held for over forty years.)

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ARAM ILYICH KHACHATURIAN

Chronology

1903	Born 24 May/6 June at Kidzgori, near Tbilisi
1925	Poem for piano
1926	Lullaby for violin and piano
	Dance for violin and piano
1927	Ballade for violin and piano
	Poem for piano
	Pantomime for oboe and piano
1929	Graduates from Gnesin Music School
	Song-Poem for violin and piano
	Allegretto for violin and piano
	First Field March for wind orchestra
1930	Second Field March for wind orchestra
1931	String Quartet
1932	Toccata for piano
	Uzbek March and Dancing Song for wind band
	Armenian Folksong and Dance for wind band
	Suite for piano
	Violin Sonata
	Clarinet Trio
1933	Third Dance for piano
	Dance Suite for orchestra

	<i>Macbeth</i> , incidental music
1934	Graduates from Moscow Conservatory (teachers: Glier, Gnesin, Myaskovsky)
	First Symphony
1936	Piano Concerto
1937	<i>The Big Day</i> , incidental music
	Song of Stalin , for orchestra and chorus
1938	Poem about Stalin for orchestra and chorus (rev. Song of Stalin , 1937)
	Film: <i>Zangezur</i>
1939	Ballet: <i>Happiness</i>
1940	<i>The Valencian Widow</i> , incidental music
	Violin Concerto
1941	<i>Masquerade</i> , incidental music
1941-2	Ballet: <i>Gayane</i>
1942	<i>The Kremlin Chimes</i> , incidental music
	" To the Heroes of the Patriotic War ", march for wind band
1943	Second Symphony , "(The) Bell" (rev. 1960)
1944	Russian Fantasy for orchestra
	Armenian State Anthem for chorus and orchestra
	3 Pieces for two pianos
1945-47	Scenes from Childhood for piano
1946	Cello Concerto
	3 Concert Arias for high voice and orchestra
	The Adventures of Ivan for piano

1947	Third Symphony, "Symphony-Poem"
	<i>A Tale of Truth</i> , incidental music
1948	Ode in Memory of Vladimir Ilyich Lenin for orchestra
1949	Documentary Film: <i>Vladimir Ilyich Lenin</i>
	<i>Ilya Golovin</i> , incidental music
	Film: <i>The Battle of Stalingrad</i>
1950	Triumphal Poem for orchestra
	Film: <i>Secret Mission</i>
1953	Film: <i>Admiral Ushakov</i>
1954	Ballet: <i>Spartacus</i>
1956	Film: <i>Othello</i>
	Ode To Joy , cantata for mezzo-soprano, mixed chorus, violins, harps, and orchestra
1957	rev. <i>Gayane</i> (1943)
1958	Greeting Overture for orchestra
	<i>King Lear</i> , incidental music
	Sonatina for piano
1959	Suite from <i>Lermontov</i> for orchestra
1961	Piano Sonata
	Concerto-Rhapsody for violin and orchestra
	Ballad of the Motherland for bass and orchestra
1963	Concerto-Rhapsody for cello and orchestra
1964-5	10 Children's Pieces for piano
1966	Recitatives and Fugues for piano

1973	March of the Soviet Police in E flat major
1974	Sonata-Fantasy for solo cello
1975	Triumphal Fanfares for trumpets and drums
	Sonata-Monologue for solo violin
1976	Sonata-Song for solo viola
1978	Vocalise for piano
	Dies 5 January in Moscow

[NB This list omits some stage, cinema, songs, instrumental works]

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Below: Mikhail Bulgakov in 1926



SHOSTAKOVICH and BULGAKOV

'20s satire - literary and musical

In his memoir *Taming of the Arts*, the *emigré* violinist Yuri Yelagin records that, at the height of Stalin's Terror, an NKVD officer called Shatilov was appointed head of the Central Music Department in Moscow. So eager to please his superiors was this secret policeman that, during the 1937 National Piano Competition, he decided no 'undesirable elements' ought to be allowed to win any prizes and began arresting and interrogating the finalists.

Of course, thousands of similar arrests and interrogations were then proceeding daily in the USSR, but the conscientious Shatilov hadn't quite grasped the point: these happened out of sight of the foreign press. Hauling concert pianists off to be beaten with rubber hoses was clearly permissible in principle, but not during the National Piano Competition. Shatilov, recalls Yelagin, was accordingly arrested and 'as usual' charged with Trotskyite sabotage. The competition, meanwhile, went smoothly ahead.

This story illustrates several things vital to an understanding of Shostakovich's music, among the more obvious being the routine horrors of Stalinism and its equally routine success in concealing these from

the West. The most significant thing about Yelagin's tale, though, is that it is, in its ghastly way, funny. Typical of the Russian political anecdote, its gallows humour is a touchstone for the country's long-standing satirical tradition and stories like it have formed the basis of subversive 'flights of fancy' from Gogol to Voynovich.

An important point is secreted here for whereas in the West the arts are kept apart, only rarely being allowed to shed light upon each other, no such artificial barriers apply in Russia. It is consequently exceedingly difficult for anyone lacking some acquaintance with the tone and techniques of Russian literary satire to penetrate the music which Shostakovich, a lifelong connoisseur of the genre, produced under its influence. More crucially, unfamiliarity with such writing - and in particular the droll, stone-faced state of mind behind it - is bound to restrict one's perceptions of what, in Shostakovich's music, is exactly as it seems to be and what is actually ironic. Those who, relying solely on the label on the packet, assume that the composer's satire is always openly declared and dependably above board are almost certainly failing to hear the lion's share of what he was saying.

To know something of Shostakovich's relationship with the great satirist Mikhail Bulgakov serves two purposes. First, it provides clues to the state of mind - referred to by Solomon Volkov in *Testimony* as that of the *yurodivy* - in which he seems often to have approached his work. Second, it shows that, even in the '20s when writing pieces as ostensibly 'Red' as the Second and Third symphonies, he is extremely unlikely to have been a Communist.

Mikhail Afanasyevich Bulgakov (Kiev 1891-Moscow 1940) is, to today's post-*perestroika* Soviet intelligentsia, the most revered writer of his era - indeed the contemporary cult for Bulgakov has precedence only in the Gogol-worship subscribed to by Shostakovich and other young Russian intellectuals 70 years ago. Internationally famous for his masterpiece, the vertiginous fantasy *The Master and Margarita* (published posthumously in 1966), Bulgakov was known to Russians of the '20s and '30s as an ultra-individualist author of dazzling Stoppardian plays and macabre satirical fables zealously barracked by extreme Leftists and banned by the cultural authorities.

Though Bulgakov and Shostakovich had several celebrated mutual acquaintances (notably, Yevgeny Zamyatin and Yuri Olesha) - and despite coincidentally, and equally half-heartedly, working, during 1930-31, for the left-wing Working Youth Theatre (TRAM)[\[1\]](#) - they appear not to have met till early 1936 when the writer ran into the composer while acting as a literary consultant to the Bolshoi Theatre in Moscow.

According to the diary of Bulgakov's wife, Yelena Sergeevna, Bulgakov, then 45, met Shostakovich, then 29, after the second performance of the new Bolshoi production of *Lady Macbeth* on 2nd January 1936. That Bulgakov liked Shostakovich and was impressed by his music is clear from the fact that he immediately invited the composer to turn his latest play *Last Days* into an opera. (Prokofiev, then abroad, was also in the running. Yelena confides that she preferred Shostakovich.) Four days later,

Bulgakov invited Shostakovich to his apartment where he read him *Last Days*, acting all the parts in his customary manner. Shostakovich was enthusiastic - significantly, since, like *A Cabal of Hypocrites* (Bulgakov's play about Molière), *Last Days* (about Pushkin) was a sideways glance at some sensitive contemporary topics: censorship, surveillance, betrayal by informers, and the victimisation of the talented by the mediocre.

The visit continued warmly, Yelena serving lunch ('our pies were a wild success'), Shostakovich responding in musical kind at the piano with two dances from *The Limpid Stream* ('marvellous!').^[2] Unfortunately, shortly after Bulgakov and Shostakovich had begun preliminary work on the opera, *Pravda* attacked the Moscow Art Theatre's revival of *A Cabal of Hypocrites* and both it and *Last Days* were immediately cancelled. For the second time in his career, Bulgakov's star fell, this time never to rise again. (Like Pasternak, Mandelstam, and Akhmatova^[3], he was eventually driven to compromise and, in 1939, attempted to sweeten Stalin with *Batum*, a biographical play about the dictator's revolutionary youth - but to no avail.)

Bulgakov's first fall had occurred at the onset of the Cultural Revolution in 1929 when, at the insistence of the extreme Leftists of the Proletkult, his work had been banned outright for several years. The climax of a struggle that raged throughout the '20s, Bulgakov's defeat served symbolic notice on the individualist artists with whom Shostakovich had identified soon after leaving the Leningrad Conservatoire in 1925. The question is: How early had the composer been aware of this conflict and of those figures, like Bulgakov, whose reputations were largely identified with their resistance to the tyranny of the Left?

Guided by older students at the Conservatoire, the teenage Shostakovich is likely to have found a modern substitute for his beloved 19th century satires (Gogol, Dostoyevsky, Saltykov-Shchedrin) in the magazine squibs of Zamyatin, Pilnyak, Katayev, Zoshchenko, and Bulgakov, published (so far as Leningrad was concerned) in the 'right wing' journal *Russia* between 1924 and 1925. At that time, Bulgakov's *feuilletons* were seized on avidly by the young non-Party intelligentsia, it being generally considered neck-and-neck between him and Zoshchenko for the title of the country's funniest writer. Since, however, most of their jokes were at the expense of the dogmatists of the Left, these writers had as many enemies as admirers and the war of words between the two camps was continuous, public, and bitter.

Along with his exchanges with the Leftists of the Proletkult, Bulgakov, like Zamyatin, was throughout the '20s engaged in battles with the state censor, Glavlit, notably over *The White Guard*, his 1924 novel about a bourgeois family in Kiev during the Civil War which, because it dealt with a 'counter-revolutionary' subject, was suppressed half-way through its serialisation. Shostakovich may or may not have been among those following Bulgakov's novel when it was spiked, but it seems certain that he read the author's notorious novella *The Fatal Eggs*, published in the literary anthology *The Depths* in February 1925 and serialized during the same year in *Red Panorama* ^[4]. This work, in which Bulgakov

satirised the monstrous productions of a mad 'Science' - an established non-Party codeword for Communism (self-designated as the only 'scientific' theory of history) - founded his reputation among the liberal young who delighted in decoding its author's veiled references to contemporary events, which could be highly specific.[\[5\]](#)

Discerning the vein of subversion in *The Fatal Eggs*, Leftist organisations like RAPP (Russian Association of Proletarian Writers) and the Komsomol (Communist Youth Movement) began to target Bulgakov and when, in 1926, he produced another 'mad scientist' allegory in the form of his venomously anti-proletarian satire *Heart of a Dog*, Glavlit was persuaded to step in to suppress it and the Cheka (secret police) raided its author's apartment. (The novella remained unpublished in Russian until 1968 - and then only abroad.)

The greatest scandal, though, was still to come. Towards the end of 1926, *The Days of the Turbins*, Bulgakov's dramatisation of his novel *The White Guard*, negotiated a censorship obstacle-course in rehearsal at the Moscow Art Theatre to set off the hottest literary controversy of the '20s, being, so far as ordinary people were concerned, far more comprehensible than the Zamyatin-Pilnyak witch-hunt of 1929 (qv. *The New Shostakovich*, pp. 65-7). There can be no doubt as to whether Shostakovich knew about this for the play's first night (5th October 1926) was a sensation surpassing that of the première of his First Symphony five months earlier. It instantly became 'the only show in town' and, for over a year afterwards, metropolitan Russia spoke of little but the Bulgakovshchina (Bulgakov Affair).

The first 'Soviet' art-work to depict the Whites as human beings rather than devils incarnate, *The Days of the Turbins* touched a public nerve, creating a vogue in which theatre-goers went to see it again and again. (It was still running three years later when its author was finally banned from the Soviet stage.) Even Bulgakov's enemies were to some degree won over. Many pro-Bolsheviks, accustomed to vilifying him as a Tsarist reactionary, found themselves fascinated by this poignant tale of a privileged family under revolutionary siege.

The hard Left, however, remained unmoved and amongst the applause every night at the Art Theatre there were invariably angry shouts of 'Counter-revolution!' from the Proletkult. Nor was the opprobrium limited to freelance extremists, press condemnation of *The Days of the Turbins* being violent and ubiquitous. Leopold Averbakh[\[6\]](#), later to direct the Cultural Revolution of 1929-32, led the anti-Bulgakov chorus, supported by the seedy RAPP playwright Alexander Bezymensky (who declared that the play 'personally insulted' him by portraying 'class enemies' in a favourable light) and by the Futurist poet Vladimir Mayakovsky (who castigated the work's 'whining' and called for legal 'reprisals' against its author).

During the late '20s, no educated person in Russia could have avoided having an opinion on the Bulgakovshchina and it is obvious enough from his contemporary friends and acquaintances which side Shostakovich was on. According to the Sollertinskys' *Pages from the Life of Dmitri Shostakovich*, the

composer saw *The Days of the Turbins* in Moscow in January 1928 and was disappointed to encounter a revised ending. Under pressure, Bulgakov had been obliged to renounce the ambiguity of his original closing scene to make the coming of Communism clearly positive. The 'new ending' accordingly consisted of playing the Internationale off-stage as guns fired a salute to the Bolsheviks - a *yurodivy* solution as deliberately crass as Shostakovich's finale to his Fifth Symphony and Prokofiev's enforced revision of the last pages of his Seventh.

Information so far available suggests that the young Shostakovich subscribed neither to mainstream Communism nor to the extreme Left. The question of what, if anything, he positively believed in is more complex. Certainly he was a contradictory character at this age, but the haughtiness observed by film director Leonid Trauberg^[7] represented only one aspect of a personality too complex for all but a few intimates to penetrate. It is, for example, conceivable that the satirical 'bourgeois' waltz he wrote for *New Babylon* - about which the fervently left-wing Trauberg exulted 'Shostakovich has put in so much hate!' - genuinely embodied feelings formed in him under the influence of late '20s iconoclasm. On the other hand, Trauberg's report that Shostakovich 'hated' his taste for light music (saying 'You're an idiot, you don't know Brahms and Mahler') is arguably best understood as a misunderstanding of the composer's sly mockery of his dogmatic pseudo-proletarianism.

Shostakovich had, after all, cheerfully orchestrated the ultra-bourgeois foxtrot *Tea for Two* more than a year earlier - and, in the teeth of Komsomol menaces, soon afterwards inserted it into his first ballet *The Golden Age*. (To young Leftists of the period, the foxtrot was an archetype of Western decadence and only the boldest, least 'serious' people dared dance it.)

During the Bulgakovshchina, to attack the author of *The Days of the Turbins* was to attack the 'internal emigrés' or 'old people' of the supposedly superseded bourgeois society. Like the anti-Communist writer Yevgeny Zamyatin, Bulgakov was notorious for speaking and dressing in old-fashioned 'gentlemanly' style ('like a Tsarist', his enemies said) - indeed, at one stage, in a confessed spirit of *épater le prolétariat*, he took to wearing a monocle. If Shostakovich found these traits objectionable, he seems to have been unusually careful to hide his distaste.

In reality, Shostakovich and Bulgakov had so much in common that the former's attitude to the latter's sardonically stylised social obsolescence is likely to have been closer to relish than repugnance. Bulgakov's 'Aesopian' manner of ironic obliqueness was probably as influential on Shostakovich's own double-edged style as the nod-and-wink mock-innocence of his friend Zoshchenko. (All three artists were, at one time or another, accused by conformist critics of 'turning Soviet reality into a joke'.)

The literary tastes of Shostakovich and Bulgakov were likewise close, each harbouring a love of Gogol and a rare - and suspiciously coincidental - penchant for Chekhov's eerie parable *The Black Monk*. (Bulgakov was also obsessed by the Faustian hubris of Bolshevism, a motif hinted at by Shostakovich in his Twelfth Symphony.) Similarly charismatic, both men displayed a gift for poker-faced mimicry and a

chameleon ability to modify their character at will. (Shostakovich seems to have developed this talent for reasons of self-preservation; Bulgakov, a consummate actor, apparently did it for the pure fun of confusing people.) Bulgakov even shared Shostakovich's semi-respectful dislike of Mayakovsky, with whom he waged a languid feud throughout the '20s - a rivalry akin to his attitude to Meyerhold, for whom his respect was far smaller.[\[8\]](#)

All of this suggests that, even during his period of 'anti-bourgeois' iconoclasm between 1927 and 1931, Shostakovich's true allegiance was to the distanced, ironic, and apolitical individualism of writers like Bulgakov, Zamyatin, Zoshchenko, Olesha, Pilnyak, Leonov, and Katayev (all of whom were then regularly attacked by Leftist critics as 'bourgeois' and 'right-wing'). It is, on the other hand, clearly out of the question that the composer had anything in common with the dour Proletkult for whom satire was by definition counter-revolutionary. (That he didn't work again with Meyerhold after *The Bedbug* suggests he was deliberately steering clear of the 'Left' art represented by the director and such other big names as Mayakovsky and Eisenstein.)

It is not hard to picture the young Shostakovich following Bulgakov's progress during the '20s with admiration and an eye for anything he could steal. *Zoya's Apartment*, the playwright's brothel farce designed as a scandalous follow-up to *The Days of the Turbins*; his satire on Meyerhold, *The Crimson Island* (described by a German newspaper as 'the first call for press-freedom in the USSR'); his outrageous surrealist dream-play *Flight* - all of these would have been meat and drink to Shostakovich. They were in any case huge hits with the public. When Bulgakov was brought down by RAPP in May 1929, all four plays were running to packed houses in many Soviet cities. Begun eight months later, *A Cabal of Hypocrites* - beneath its 'period costume' (dramatizing Molière's struggle with Louis XIV's religious inquisition) - is a grim satire on the Proletkult conspiracy that ruined Bulgakov's career. Shostakovich, needless to say, spent his life battling the same cabal.

For Mikhail Bulgakov, everything depended on 'tone'. At rehearsals, he would assume every role in the cast to convey the sounds, nuances of expression, tempi (sic), and atmospheres he wanted. Shostakovich was similarly picky and, were he alive today, would no doubt be doing the same *vis-à-vis* performances of his own work. His affinity with Bulgakov is nowhere more significant for, without the right 'tone' - which ultimately means the right meaning - there is no performance.

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Notes to "Shostakovich and Bulgakov"

It is suggested that the reader opens these notes as a New Window.

[1] Having appealed to Stalin for help in 1930, Bulgakov was appointed as a literary consultant to TRAM, a job which entailed vetting playscripts. Detesting the work, he wrote nothing for the company. Coincidentally, he toured the Crimea with Moscow TRAM in late July 1930 while Shostakovich was there writing *The Bolt* (having done *The Shot* for Leningrad TRAM two months earlier). There is no reason to believe that they met then. By 1931, like most individualist artists, Bulgakov was exhausted and ill from the pressures of the Cultural Revolution. He gave up working for TRAM in March 1931, shortly before the Central Committee decree banning all Leftist cultural organisations.

[2] Further entries document Madame Bulgakov's shocked - and naive - reactions to the *Pravda* attacks on *Lady Macbeth* ("I suppose Shostakovich was mistaken to tackle such a gloomy and painful subject") and *The Limpid Stream* ("I feel sorry for Shostakovich, he's been drawn into hack-work; the authors of the libretto were just trying to please"). By March, the anti-Formalist campaign was in full swing ("in *Pravda* they are printing one article after another, and one person after another is being sent flying"). Her entry for 29th January 1938 records that "this evening we're going to listen to Shostakovich's Fifth Symphony, which has created such a sensation." No further references to Shostakovich occur. (Source: J.A.E. Curtis, *Manuscripts Don't Burn*, Cambridge University Press, 1991.)

[3] Bulgakov met Akhmatova in Leningrad in July 1933. Himself a highly magnetic character, he was accustomed to recharge himself by contact with people - usually artistic - of similar charisma. Uninterested in poetry, he was nevertheless very struck by Akhmatova (and she by him). That her beauty and wit had a stimulating effect on him is clear from the fact that, soon afterwards, while still in Leningrad, he was seized by "devilish" inspiration and began what was to become the definitive version of *The Master and Margarita*, a novel he had started in 1928 but scrapped after three drafts in 1930. By October, he had written 500 pages and worked out the final structure of the book, which he finished in this draft in July 1936. Later, during Akhmatova's evacuation in Tashkent, Bulgakov's widow and literary executor Yelena Sergeyevna showed her the manuscript of *The Master and Margarita* which the poetess read avidly, glancing up every so often to remark "He's a genius".

[4] *Diaboliad* (which included *The Fatal Eggs*) was the only full-length book by Bulgakov to be published in the Soviet Union during his lifetime (Mospoligraf, May

1925, in an edition of 5000). Apart from a couple of instalments of *The White Guard*, published in 1925, and two slim volumes of *feuilletons*, it is the only Bulgakov work Shostakovich could have known apart from the plays.

[5] For example, thousands of bourgeois "hostages" taken during the Civil War were, from 1920, shipped to the Solovetsky Islands (Solovki) in the White Sea, embarking for their hellish destination at Archangelsk. Though this was never officially acknowledged, everyone in Leningrad knew about it and when, in 1923, news slipped into *Pravda* of the prison-revolt of the SRs (consigned to Solovki after Lenin had repressed them in 1922), neither general surprise nor public discussion was forthcoming. In *The Fatal Eggs*, Bulgakov referred to the creeping wave of political arrests in a casual digression about a "chicken-plague" supposedly spreading over Russia which, in the north, had got only as far as Archangelsk "since, as everyone knows, there are no hens in the White Sea".

[6] As brother-in-law of Genrikh Yagoda, head of the GPU (secret police), Averbakh, like Yagoda, was shot during the Terror in 1939. He may have been the prototype for Bishop Charron in Bulgakov's *A Cabal of Hypocrites*.

[7] Theodore Van Houten, *Always the Unexpected*, Buren, 1989.

[8] Bulgakov saw Meyerhold as a flashy manipulator, wilfully unfaithful to the text. *The Fatal Eggs*, written in 1924 but set futuristically in 1928, refers drily to "the late Vsevolod Meyerhold, who, of course, died in 1927 during rehearsals for his version of Pushkin's *Boris Godunov* when a platform full of naked boyars collapsed on him".

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UNIVERSAL BECAUSE SPECIFIC

Arguments for a contextual approach [\[1\]](#)

by Ian MacDonald



**"A composer must be local before he can be universal."
- Ralph Vaughan Williams**

In *The New Shostakovich*, I indicated some of the ways in which the modern tendencies to elevate abstraction and formal beauty conspire to create an atmosphere in which music with specific inner significance, such as Shostakovich's, is reduced or glossed over in both performance and analysis. I would like here to amplify this with reference to the dogmatic subjectivism associated with these trends, inasmuch as this critical stance has become something of a fallback position for those once happy to accept the Soviet line on Shostakovich yet now unwilling to adopt the contrary position.

To take a typical example, Nicholas Kenyon has dismissed my account of Shostakovich's historical context as irrelevant, "undervaluing a composer whose musical genius, as someone said of Mozart's, was to suggest an infinite number of possibilities at once".[\[2\]](#) This statement neatly encapsulates the paradox of the aesthetic ideal of "universality" in music - which is that, to be "universal", a given composition must not (as one might expect) signify more or less the same thing to all men, but rather mean different things to everyone who hears it. The oddity of this notion, with its overtones of Doublethink, is clear from the fact that, in language, a statement which suggested an infinite number of possibilities at once would certainly be meaningless.

Having fixed his standard of musical sublimity and qualified Shostakovich for assessment by it, Kenyon rejects the idea that an artist so "neurotically unsure of himself" - "Did he ever know what he really thought? Did his frequent verbal betrayals of himself mean anything?" and so on - could ever be specifically interpreted. In other words, having been asked to accept one dizzy paradox, we are additionally required to believe in a stupid and self-doubting ditherer mysteriously capable of the loftiest ineffability once confronted with score-paper.

Surely this quaint academic notion of Shostakovich as an *idiot savant* has been allowed to misdirect Western studies of the composer for long enough? How, for example, can those who maintain this theory acknowledge the Preludes and Fugues, Opus 87, as the product of a sophisticated intellect whilst

otherwise maintaining that intellect to be basically muddled and naive? As it happens, conjecture on this question is obsolete since Shostakovich's colleagues have witnessed in chorus that he was every bit as intelligent as his music suggests; yet the subjectivists, regarding such contextual material as an irrelevant intrusion on their private response, choose to ignore this.

To refuse to acknowledge Shostakovich's intelligence is, inevitably, to refuse to recognise the crucial satirical strand in his art - to see him, instead, as a confused introvert wallowing in tragic grandiloquence (what I have called the "Hamlet" theory). However, it is not, as the subjectivists insist, merely a matter of taste as to which option one selects. It is not even a question of probability (ie., that while a "tragic-satiric" analysis of Shostakovich creates no contradictions, the "Hamlet" theory breeds paradoxes within paradoxes, yet still makes no sense). It is that the evidence of the historical record has entirely destroyed one of these rival positions, leaving us no fundamental interpretive dilemma over which to hesitate. Shostakovich was *indisputably* a tragic-satiric observer, not an introspective or bewildered Hamlet figure.

If the abstract, non-contextual, and aesthetic approaches to Shostakovich are discredited, what of the alternative? Why should a contextual approach be more appropriate?

It has been argued, for example by F. R. Leavis and W. H. Auden, that, so far as literature goes, authorial biography and the wider historical, social, and cultural context are distractions to our engagement with the timeless "universality" of the text. I have characterized the similarly score-centred concern for "universality" in music criticism, with its key concepts of "pure music" on the one hand and the "extra-musical" on the other, as subjective. Where music criticism of this kind differs from the sort of literary criticism advocated by Leavis and Auden (rendering it even more subjective) is that it lacks the moral dimension unavoidable in a linguistic medium, instead confining itself to aesthetic criteria.

What is crucial to observe, however, is that this aestheticism is compromised wherever words are added to music in the form of a text, a libretto, a programme, or an exegesis sponsored or written by the composer in question. When this happens, the division between "pure music" and the "extra-musical" element attached to it (in this case, language) becomes blurred in such a way as to point to an underlying philosophical misconception about music best illustrated by means of a simple example.

Interviewed recently[3], Daniel Barenboim spoke derisively of the third movement of Shostakovich's Eighth Symphony, describing it as "pages of violas playing crotchets - for hours it goes on". When Barenboim took this up with some Soviet musicians, he received a reply that only deepened his irritation: "They said that it symbolized the crushing of the Russian people or something - and I think that's a load of rubbish. When you need non-musical explanations like that to see the value of it - this I can't come to terms with."

Postponing the issue of what, if anything, the passage in question "means" and whether this "meaning"

should be allowed to alter our perception of its composer's methods in writing it, it seems reasonable to deduce from Barenboim's description that he finds the music boring or inadequate because formally simple and repetitious. This being so, we can presumably further deduce that he would feel the same about the thirty-four common chords spaced evenly between Scenes 2 and 3 of Act III of Britten's opera *Billy Budd*. Or can we?

One would, on the contrary, expect a musician of Barenboim's sensitivity to see that, at this point in his opera, Britten's simplicity and repetition are sufficiently apt that formal reservation is obliterated by the emotional effect they produce. *Billy Budd* has just begged Captain Vere to save him, but being (to coin a phrase) trapped in formalities, Vere must condemn him. Britten's plain sequence symbolizes the agony of Vere's mind, the awe of his power over life and death, the implacability of fate, the insignificance of human endeavour.

How do we know this? Because the music has words attached to it. Elsewhere in the same interview, Barenboim declares that *Così fan tutte* represents "beauty married to falseness". How does he know this? Because the music has words attached to it. Yet, according to Barenboim's definition with respect to Shostakovich, words are "non-musical" things. How is it that he can "come to terms" with Mozart's music via Da Ponte's words, but cannot do the same with Shostakovich's music via the words of his colleagues (or even, presumably, Shostakovich's own words in *Testimony*)?

Had Mozart left an account of his intentions in *Così fan tutte*, Barenboim would surely try to incorporate his understanding of these into his performance so as not to travesty the composer's meaning. By reading the libretto of *Billy Budd*, he would see why Britten uses simplicity and repetition. Similarly, by listening to Shostakovich's colleagues or by reading *Testimony*, he might see that, in many places (the scherzo from the Piano Quintet, the *Leningrad's* march, the Eighth's third movement, and so on) Shostakovich uses simplicity and repetition as satirical devices, mocking vulgarity by impersonating it.

As with Mozart, "non-musical explanations" would thus have helped Barenboim to see why Britten and Shostakovich chose to express themselves in certain ways. Whether he nonetheless still found their methods in so doing inadequate or uninteresting is another matter; at the very least, should he wish to conduct their music, he would now stand a fair chance of not making a mess of it.

Barenboim's philosophical misconception is the very simple - and common - one of confusing music with notation. Were music identical with notation, no problems of interpretation would ever arise. Robots could play it. But music is something larger: *thought and feeling expressed as sound represented in notation*. In this perspective, it is clear that no music is "pure" and that there is no "extra-musical" (or "non-musical") element that contaminates it. Music, like the other arts, is part of life - life, as it were, expressing itself in an aural symbology. As the poet Wallace Stevens says, "music is feeling, then, not

sound"[4] - which is why it makes us think and feel (and value it).

Since no music can be divorced from the human context which gave birth to it, it follows that understanding the context in which Shostakovich composed is directly relevant to the performance and audition of his compositions. Once this is allowed, the issue becomes merely one of degree. In the case of most composers, the relationship of context and composition is gentle since the forces acting upon them or arising from within them are/were relatively moderate.

In the case of Shostakovich and his contemporaries in the USSR during the Stalin period, the relationship was harsh - literally a matter of life and death. There was a time and place in which millions died or disappeared into slave camps; in which fear and betrayal were institutionalized; in which natural morality and normal social relationships were virtually annihilated. This was, furthermore, a time and place in which the arts were dragooned, deformed, and all but destroyed in what the radical Hungarian architect Imre Makovecz has called a process of "cultural genocide".

Arguably, no more intense context for the production of art has ever existed - yet, despite this, subjective Western commentators on Shostakovich remain unwilling to admit that objective knowledge of this context has any legitimate role to play in understanding his music. Where reason alone is apparently insufficient, one can only fall back on commonsense. For example, I have in front of me a record of songs by the National Dance Company of Cambodia, the first lyric of which runs as follows:

Sleep well, my child.
We have gone through three fields:
The field of death, the field of chains and prisons
And the field of remembrance...
My child, you should remember this:
The regimes of separating and killing.
You should remember and must never forget
If you want your country to live...

Can anyone seriously maintain that an understanding of the context of such a song is irrelevant to its performance and audition? Of course not. And the same obviously applies to the music of Shostakovich.

This much at least is incontestable to those who knew the composer. For Kyrill Kondrashin, Shostakovich's work is "inseparable from the events of his life".[5] "His music," insists Vladimir Ashkenazy, "was totally connected with personal experiences within the Soviet totalitarian system, the horrors of war, etc. From the 1930s to 1960s he lives through the tragedy of the nation, expressing it through the medium of his music." [6] Daniel Zhitomirsky concurs: "It was by the light of Shostakovich's music that we, his contemporaries, survived our special and indescribable hell, through whose circles he led us like some latterday Virgil." [7]

Referring to the "ideological darkness" which Shostakovich fought through his work, Sofia Khentova states that "everything he wrote was, in essence, a protest against slavery; music, the creative process, remained the last refuge of his free spirit."[\[8\]](#) For Maria Yudina, the links between art and life are audible in the very forms the composer adopted: "Shostakovich does not try to keep his work balanced; instead he invariably draws us into the catastrophe of contemporary reality."[\[9\]](#) Indeed, to Yuri Temirkanov, context is so vital as to be inexhaustible: "I am always nervous when I conduct Shostakovich in the West because people know only superficially what happened; they don't know the real horror of the facts, and to understand Shostakovich fully you have to understand the extent of those horrors."[\[10\]](#)

As to the significance of *Testimony* in furthering such understanding, Maxim Shostakovich has observed: "When we take this book in our hands we can imagine what this composer's life was like in this particular political situation - how difficult, how awful it was under the Soviet regime."[\[11\]](#) In short, Russian musicians are unanimous in maintaining that a factual and imaginative grasp of the context of Shostakovich's music is not merely advisable, but *essential* to understanding it.

What, then, is specifically to be gained from such a contextual approach? And how does approaching Shostakovich's music in this way affect its claim to "universality"?

To answer the first of these questions, what is to be gained from a contextual approach is (1) a clearer idea of Shostakovich's intentions in writing in certain ways, leading to (2) a sharper instinct for his "tone" in general, leading further to (3) a more appropriate mode of interpretation (in both criticism and performance) than has been afforded his work in the West so far.

Since working thus from the specific to the general implies a quasi-programmatic treatment of many pieces by Shostakovich usually regarded in the West as "pure music", it is necessary to know that such a treatment is, and has been for some time, standard practice among the composer's colleagues. For example, Kyrill Kondrashin, who premièred Shostakovich's Fourth and Thirteenth Symphonies, described the concepts behind his own performances of the composer's music as follows:

"Not every work can be 'decoded' in detail, of course, but I feel that a conductor can better sense the form and significance of a work if he feels behind the movements of musical thought emotions and feelings that can be put into words. Sometimes he even finds a programmed logic that is close to a plot... The majority of Shostakovich's symphonies do not have titles and at first glance appear to be plotless. Nevertheless, contemporaries associate each of his symphonies with a specific period in the life of the composer, and this allows the listener to transform the development of musical thought into emotions close to the human heart and into direct plot situations...

"The historical cataclysms that gave life to Shostakovich's music passed before my eyes as well, and they were part of my life, too. Several of his symphonies elicited such vivid associations with our reality that I developed them to full programme detail. Dmitri Dmitryevich knew about my 'decodings'. He himself did not like to discuss the subtext of his music and usually said nothing, although he did not contradict me, either. Since he was usually pleased with my performances, I believe he had no objection to such an approach to his music."[\[12\]](#)

The similar "decodings" attempted in *The New Shostakovich* (published before I saw Kondrashin's statement) were naturally received with scepticism by Western advocates of "pure music" and the subjective approach. In particular, it was argued that I had pursued too consistent a line in metaphor and in linking biographical and musical events. (Inconsistency is, of course, a virtual obligation for any philosophy of music which sees as its highest ideal the suggestion of "an infinite number of possibilities at once".)

From the empirical point of view, it is thus worth pointing out that not only have several of the supposedly contentious commentaries on individual works in *The New Shostakovich* been confirmed since the book appeared[\[13\]](#), but that Vladimir Ashkenazy[\[14\]](#), Yuri Temirkanov[\[15\]](#), Gennadi Rozhdestvensky[\[16\]](#), Semyon Bychkov[\[17\]](#), and Kurt Sanderling[\[18\]](#) have all recently spoken of various Shostakovich pieces in terms similar to mine.

This is not to claim that absolute specificity of meaning is possible with any given bar Shostakovich wrote. Beyond a certain point, subjectivity comes back into play and we must each feel for ourselves the truth of what we hear. This, though, can only happen once contextual objectivity has narrowed our options from "an infinite number" to something more realistic.

Just such a range of differing, yet closely related, interpretations have, for example, accumulated around the curious percussion passages in Shostakovich's Fourth Symphony (II), Second Cello Concerto (III), and Fifteenth Symphony (IV). I have suggested that the implied association is with marionettes and automata, both of which are known to have fascinated the composer and which arguably held sinister significance for him. For Yuri Temirkanov, however, the passages in the Fifteenth Symphony and Second Cello Concerto signify "the ticking away of the hours" and symbolize the fear of death.[\[19\]](#) (Shostakovich was also, like Prokofiev, interested in clocks.) Speaking of the passage in the Fourth Symphony, Gennadi Rozhdestvensky offers a third possibility: "For me, and I think for Shostakovich, the association is prisoners tapping out messages to one another on the hot-water pipes in jail."[\[20\]](#)

All of these readings are justifiable by reference to context and therefore sufficiently appropriate to be taken on their merits. By comparison, the rare ventures into "decoding" risked by aesthetically-based

commentators are nearly always vague (typically an allusion to the Russian landscape) or randomly inappropriate (usually a reference to the composer's music as involuntarily expressive of his own self-dramatised inner turmoil).

For my own part, I cannot, despite the independent confirmations of them, guarantee that my readings are absolutely reliable, let alone exhaustive. They were arrived at by a combination of contextual objectivity and intuition; those who knew and worked with Shostakovich will presumably continue to publish comparable accounts of his music which may be different from mine (although I confidently predict that the range of such differences will be narrow). For now, all that is crucial to grasp is that, in the case of Shostakovich, the objective focus of contextual understanding *must* precede and guide our individual subjective responses to his music.

It could be argued that the same applies, in appropriately varying degrees, to all composers - indeed, I *would* argue this. At present, however, it is enough to realise that there is no music more intensely conditioned by its context than Shostakovich's. Such realisation will of itself sweep away the sort of criticism that treats his works merely as formally-determined and self-referential constructions of notes into which we may each randomly project our own private aesthetic and emotional concerns. It will also, by sharpening our sense of his intelligence, humour, and propensity for satire, put an end to the tendency of Western performers to, as one perceptive British critic has rightly complained, "Brahmsify Shostakovich".

As to how approaching Shostakovich's music in this way affects its claim to "universality", it is clear that universality is achieved not by art diffuse enough to mean different things to everyone it touches but, on the contrary, by art specific enough - in Ivan Bunin's terminology, "stereoscopic" enough - to touch all of us in the same way. That is: *the more sharply specific our perception of Shostakovich, the more universal he becomes*. To grasp this, one need only refer to the comparable specificity and stereoscopic sharpness of the characters and situations presented in the works of his favourite authors (Gogol, Dostoyevsky, Chekhov) - or, in our own language, of Shakespeare and Dickens.

It is not by idealisation or generalisation, but by focusing on specific characters in specific situations that universality is achieved. No accident, then, that Boris Tishchenko's description of Shostakovich portrays a mind for which such focus was clearly an article of faith:

"What he said was concrete and specific: every thought was expressed in a strict yet ample literary form, sometimes it was even a short story. Shostakovich was hostile to diffuse, abstract discussions and platitudes. There was no magniloquence, no pathos, everything was specific and well-rounded." [\[21\]](#)

Subjectivists often ask triumphantly how, if Shostakovich's music involves such specific and supposedly unsuspected significance, it has nevertheless managed to achieve "universal" appeal. The answer is

painfully simple: one need not understand something in order to enjoy it. In sex, attraction precedes penetration; the same goes for art. That Shostakovich's music should be popular in the West without being widely understood is surely a modest enough proposition?

Rather than cling to obsolete approaches to the subject, it is time to turn from general debate to the more fruitful pursuit of contextual specifics. The sooner *The New Shostakovich* is, in turn, rendered obsolete by intensive investigations into the many questions it has only provisionally touched on, the happier its author will be and the better all of us will understand this music we so much love.

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Notes to "Universal Because Specific"

It is suggested that the reader opens these notes as a New Window.

- [1] A version of this piece appeared in *Southern Humanities Review*, XXVI No. 2 (Spring 1992).
- [2] *The Guardian*, 20th May 1990.
- [3] *Gramophone*, October 1990.
- [4] *Peter Quince at the Clavier*.
- [5] See Kondrashin, "The Interior Shostakovich" (statement read at a symposium held at Bucknell University, New York, 9th September 1980).
- [6] *Classic CD*, February 1991.
- [7] *Daugava*, 1990, No. 3.
- [8] *DSCH XVIII* (May 1991).
- [9] Zhitomirsky, op. cit.
- [10] *CD Review*, June 1991.
- [11] *Gramophone*, May 1991.
- [12] Kondrashin, op. cit.
- [13] Notably, Lebedinsky's observations concerning the Eighth Quartet and Seventh, Eleventh, and Twelfth Symphonies ("Some Musical Quotations of Shostakovich", *DSCH XVII*, December 1990); and Maxim Shostakovich's description of the Fourth Symphony as "a portrayal of the policies and apocalypses of the Soviet regime" (Interview by Louis Blois in *DSCH XIV*, November 1989).
- [14] *Classic CD*, February 1991.
- [15] *CD Review*, June 1991.
- [16] *The Independent*, 6th April 1991.

[17] Interview by Henrietta Cowling for the BBC, August 1991.

[18] *Classical Music*, 18th May 1991.

[19] *CD Review*, June 1991.

[20] *The Independent*, 6th April 1991. An American orchestra with whom Rozhdestvensky was rehearsing the work were bemused by this. One orchestra member dimly enquired: "Why tap out messages when they can speak to one another on the telephone?" "I realised," recalls the conductor, wearily, "that there was no point in discussing the matter further."

[21] D./L.Sollertinsky, *Pages from the Life of Dmitri Shostakovich*, p. 184.

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SHOSTAKOVICH

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REVIEW



SHOSTAKOVICH

**Symphony No. 11 in G minor, Opus 103, "The Year 1905" (1957)
Leningrad Philharmonic Orchestra cond. Evgeny Mravinsky
Revelation RV10091 [60:08/AAD]**

Although the sleevenote to this issue pretends that the Eleventh Symphony is, in effect, a guilelessly virtuous piece of Communist musical propaganda unambiguously devoted to homaging the dead of the 1905 revolution, anyone who knows a bit about Soviet history will long ago have sensed from the music itself that something darker and more ironic lies behind it. Semyon Bychkov, who recorded the work in 1988, points out that "events such as those in 1905 have happened elsewhere... Uprisings tend to be similar: people are killed, there's a requiem to be written (you have that in the third movement)". He continues:

What I find really interesting is the *finale* of the Eleventh. People often think that the finale is about the eventual success of the revolution--not in 1905, but in 1917. But what is meant by "success"? Success to whom, for whom? If it's for a band of criminals who brought nothing but disaster, for them it was success--but for millions of people it was genocide. I think he's talking about that in the finale. There are three notes played by the chimes, alternating between major and minor thirds. It ends with the minor third. Why not a major third if it's a "victory"? I think this is the key element in the piece, because the same intervals are used in the fugue of the first movement, and that describes the assault on those poor people. What kind of victory is that?

Bychkov echoes Shostakovich in *Testimony* re the Fifth Symphony: "What kind of apotheosis is that?" Indeed, *Testimony* is where the double-meaning (or, rather, plural meanings) of the Eleventh first explicitly emerged. I explored these ideas about the symphony more fully in *The New Shostakovich* (pp. 214-219), written in 1988-9. In an article published in the USSR in 1990, the composer's friend Lev Lebedinsky confirmed the Eleventh's latent meanings in some detail. Referring to the revolutionary songs used in the work, Lebedinsky claimed that, whilst undergoing symphonic development, they represent "the main protagonists in a drama... one in which the depicted events are clearly not of the past but very much of the present":

Not everyone grasped the contemporary implications of the Eleventh Symphony. In Russia, it is, after all, common practice for artists to resort to the life-saving language of folk-song. However, the allusion to the tyrant's "night-black" conscience was sufficient to give Shostakovich's quotation an anti-Stalinist inflection, turning the work into a protest against tyranny in general. Though he never knew prison or the camps, the composer was able to recreate the horror and terror of Stalin's Gulag with great power, clarity, and realism. Aside from his own imaginative genius, this was due to the fact that for a number of years, particularly after the death of his close friend Tukhachevsky, he had himself lived in the daily dread of arrest and punishment. From this experience, his keen intuition was able to deduce the camps' peculiar atmosphere; in his mind, he lived in those places, heard their sad songs, felt their seething resentment against all tyranny and repression.

(Shostakovich's friend the musicologist Marina Sabinina agrees. The symphony's third movement, she argues, "could be associated with the mass executions of the Soviet era and Stalin's reprisals, while the first part, with its melodies of pre-revolutionary songs of hard labour and exile, recalls the victims of the Gulag--the millions who perished in concentration camps and prisons".)

More particularly, Lebedinsky confirms the Eleventh Symphony's associative link with another failed revolution--one which had been happening while Shostakovich was forming the music in his mind and very probably inspired it: the Hungarian Uprising of 1956. An event of immense significance to the Soviet Union's contemporary dissident intelligentsia, the tragic unfolding of the Hungarian Uprising was (illegally) monitored by Shostakovich via the BBC's Russian Service. (Flora Litvinova confirms that he was eager for news of events in Budapest in 1956. Indeed, Zoya Tomachevskaya tells us that when Igor Belsky,

producer of a ballet on the Eleventh Symphony, consulted Shostakovich, the composer said to him, "as if in passing": "Don't forget that I wrote that symphony in the aftermath of the Hungarian Uprising.")

Like his dissident colleagues, who identified with their counterparts in Hungary, the composer was almost certainly struck by the grim parallel between St Petersburg's Bloody Sunday massacre of 1905 and Budapest's Parliament Square massacre in 1956. In 1956, of course, the massacring forces were Soviet, representing the system which Shostakovich (contrary to the resident sleeve-note writer for the Revelation series) had detested for many years and fervently wished to see the back of. Lev Lebedinsky is quite specific about this: "The Eleventh Symphony can justly be called a product of the anti-totalitarian liberation movement in the USSR. As such, as well as evidencing Shostakovich's talent and mastery, it also testifies to his courage and intelligence." (Lebedinsky's use of the words "courage" and "intelligence" is far from casual. Anyone seeking to penetrate deeper into Shostakovich's music should bear both words in mind--in particular when weighing the anti-revisionist counter-image of him as cowardly and not very bright.)

For Lebedinsky, the Eleventh, far from a mere historical pageant, was "a truly contemporary work... composed in the aftermath of the Soviet invasion of Hungary"--although, he says, the work's "true programme" had to be "deliberately concealed" by Shostakovich "beneath a kind of 'period costume'":

Did the composer hide the contemporary meaning of his symphony too carefully to make it generally detectable? Hardly--although there were plenty of sharp-witted people in Moscow and Leningrad who were probably too scared to admit the truth. "Those weren't rifle shots--those were tanks roaring and people being machine-gunned," remarked an old lady loudly after the symphony's première in Leningrad. And she was right. In the symphony's second movement (*The Ninth of January*), Shostakovich, with immense orchestral mastery, reproduces the roar of engines and clatter of tank-tracks--sounds strongly suggestive of the massacre during the 1956 uprising in Budapest... This was so clear to those "who had ears to listen", that his son, with whom he wasn't in the habit of sharing his deepest thoughts, whispered to Dmitri Dmitriyevich during the dress rehearsals, "Papa, what if they hang you for this?"

Lebedinsky's article caused a minor scuffle in the Russian musical press in 1991. Lev

Levitin claimed, in roundly abusive terms, that Lebedinsky's suggestion was simplistic and "one-dimensional". In turn, the musicologist Lev Mazel chided Levitin for his intemperate outburst and proposed that, while Lebedinsky had perhaps replaced one simplistic interpretation with another, his basic claim about the dual historical resonance of the symphony was justifiable. The work, Mazel continued, was "inspired by tragic contemporary events--and it is arguably this inspiration which gives the symphony its true meaning and substance". ("This," he added, "is, in fact, how I understood the symphony from the very start. I did not ask 'was there more 1905 or 1956' in it; the various aspects of an artistic work as a whole do not require quantitative equations.")

Manashir Yakubov, the keeper of the Shostakovich archive in Russia, cautiously agrees with Mazel: "It is quite possible that while Shostakovich was writing his Eleventh Symphony that he was thinking of not only the 1905 revolution. Probably he hoped that his audience would hear beyond the generalised pictures of violence and the people's suffering something other than what communist ideologists wanted to hear." The conductor Kirill Kondrashin, equally circumspect (though, writing in 1980, for a different reason), likewise points out that both the Eleventh and Twelfth symphonies are "associative as well as illustrative; that is, they throw out a bridge between historical events and the present". As for the musicologist Vera Volkova, hearing the Eleventh for the first time as a teenager in 1964, she records that "people were crying at the concerts, for the first time perceiving without prejudice or doubt the tragic revelations of the Fifth, Seventh, and Eleventh symphonies. Liberated from prohibition, Shostakovich's music became a symbol of the severe truth of our time..."

The sheer passion of the performance contained in this 1960 recording supports the "Hungarian" thesis. It is undeniable that 1905 was significant for Russia in several ways, not least in poignantly suggesting a more decent sort of freedom which the nation might have achieved without having to suffer Lenin's red fascism. Even at a distance of fifty years, it was still an emotional subject for Russians in 1956, especially to the liberal intelligentsia who, so far as as possible, had always resisted Soviet communism and had then just seen Stalin's reign of terror formally condemned by Khrushchev. Yet the Hungarian Uprising was far more immediate in its impact; in fact, it was the catalyst for the open dissidence which began to manifest in the USSR around the time of this recording. One of those dissidents, Vladimir Bukovsky, describes what the events in Hungary meant to his contemporaries in 1956:

After all the exposures, denunciations, and posthumous rehabilitations [of the

1956 thaw], after all the assurances about the impossibility of repeating the past, we were now presented with corpses, tanks, brute force and lies all over again. Just one more convincing proof that nothing had changed at all. Boys just like us, fifteen or sixteen years old, were perishing on the streets of Budapest, rifles in hand, in defence of freedom... On the one side there was our side--the Russians, who were being cold-bloodedly sent in to kill. And on the other there was also our side, for I would have done exactly the same thing if I had been in the place of those young Hungarians... After those red-starred tanks, the pride and joy of our childhood, had crushed our peers on the streets of Budapest, a bloody fog blinded our eyes. The whole world had betrayed us, and we believed in nobody.

A recent parallel can be drawn with the mood in China after the massacre in Tiananmen Square in 1989. With an equivalent feeling abroad in Russia in 1956-7, it is inconceivable that a piece of sound-painting as naturalistic as the massacre in the second movement of Shostakovich's Eleventh Symphony could have struck its early audiences as mere coincidence. Thus the exceptional intensity of feeling in this performance, as in many historical Shostakovich recordings, derives not merely from the innate excitement of being close to the time of composition of the music, but rather from closeness to the contemporary events which precipitated the composition itself.

This is the third Mravinsky-conducted Eleventh to have appeared on compact disc. The first, the Leningrad première of 3rd November 1957, which came out on Russian Disc (RDCD11157) four years ago, is unusual in being a first outing which in Mravinsky's hands doesn't succeed. The white-hot passion is there, but his usual cogency isn't--particularly in a rather disorganised third movement--and, in general, the impression is of a work quickly learned and, as yet, only partially absorbed. (Compounded by mono sound that scrunches up the tuttis and lacks body even in the quieter passages, this makes for a disc of mainly archival interest.)

The second of Mravinsky's Elevenths is a performance recorded in Prague in 1967--a reading very similar to the one contained in the present disc and in superior sound (Praga PR 254018). This new one, made in 1960, is supposedly the one issued, on two LPs, along with the composer's recording of his Second Piano Concerto with Alexandr Gauk, on MK in 1961. I bought this in 1963--I can still smell the fishpaste glue which held the big green box together--and it doesn't sound the same to me today. The overwhelming forcefulness of the music-making is identical, or seems so (I had to sell my MK box in order to eat in

1968 and have never found it again since). The sound, on the other hand, is fairly testing--although anyone who can cope with the sonics of Mravinsky's 1954 recording of the Tenth (and only vapid hi-fi buffs can't) will be able to tolerate these raging "peaks" and fiercely "toppy" frequencies. In any case, the disc is an essential part of a Shostakovich fan's collection for the window it opens onto the emotional/intellectual background to this controversial symphony, as well as for preserving what remains arguably its greatest musical interpretation for the enlightenment of generations to come.

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REVIEW



SHOSTAKOVICH

Symphony No. 14, Opus 135 (1969)

Galina Vishnevskaya, soprano; Mark Reshetin, bass

Moscow Chamber Orchestra cond. Mstislav Rostropovich

Seven Romances on Poems of Alexander Blok, Opus 127 (1966)

Galina Vishnevskaya, soprano; David Oistrakh, violin;

Mstislav Rostropovich, cello; Moisei Vainberg, piano

Revelation RV10101 [72:45/ADD]

Two historic concert recordings--the surprise being that the more compelling turns out not to be that of the première of the Blok cycle in Moscow on 27th October 1967, but rather a live performance of the Fourteenth Symphony taped, presumably in Moscow, on 12th February 1973. The Blok première is, of course, of innate interest; yet the reading, while possessing the customary intensity of Shostakovich première recordings, is marred by tape deterioration and one of Vishnevskaya's squallier performances. In the Fourteenth, though, she is magnificent: more accurate than in Russian Disc's otherwise immensely gripping Moscow première recording from 29th December 1969 (RDCD 11192) and even more deeply involved in the meaning of the work. Taking into account the atmospheric interference that affects the Russian Disc recording, this Revelation issue, which uses the same forces as at the première but with Rostropovich in place of Barshai on the podium, is arguably preferable.

The Fourteenth Symphony is always a lacerating experience, but this performance is particularly concentrated and ferocious. This mood was almost certainly a by-product of events leading up to the time of the concert, an ominous period of freshly gathering

repression in which Brezhnev's KGB were closing in on Solzhenitsyn, with whom Vishnevskaya and Rostropovich had been publicly identified since inviting the persecuted writer to move into their dacha with them in 1969. Such a noble gesture carried frightful risk and consequently brought with it an additional burden of fear for Vishnevskaya and her husband. In her remarkable memoir, *Galina* (Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1984), she records David Oistrakh's reaction upon learning that his friends had given Solzhenitsyn sanctuary:

"I won't play the hypocrite with you: I would never have taken him in. To tell the truth, I'm afraid. My wife and I lived through '37, when night after night every person in Moscow feared his arrest. In our building, only our apartment and the one facing it on the same floor survived the arrests. All the other tenants had been taken off to God knows where. Every night I expected the worst, and I set aside some warm underwear and a bit of food for the inevitable moment. You can't imagine what we went through, listening for the fatal knock on the door or the sound of a car pulling up. One night a Black Maria stopped out in front. Who were they coming for? Us or the neighbours? The downstairs door slammed and the elevator began its ascent. Finally it stopped on our floor. We listened to the footsteps, and went numb. Whose door would they come to? An eternity passed. Then we heard them ring at the apartment across from us. Since that moment, I have known I'm not a fighter..."

Vishnevskaya, Rostropovich, and Solzhenitsyn were definitely fighters. During the four years that Solzhenitsyn worked in the guesthouse at their dacha, they were forced to endure an increasing number of petty restrictions by the Soviet authorities and became used to being openly spied on by the KGB, which had set up an observation post on the nearby road. A year after the performance of the Fourteenth Symphony preserved on this disc, Solzhenitsyn was thrown out of the USSR for "treasonably" publishing *The Gulag Archipelago* abroad. Vishnevskaya and Rostropovich, goaded by vengeful official cancellations and obstructions, reluctantly followed him into Western exile some months later. They were under siege when they made this recording--a fact which goes far towards explaining the intensity of feeling contained in it.

Why, though, should such feeling have expressed itself via what many hold to be one of Shostakovich's least "political" symphonies?--a work, indeed, ostensibly, and only, about death. In fact, as anyone who examines the libretto will see (and as becomes blindingly

clear from this performance), the Fourteenth is actually one of Shostakovich's *most* political symphonies--a very personal expression of moral outrage against the spiritual imprisonment of life in the USSR at the time it was composed and of which he by then had over fifty years of bitter experience.

The English composer and musicologist Gerard McBurney made the case for the moral/political message of the Fourteenth Symphony in a talk called "Marking the Graves" which he gave on BBC Radio 3 during February 1993. Lorca's *De Profundis* [I], he pointed out, speaks of "a hundred fervent lovers [who] fell into eternal sleep beneath the dry soil". In the Russia of 1969, this would naturally have been taken as an allusion to the mass-graves of Stalin's victims which surrounded the country's cities. "Here crosses will be erected," the text continues, "so that the people will not forget them." Preludially preceding the rest of the symphony and reprised in the work's penultimate section, the cold high strains of this music speak of isolation and incarceration of a kind at once literal and metaphorical.

In II (*Malagueña*)--musically derived from the scherzo of Moisei Vainberg's Sixth Symphony (a work which commemorates the Jewish victims of Nazism)--death "stalks in and out of the tavern" with a repetitive methodical briskness suggesting that of the NKVD at the height of Stalin's purges, as recalled by David Oistrakh. In III, Apollinaire's Lorelei laments that, like those sent to the Gulag or into internal exile, her lover "has gone, he is in a distant country... nothing pleases me, darkness fills my heart". The agony of separation which drives Lorelei gradually towards suicide was the common lot of countless Soviet women, their husbands taken from them and transported to faraway places, rarely to be allowed contact even by letter and often never to meet again. Lorelei's suicide, made explicit in IV, directly reflects the composer's suicidal impulses throughout his life, particularly during periods of persecution. "I remember," writes Vishnevskaya of the rehearsals in 1969, "with what deep self-absorption, with what apparent agony, Dmitri Dmitriyevich listened to the words "Three lilies, three lilies on my grave without a cross..." In this performance, the composer's anguish is searingly conveyed by Vishnevskaya in the climactic passage on the lines "the [second lily] grows from my heart which suffers so/Upon a verminous bed; the third one's roots lacerate my mouth". Implied: the verminous bed of Soviet "culture"; the mouth-lacerating disgust of self-traducing words uttered under duress.

The remainder of the symphony is increasingly personal, and only obliquely about the supposed central subject of death. In V (*On Watch*), Shostakovich turns to the theme of

vigil, which, in his case as in countless others', took the form of waiting sleeplessly through the night for the dreaded knock of the Soviet secret police. VI (*Madame, Look!*) deals with the demoralising effect of such sustained experiences of stress and fear: heartless cynicism becomes a refuge in a society in which love is so hideously vulnerable to violence, separation, and death. While this was an experience shared by millions of his fellow citizens, Shostakovich felt it with particular intensity in that his social conscience detested cynicism, as he emphasises in *Testimony*. In Vishnevskaya's riveting performance, the ghastly laughter of the protagonist veers from sickening scorn to self-contemptuous revulsion. From this point in the work, she falls silent until the end. The music now darkens even deeper.

Since the external repression of Communism generated an additional dimension of necessary *self*-repression, Shostakovich, as so many like him, became his own jailer. Hence VII deals with imprisonment both naturalistically and as a psychological condition. (That Shostakovich felt almost literally imprisoned by his predicament has been confirmed by several who knew him in later years, and is explicitly encoded in the opening of the fourth movement of his Eighth Quartet.) The composer's repressed indignation--and the subterranean scheme of the entire symphony--erupts into the open in VIII, *The Zaporozhian Cossacks' Answer to the Sultan of Constantinople*, which, railing against tyranny, has nothing whatever to do with the work's advertised subject. Section IX (*O Delvig, Delvig!*) sets a poem by the only Russian included in this collection: an obscure lament for a fellow poet imprisoned under the regime of Alexander I. Here, as in his Tsvetayeva and Michelangelo cycles, the composer vents his anger over the repression of the creative conscience under totalitarianism. In X (*The Death of the Poet*), Shostakovich pursues an ongoing exposition of his personal predicament ("How can they understand how long this road is?") before returning to a more coldly objective stance in the symphony's grim *Conclusion*. The work's real subjects--isolation, repression, and the experience of imprisonment--become concealed again in its final section, yet they are unignorably dominant throughout most of the score.

All things considered, it's hardly surprising that the Fourteenth Symphony should have called forth such blazing commitment from its performers during the nadir of the Brezhnev freeze.

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REVIEW



SHOSTAKOVICH

**Quartet No. 1 in C, Op. 49 (1938); Quartet No. 2 in A, Op. 86 (1944);
Quartet No. 4 in D, Op. 83(1949)**

Beethoven Quartet/Consonance 81-3005 [67:47/AAD]

**Quartet No. 7 in F sharp minor, Op. 108(1960); Quartet No. 8 in C minor,
Op. 110 (1960); Quartet No. 15 in E flat minor, Op. 144 (1974)**

Beethoven Quartet/Consonance 81-3006 [68:39/AAD]

Quartet No. 3 in E, Op. 73 (1946); Quartet No. 6 in G, Op. 101 (1956)

Beethoven Quartet/Consonance 81-3007 [55:31/AAD]

**Quartet No. 12 in D flat, Op. 133 (1968); Quartet No. 13 in B flat minor,
Op. 138 (1970); Quartet No. 14 in F sharp, Op. 142 (1973)**

Beethoven Quartet/Consonance 81-3008 [69:32/AAD]

**Quartet No. 9 in E flat, Op. 117 (1964); Quartet No. 10 in A flat,
Op. 118 (1964); Quartet No. 11 in F minor, Op. 122 (1966)**

Beethoven Quartet/Consonance 81-3009 [60:49/AAD]

**Complete String Quartets (1938-1974);
*Piano Quintet in G minor, Op. 57 (1940);
Prelude and Scherzo, Op. 11 (1925-6)

Borodin Quartet with *Sviatoslav Richter and **Prokofiev Quartet BMG 74321 40711-2 [411:10/ADD]

The Beethoven Quartet - Dmitry Tsiganov (violin I), Vasily Shirinsky (violin II), Vadim Borisovsky (viola), and Sergei Shirinsky (cello) - premiered almost all of Shostakovich's quartets and he dedicated four of them to the ensemble's individual members (respectively: Twelve, Eleven, Thirteen, and Fourteen). The group were likewise usually the first to record the quartets for vinyl release. Made from 1956 onwards, the present Ostankino radio performances offer an almost complete record of their relationship with this cycle. (Only the Fifth Quartet is missing.)

Sadly, except for searching versions of the late quartets, these recordings must be considered mainly of historical interest. There are two major drawbacks. The first is the Beethovens' fast speeds, which often give the impression of depthlessness and sometimes disrupt the structural coherence of the music (e.g., the shifting relationships of time-signature and note-value in the finale of the Ninth Quartet). This may have been due to the influence of the composer, whose speeds often tended to the hectic; there again, it might have been a by-product of recording for radio or even merely a question of familiarity breeding impatience. When Shostakovich joined the Beethovens to record the Piano Quintet in 1955, the result was a brisk 29-minute reading. Yet the same forces in 1940 [Multisonic 31 0179-2] produced a very different version nearly eight minutes longer - similar, in fact, to the Borodins and Richter in 1984. Furthermore, the later performances in this series (from the Eleventh onwards, with new personnel) calm down considerably. Indeed, the Fifteenth (recorded in 1975) is unusually slow and deliberate.

The second drawback is recording quality, which tends to be harsh, boomy, and occasionally even simply faulty. Often Tsiganov is recorded too close for comfort and with little body to his sound, making for uncomfortable listening. The Second Quartet (taped in 1956) suffers from a particularly poor production, including a low-level background signal which spoils the closing movements. This is even worse in the Fourth Quartet, where a loud hum ruins the second movement. From the Seventh Quartet onwards, these quite obtrusive sound problems decrease.

Despite an unusually reverberant acoustic, which glaringly envelopes the climax of the finale, the Third Quartet comes off well, as do the Sixth and Seventh. Here the Beethovens' fast speeds seem less intrinsically lightweight, while certain details are special indeed, hinting at the close proximity of Shostakovich himself, watching and transmitting his feelings to the players. (E.g., the ferocious attack on the first note of the *passacaglia* in the Third Quartet; a witheringly intense "Recitative and Romance" in the epic Second; the characteristic *pizzicato* passages in the opening movement of the intimate Seventh.) The fact remains, though, that the Consonance series is of interest mainly to students of performing tradition in this repertoire.

Allowing that the Beethoven Quartet were genuinely respected by Shostakovich, they were regarded by their younger Soviet contemporaries as something of an official ensemble, and looked on slightly askance because of that. The Borodin Quartet, on the other hand, though "ideologically" at odds with each other behind the facade, were more in tune with the unofficial side of Shostakovich's art. Indeed, if

Rostislav Dubinsky's [autobiography](#) (*St ormy Applause: Making Music In A Workers' State*, 1989) is anything to go by, the Borodins occasionally enjoyed a closer rapport with the composer.

Many feel that it is this rapport which makes the Borodins' first (incomplete) recording of the Shostakovich quartet cycle (Melodiya/HMV, 1962-67) superior to both their second recording (Melodiya/HMV, 1978-84) and their Nineties issues on Virgin Classics and Teldec. Between the first and second cycles, two founder members, Dubinsky and Yaroslav Alexandrov, departed, leaving Dmitri Shebalin (viola) and Valentin Berlinsky (cello) to recruit Mikhail Kopelman (violin I) and Andrei Abramnikov (violin II). The line-up which made the second cycle was not the one Shostakovich got drunk and joked with after concerts. This reformed group is nonetheless formidable, and its second cycle, here reissued by BMG after EMI's lease on it expired at the end of 1995, remains outstanding.

For the reissue, Hugh Ottaway's learned but imperceptive notes are replaced by an informed and penetrating commentary by Sigrid Neef, while the recordings are remastered using 20-bit digital processing. Bizarrely, this "no noise" spring-clean has added a faint hiss to the 1984 analogue Eighth Quartet. Otherwise we get a more "live" and immediate acoustic, unsmoothed by reverb, and a more full-bodied, three-dimensional sound at higher level. Those with the facility to compare, and the money to invest in the same cycle twice, will find these effects displayed most dramatically in the live recording, with Richter, of the Piano Quintet (wrongly given on the sleeve as composed in 1945) - although the way the remastered opening crescendo of the Fourth Quartet replaces the original's shrill wiriness with a truly unison timbre of real depth is even more remarkable. With a chronological layout and the addition of a superb Opus 11 by the original Borodins with the Prokofiev Quartet from 1964, this set returns to top choice in this repertoire.

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REVIEW



SHOSTAKOVICH

Symphony No. 1 in F minor, Opus 10 (1924-5)

Concerto for Piano, Trumpet, and Strings in C minor, Opus 35 (1933)

Mihail Rudy, piano; Ole Edvard Antonsen, trumpet

Berlin Philharmonic Orchestra cond. Mariss Jansons

EMI Classics 555361-2 [55:51 DDD]

What an astounding work Shostakovich's [First Symph ony](#) is. No wonder the audience gaped when they saw its schoolboy author stumble out to take his gawky bows at the première. Not only is the work's command of the orchestra masterful, but it is beyond doubt one of the great tragic symphonies - indeed, the last in the romantic style (much as the contemporary *Turandot* was the last of the grand operas). Shostakovich was not quite as young as David Fanning's sleeve note claims when he started the symphony - the Glivenko letters give this as around 1st February 1924, with possible restarts in October and November; Fanning suggests 1st July 1923 - yet the fact remains that, by any normal measure, he was a mere stripling. Reconciling this with the vast strength of feeling and vertiginous imagination he displays in this most dazzling of compositional debuts is almost impossible. It is an overwhelming piece, and any performance which does not leave its listeners stunned and tearful simply isn't worth having.

Mariss Jansons does not let us down. Particularly in the slow movement, this is a reading of gripping power, aided by one of the most stupendous recordings ever applied to Shostakovich's music. In fact, so precise is the Berlin Philharmonic's articulation and so clear, full, and three-dimensional the production, that when we hear a slightly ragged entry (or imperfect edit?) in the first movement (7:53), it jolts us. To tell the truth, the sound on

this disc is of such ostentatious "demonstration quality" that it often threatens to tear our attention away from the music, turning drama into sonic spectacle. (The percussion, in particular, are *de trop*.) Yet such is the force and continuity of Jansons' conception that, most of the time, production and performance harmonise to great effect. While I would not be without Bernstein's version on Sony (SMK 47614), Jansons' is certainly worth stashing alongside him.

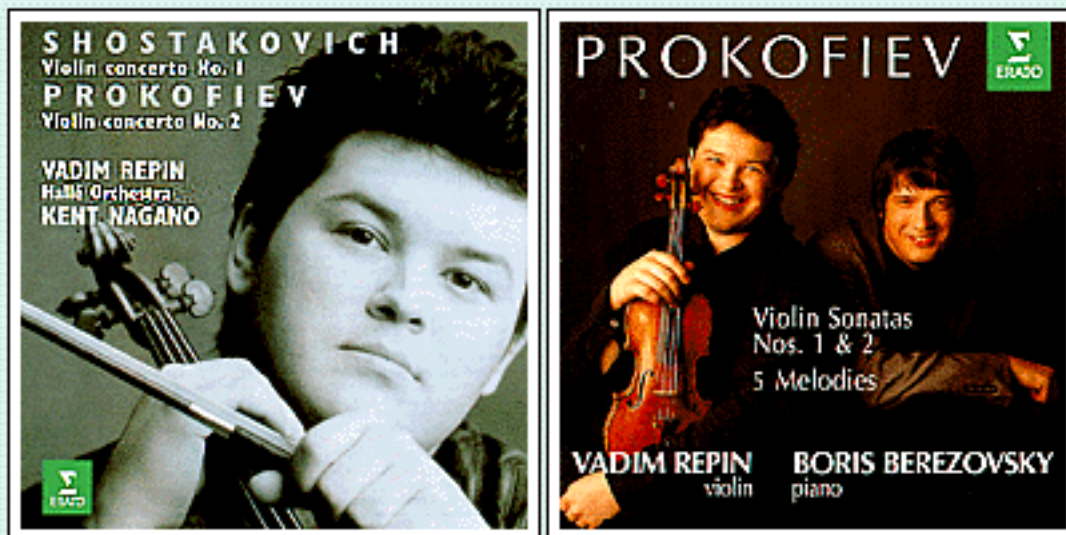
The First Piano Concerto is not such a clear-cut success. Mikhail Rudy is too inward an artist to bring off the slapstick with quite the right Tommy Cooper touch, while he and Jansons make too much of a glamorous meal of the slow movement's wistful pathos. Despite this, there are plenty of tremendous passages, especially when Antonsen is around, and, again, the production provides a superb balance, allowing every corner of the score full audibility.

Signalled by his fine coupling of the Sixth and Ninth symphonies (EMI 754339-2), this disc confirms Mariss Jansons' promise as a Shostakovichian.

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REVIEW



PROKOFIEV

Violin Concerto No. 2 in G minor, Opus 63 (1935)

SHOSTAKOVICH

Violin Concerto No. 1 in A minor, Opus 99 (1947-8)

Vadim Repin, violin

Hallé Orchestra cond. Kent Nagano

Erato 0630-10696-2 [58:59/DDD]

PROKOFIEV

Violin Sonata No. 1 in F minor, Opus 80 (1938-46)

Violin Sonata No. 2 in D major, Opus 94b (1943/44)

5 Melodies, Opus 35b (1920/25)

Vadim Repin, violin; Boris Berezovsky, piano

Erato 0630-10698-2 [62:33/DDD]

Violinist Vadim Repin (born Novosibirsk, 1971) follows Maxim Vengerov (born Novosibirsk, 1974) into the Western musical arena with an outstanding coupling of a Prokofiev concerto with Shostakovich's First. (Vengerov's disc, replacing Prokofiev's Second with his First, features him with the LSO under Rostropovich [Teldec 4509-98143-2].) As with Vengerov, Repin knows what he thinks about these scores and his way with the Prokofiev is fascinating.

This work owes its popularity to the aria-like theme of its *Andante* - yet it's otherwise a mysterious piece: restless and dark and provocatively abrupt in its ending. Emphasising

the dissonance of the solo double-stopping, Repin plays the concerto "in context" - which is to say: as the product of a period, prior to the composer's fateful final move back to the USSR, in which his enemies in the Composers' Union were stirring animosity against him, claiming that his avowed intent of seeking a "new simplicity" in his music insulted the Soviet People, whilst (simultaneously!) attacking him for élitism. At the Composers' Union early in 1935, the principles of Socialist Realism had, for the first time, been pitched against those of bourgeois individualism and formalism. The Second Violin Concerto was composed a few months later. Arguably the childish pedantic flute arpeggios which Prokofiev uses to accompany the first statement of the "aria" theme are a satirical reply to his proletarian critics (mostly the same zealots that had savaged his ballet *Le pas d'acier* eight years earlier). If this is so, the change, for the restatement, to romantically sustained string chords becomes a further step in Prokofiev's "argument" with the forces of musical reductionism in 1930s Russia.

Once one starts to listen to the concerto in this way, its enigmatic restlessness becomes less arbitrary. The shadowy, evasive opening movement takes on the tone of the darker episodes in the narrative drama the composer was writing at the same time: *Romeo and Juliet*. (He seems to have designed this ballet to bypass his enemies by appealing over their heads to ordinary listeners with music which offered instant appeal without forfeiting expressive sophistication.) Similarly the bass-drum which paces the solo part throughout the rhythmically irregular finale begins to sound like a somewhat sinister ringmaster. In other words, the satire is integral. Repin is alive to all this and Nagano supports him with his usual attention to timbre and characterisation in the orchestral parts.

Cunningly suggestive in the Prokofiev, Repin blazes with passion in the Shostakovich, turning in a reading of unusual quickness (particularly in the scherzo, where Nagano and the Hallé nevertheless manage a performance of breathtaking accuracy and clarity). Moving more propulsively than usual in the Nocturne and Passacaglia, Repin does not achieve Oistrakh's depth of feeling [Le Chant du Monde LDC 278882-2], but scorches in the climactic passages, where he communicates an absolute certainty of what the music is saying. If the laser intensity of Leonid Kogan [Russian Disc RDCD 11025] shines brighter here, Repin's recording of this great concerto is nonetheless among the very best.

Sleevenote writers always introduce Prokofiev's grimly tragic F minor sonata by bringing up the composer's allusion to Handel. Yet, while there are technical justifications for this, it's an absurdly trivial aspect of a piece conceived at the height of Stalin's Terror and quite obviously a direct musical reflection on this. Far from idle fantasy, the famous "wind in a

graveyard" passage in the first movement is intimately linked to the enormous boom in grave-digging which occurred around this time, while the three dominant bass Cs in the second and fourth movements are as explicit a projection of Stalinist brutality in musical terms as anything in Shostakovich's output. Repin and Berezovsky stress this brutality, contrasting it, by means of extreme dynamics, with the wanly elegiac moods elsewhere. Only at the beginning of the third movement is there any hint of technical insecurity (Berezovsky's flowing accompaniment figure). Otherwise, this is a thoroughly convincing reading as completely in touch with the music's meaning as, for example, Gidon Kremer's bizarrely self-regarding performance with Martha Argerich [Deutsche Grammophon 431803-2] is most certainly not.

Adapted from a flute-and-piano original composed as light relief from war-time work on *War and Peace* and *Ivan the Terrible*, the D major sonata is resolutely droll and radiant. Here, Repin and Berezovsky wisely decline to sentimentalise the dotted-rhythm secondary theme of the first movement, instead ironically inflecting it as an insouciant Parisian amble. Recurring in the jazzy sextuplets of the third movement, this Gallic flavour naturally dominates the *Cinq Mélodies*. All of these performances are perfectly idiomatic and delightfully brought off. For the sonata coupling, Repin and Berezovsky go to the head of the current class, their only plausible rivals being Ashkenazy and Perlman [RCA Victor Red Seal 09026-61454-2] and Mordkovitch and Oppitz [Chandos CHAN 8398].

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REVIEW



SHOSTAKOVICH

Six Romances on Texts by Japanese Poets, Opus 21 (1928/1931/1932)

***Six Poems of Marina Tsvetayeva, Opus 143a (1973-4)**

****Suite on Verses of Michelangelo Buonarroti, Opus 145a (1974)**

Ilya Levinsky, tenor; *Elena Zarembo contralto; **Sergei Leiferkus, baritone

Gothenburg Symphony Orchestra cond. Neeme Järvi

Deutsche Grammophon 447085-2 [71:06/DDD]

With this disc, Järvi completes his two-volume edition of Shostakovich's orchestral songs. The first, issued in 1974, consisted of 2 *Fables of Krylov*, Opus 4 (1922), 3 *Romances on Poems by Pushkin*, Opus 46a (1937), 6 *Romances on Verses by English Poets*, Opus 62/140 (1942/71), and *From Jewish Folk Poetry*, Opus 79a (1948/63). (Mainly devoted to the composer's sardonic side, it might also have contained Boris Tishchenko's orchestration of the 5 *Satires* of 1960.) Volume 2, by contrast, is almost entirely nocturnal and tragic in tone.

Only one previous recording of the *Japanese Romances* exists - a version on Melodiya, unissued in the West, made in 1982 by Gennadi Rozhdestvensky with Alexei Maslennikov and the USSR Ministry of Culture Symphony Orchestra. A work dedicated to Shostakovich's first wife Nina, this six-song cycle was composed fragmentarily over a five-year period during the turbulent era of the Cultural Revolution. Lost love and death are its dominant themes, and the music is suitably sombre. Mahler's *Das Lied von der Erde* must have been an influence, and, in fact, an accompaniment figure from *Der Abschied* crops up in the first song. By the final numbers, the style is less lush, more Stravinskyian. Levinsky acquits himself well, without drawing attention to himself, while the orchestral

accompaniment and production here, as throughout the disc, are alike exceptionally good. (This is one of Järvi's best Shostakovich recordings.)

Similarly, Elena Zaremba does not quite penetrate the Tsvetayeva songs (one hopes some day for an artist of Brigitte Fassbaender's dramatic tenacity), but nor does she undersell the music. In this great cycle - arguably a finer work than the more celebrated Michelangelo suite - Järvi and his orchestra rise to the occasion with sumptuous and stunning playing. The world-class voice of Sergei Leiferkus receives similarly superb backing in Opus 145a, here delivering the outstanding vocal performance of a highly recommendable recital issue.

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REVIEW



SHOSTAKOVICH
The Limpid Stream, Opus 39 (1935)
Royal Stockholm Philharmonic Orchestra
cond. Gennady Rozhdestvensky
Chandos CHAN 9423 [68:31/DDD]

Rozhdestvensky's final volume in his series of Shostakovich's ballet scores features the legendary work which, along with the opera *Lady Macbeth*, was officially castigated in *Pravda* in January 1936, leading to Shostakovich's "unpersoning" and relegation to the background of the Soviet music scene. This demotion, which occurred at the height of Stalin's Terror, was no laughing matter and the composer's return to official favour with his Fifth Symphony occurred in spite of the attitude of Stalin's *apparat*, which remained hostile.

Shostakovich's brief in *The Limpid Stream* was to produce a score suitable for a scenario of almost parodistic naivety set in the Kuban wheat-fields. Whether the librettist Adrian Piotrovsky - author of the TRAM play *Rule, Britannia!* for which Shostakovich wrote incidental music in 1931 - harboured any tongue-in-cheek intent with his conflictless Socialist Realist plot is unknown. (He was purged and executed in 1938.) On the other hand, we may certainly infer irony on the part of Shostakovich, who "wrote" an article in 1935 apologising to proletarian critics for the regrettable lack of solemnity in his previous ballets and acknowledging that "the portrayal of socialist reality in ballet is a very serious business" - before composing a score of pure candyfloss tinted with his usual facetious tonal derangements.

Shostakovich probably had a little fun with parts of *The Limpid Stream* and its success with Leningrad audiences during 1935 may have persuaded him that, despite his failure to fulfill his vow to keep a straight face on this occasion, he had managed to strike something approximating an acceptable note. Not that he had tried terribly hard. The full-length score contains many repetitions and some bolstering material imported from *The Golden Age* and *The Bolt*, while much of the rest is lightweight to the point of non-existence. Rozhdestvensky solves this by dropping the duplicated music, cutting 44 numbers to 29. (These divisions bear no relation to those given by Derek Hulme in his Shostakovich catalogue.) The result is a 70-minute score.

Several of the movements here - notably the Waltz - will already be known to those familiar with the Ballet Suites 1-3. As for the rest there are few real surprises, but probably enough from which to fashion a tolerable suite. One inclusion would have to be Rozhdestvensky's No. 12 (Hulme's No. 7), a scene portraying the end of work in the fields which, far from joyous, rises to a menacing fortissimo climax via a startlingly aggressive passage over pounding drums which anticipates a section of the first movement of the Twelfth Symphony. Also of interest is the grotesque satirical portrayal of two elderly summer residents (bassoon and contrabassoon) in Rozhdestvensky's No. 33 (Hulme's No. 15). This is the *passacaglia* theme recycled for full orchestra in the grim Introduction to Ballet Suite No. 4 (1953). (See Järvi's recording, coupled with the Tenth Symphony, Chandos CHAN 8630.) What, one wonders, is the story behind this tantalising transformation - and when did it take place: in the 1930s or the early 1950s?

Most of *The Limpid Stream* is functional stuff of the sort Shostakovich could turn out in his sleep. Conceivably it closely matched Fyodor Lopukhov's choreography. If so, it will be a pity if it turns out that this choreography is lost, since the way Shostakovich used sound to counterpoint visual events ought to be of interest to certain ponderous American academics of my acquaintance. Is this disc worth buying? Only if you're a fan who must have everything. But for a few exceptions, the music is feeble and, while well recorded, the performance is sometimes less than sufficiently sparkling.

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SMART BUY



SHOSTAKOVICH
Symphony No. 10 in E minor, Opus 93 (1953)
Hallé Orchestra cond. Stanislaw Skrowaczewski
IMP Classics PCD 2043 [51:37/DDD]

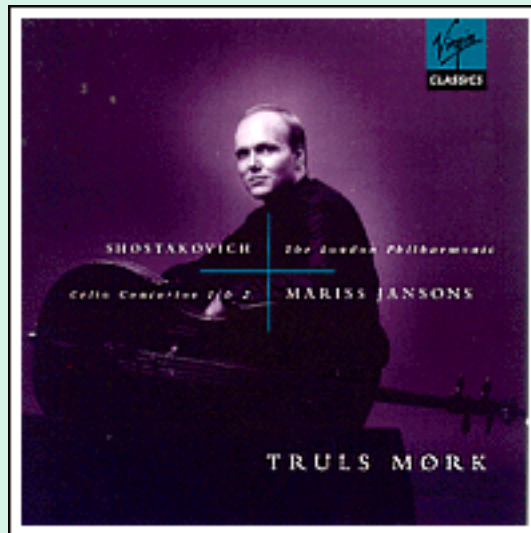
Anyone on a tight budget building a basic Shostakovich collection in digital sound should try this "super-bargain" reissue of a disc first released in 1991. Apart from Mravinsky [Saga EC3366-2, rec. 1954, mono], there's nothing to touch it in this cheapest of price brackets. In fact, this performance is arguably more convincing than any current full-price offering. In its general range, only Karajan's 1966 version on Deutsche Grammophon [429716-2] competes, but this mid-price reissue is more expensive and its CD transfer is unsatisfactory.

Skrowaczewski, the Hallé's principle guest conductor before the arrival of Kent Nagano, was a Polish-born musician who, having conducted the Warsaw National Philharmonic in the late 1950s, made his Western reputation with the Minnesota (Minneapolis) Orchestra during 1960-79. (See various reissued Mercury recordings of the 1960s.) He began his career as a pianist before his hands were damaged during an air-raid in wartime Lvov. Having studied under Nadia Boulanger in Paris after the war, he went on to become a prize-winning composer of, among other works, four symphonies. But it was as a conductor that Skrowaczewski found his true vocation, particularly with the Hallé, with whom he recorded a fêted Brahms symphony cycle as well as outstanding versions of the Fourth symphonies of Bruckner and Mahler. (The conductor's Shostakovich Fifth [PCD 2018] is, alas, not as commendable as his Tenth.)

Skrowaczewski's conception of Shostakovich's Tenth is fiery and propulsive. Only Mravinsky's definitive (but "historical") première recording compares in this respect, the similarly full-tilt version by Christoph von Dohnanyi with the Cleveland Orchestra (Decca) disqualifying itself by its over-heated rhetoric. Paying close attention to markings and stressing dissonances which other conductors lose in the overall texture, Skrowaczewski is a minute or two faster than Karajan in the opening movement, but this only shows in its coda, which lacks a measure of repose. His scherzo is fast and savage, but also unusually clear. In the Allegretto, he is the only conductor to attempt a radical accelerando in the penultimate passage, whipping the orchestra into a hysterical crescendo which strains ensemble but nonetheless memorably makes its point. The finale is one of the best on disc. IMP's production is both wide-ranging and realistic.

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REVIEW



SHOSTAKOVICH
Cello Concerto No. 1 in E flat major, Op. 107 (1959)
Cello Concerto No. 2, Op. 126 (1966)
Truls Mørk (cello)
The London Philharmonic cond. Mariss Jansons
Virgin Classics VC545145-2 [65:56 DDD]

That *all* of Shostakovich's music is, in a sense, vocal is nowhere plainer than in his cello concertos, where the sighs and curses of the soloist contrast with the harsh laughter and Bosch-like leers of the woodwind. Indeed, the clearer the composer's meaning becomes in such works, the more emotionally unbearable they seem. Interviewed by Elizabeth Wilson, Sofia Gubaidulina has reflected sombrely on the period of the First Cello Concerto's creation: "The circumstances he lived under were unbearably cruel, more than anyone should have to endure." Marina Sabinina recalls Shostakovich behaving "like a frenzied maniac" shortly after being forced to read an official speech to the Composers' Union in 1956. "I read," he repeatedly shrieked, "like the most paltry wretch, a parasite, a puppet, a cut-out paper doll on a string!" That grotesque episodes like this are part of the nightmare world of the First Cello Concerto's outer movements does not require much acumen to discern.

Shostakovich's musical model for his First Cello Concerto was Prokofiev's Symphony-Concerto (1952), an enigmatic revision of the composer's already revised First Cello Concerto, which had reached its final form during the Terror in 1938. Apart from reworked material, the main common factor between the two works was Mstislav Rostropovich, whose première recording of Shostakovich's First Cello Concerto with the

Philadelphia Orchestra under Eugene Ormandy (Sony CD44850) remains outstanding. Rostropovich's character and abilities must have played a part in shaping the work. What Shostakovich was driving at in general is a different question. Evgeny Chukovsky reports him as saying "I took a simple theme and tried to develop it." As a summary of the First Cello Concerto, this is so clearly inadequate that we must assume he was referring to one section of it (the first movement), or - more probably - that he was being deliberately evasive. (That he wished to keep his head down over this work is obvious from the finale's allusion to the Georgian folk-song "Suliko" - so carefully buried that even Rostropovich didn't notice it until Shostakovich pointed it out to him.)

Shostakovich referred to the work's opening movement as "an ironic march". As André Lischke notes, this is an extremely euphemistic description: "The irony rapidly becomes mordant sarcasm emphasised by the caustic and raw timbres of the woodwinds and the aggressive mottoes in the solo part. A particularly spectacular passage in the recapitulation is the duo of the soloist with the horn, *a dramatic confrontation suggestive of scenographical visions.*" (My italics.) Of the similarly "ironic" finale, Lischke comments: "Gaunt, harsh, rhythmic, it could very well bear the imprint of hints of the terrible years in Shostakovich's life. It is certainly not by chance that shortly after the beginning we hear the strings playing the opening phrase of a well-known tune, 'Suliko' (E flat repeated, C, D flat, E flat), which gained notoreity from having been Stalin's favourite song. The fact that Shostakovich quoted it in its entirety in his satirical cantata *Rayok* to caricature the Little Father of the People, tends to confirm the real intention behind its presence here." (For details, see Wilson, *Shostakovich Remembered*, pp. 477-79.)

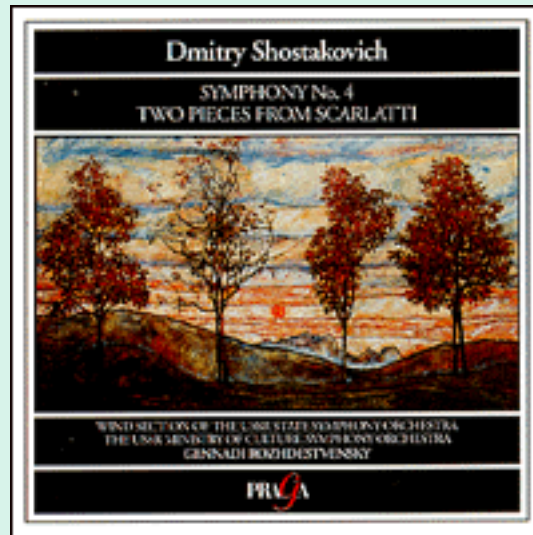
Truls Mork and Mariss Jansons approach the outer movements with a driving attack, blurred slightly at fortissimo by a bass-heavy balance. Tempo for the *moderato* is slow, picking up as the movement progresses. Mork, though, sounds as if he's playing from the outside, his phrasing gestural and his tone undifferentiated. Much the same occurs in the Second Cello Concerto, which falls a long way short of Rostropovich's première recording with Ozawa (DG Galleria 431475-2). There are no tokens of insight here, such as, for example, Ivan Monighetti brings to the shudders of revulsion after the climax of the work's finale (9:45) in his Chant du Monde recording (LDC 278 1099).

Couplings of Shostakovich cello concertos are becoming more common, but it's not easy to make clear recommendations. Schiff, the normal choice, is somewhat stolid. Maisky and Tilsson Thomas have won good opinions for their 1995 version on Deutsche Grammophon. (I've not heard it.) However, if you don't need digital sound, Rostropovich's

live recordings with the USSR Symphony Orchestra under Yevgeny Svetlanov on Russian Disc (RDCD 11109) are hard to beat. Recorded in the bitter dawn of Brezhnev's repression, these performances are as acerbic as Kondrashin's 1969 Prague reading of the Eighth Symphony. Here projected with astonishing vehemence, the finale of the First Concerto explodes at an almost unplayable pace. If wobbly horns and a backward solo image put this pairing off-limits for beginners, devotees will be gripped, illuminated, and shaken by these blazing performances.

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REVIEW



SHOSTAKOVICH

Symphony No. 4 in C minor, Opus 43 (1935-6)

***Two Scarlatti Pieces, Op. 17 (1928)**

USSR Ministry of Culture Symphony Orchestra

***USSR State Symphony Orchestra Wind Section**

cond. Gennadi Rozhdestvensky

Praga PR 250090 [73:40/ADD]

Rozhdestvensky's third version of the [Fourth Symphony](#) to be issued on CD is at once his most extreme and most compelling. His view of the work has always been marked by vivid characterisation among the wind instruments, especially during the "divertissement" section of the finale (where, in a passage which conceivably represents Shostakovich's censure at the Composers' Union in 1936, the conductor discloses an extraordinary gallery of Dickensian grotesques). This consciously dramatic approach applies more than ever to the present issue. Mahler wrote symphonies which took up whole evenings - more like symphonic "happenings" than anything his forerunners in the idiom would have recognised. When Rozhdestvensky conducts Shostakovich's Fourth, we hear the stirrings of another (sadly stillborn) new genre: "symphony-theatre" - a hybrid of symphony and stage music which proceeds in a sequence of tableaux, loosely organised by sonata principles and marked by a high incidence of solo or chamber music groupings, as if embodying dialogues, dances, and snatches of song played out before the backdrop of the main orchestra.

Rozhdestvensky's recorded attempts on this symphony, which clearly holds an abiding fascination for him, have hitherto bristled with personality but suffered either from

eccentric engineering or an occasional loss of ensemble in *tutti* passages. His 1984 version with the USSR Ministry of Culture Symphony Orchestra (Olympia OCD 156) is garishly spotlit and reverbed in the unrealistic style favoured by Russian producers; yet anyone who can put up with weirdly haloed high strings, ballooning solo instruments, and sometimes leisurely tempos, will learn a lot about the score from this disc.

Rozhdestvensky's second release, a "live" 1981 recording with, appropriately, the Bolshoi Theatre Orchestra (Russian Disc RDCD 11190) is just as prone to production quirks, but more impulsively Kondrashin-like in attack. Were it not for the fact that ensemble keeps coming unstuck at *fortissimo* - muddling some of Shostakovich's greatest orchestral coups - this would be the only convincing rival to Kondrashin (Melodiya 74321-198402). As it is, Rozhdestvensky is uniquely in touch with the composer's satirical streak and again obtains some stunning characterisations from his wind players.

The new version from Praga, which finds Rozhdestvensky back with the USSR Ministry of Culture Symphony Orchestra in a Czech concert broadcast of 1985, is as bizarre as its predecessors in terms of production, the violins often sounding as if recorded in an adjoining railway terminus. It is also, at times, peculiarly slack in tempo (e.g., the finale's opening slow-march and 3/4 allegro sections), while the audience is loudly cough-prone and erupts in raucous applause before the last note has faded. Despite these drawbacks, this is a fascinating performance which will absorb anyone who especially loves this symphony (which means those who already possess, at the very least, the classic Kondrashin version).

Never has this symphony seemed more Kafkaesque, nor its "symphony-theatre" concept more riveting. So hypnotic is Rozhdestvensky's concentration that the audience's rasps and splutters, which break out on cue between movements, quickly die away as the music grips their attention. Tempi are often slowed so as to point up nuances of phrasing, timbre, and balance - and here the clarity of effect is positively hallucinatory. It is as if, in a sinister twilight, Mahlerian unease blends with the harlequin world of *Pulcinella*. (The neoclassical influence of Stravinsky is underlined by the filler, Shostakovich's wind-band orchestrations of two Scarlatti sonatas, which, anticipating the symphony, treat each contrapuntal strand as an individual voice with its own character.)

The antithesis of the delusory "pure music" approach to Shostakovich - as demonstrated, for example, by Eliahu Inbal's limp reading on Denon - this performance shows Rozhdestvensky producing fresh insights from every corner of an astounding score. Very different in pace and stress from Kondrashin's, this reading often gets in deeper and, at its

best, makes his solutions seem, imaginatively, somewhat superficial. Though not a first - and certainly not an only - buy, this is well worth considering if you put music ahead of top quality sound and can afford two or more recordings.

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REVIEW



SHOSTAKOVICH

Golden Mountains, suite Op. 30a (1931/36)

Maxim Trilogy (Vyborg District), suite 50a (1934-5/1936-7/1938/1961)

Berlin Radio Symphony Orchestra and Choir cond. Mikhail Jurowski

Capriccio 10561 [56:18/DDD]

SHOSTAKOVICH

Soja (Zoya), suite Op. 64a (1944)

The Fall of Berlin, suite 82a (1949)

German Symphony Orchestra, Berlin cond. Mikhail Jurowski

Capriccio 10405 [61:46/DDD]

During the 1980s, when Western critics were still struggling to interpret Shostakovich as a "populist" and part-time "propagandist" for Communism, his film music was seen as a sincere body of work earnestly created by a Soviet believer in the People's art of cinema. Not to be outdone in earnestness, such writers bent over backwards to take Shostakovich's film music seriously, despite the fact that he wrote most of it under various forms of duress, and that consequently 90% of it is rubbish.

Shostakovich's interest in cinema was genuine but discriminating. He did not, for example, relish writing music for such Stalin hagiographies as Mikhail Chiaureli's *The Fall of Berlin* - but he had no choice. At several points in his career (notably after his public denunciations in 1936 and 1948), cinema work was virtually all he could get. Even passing moments of uncertainty would find him hiding in the neutral territory of the film

score, churning out accompaniments to patriotic battles and heroic posturings from all periods of Russian history. Most of this music consists of bombastic ceremonial perorations, episodes of folksy chintz, sentimental waltzes, Disneyesque vocalises, and funeral or triumphal marches of pompous, cymbal-crashing banality. Yet this is how the Soviet man in the street knew Shostakovich, if he knew him at all. His success at providing obvious music to obvious images (and throwing in a song or a waltz which caught the ear) created his popular image in the USSR. No conception of Shostakovich is complete if it omits this aspect of his career, however negligible the music associated with it. Apart from anything else, it was the composer's demotic touch which made him useful to "Socialism" in the eyes of the Communist leadership. Indeed, it was probably Shostakovich's exploits on celluloid soundtracks which commended him to Stalin and may even have kept him alive when others close to him were perishing.

Arising from projects which he believed in (or, at the very least, tickled his imagination), Shostakovich's better film scores - *New Babylon* (1929), *The Gadfly* (1955), *Hamlet* (1964), and *King Lear* (1970) - are already fairly well known in the West. Capriccio's "Original Motion Picture" Shostakovich series so far consists of five releases, only two of which are currently available outside Germany and which are those reviewed here. The others (which presumably will be issued presently) are: *New Babylon/Five Days, Five Nights* [10341/42], *King Lear* [10397], and *Hamlet/The Gadfly* [10298].

In all, Shostakovich composed music for [34 films](#). The earliest work here - the suite from the film *Golden Mountains* (1931), assembled by the composer in 1936 - has been issued on CD twice before: in a recording by the Belgian Radio Symphony Orchestra under José Serebrier (along with the suites from *Michurin* and *The Fall of Berlin* [RCA Victor Red Seal RK60226]) and in a version by the USSR Ministry of Culture Orchestra conducted by Gennadi Rozhdestvensky (coupled with *New Babylon* [Russian Disc RCCD 11064]). Serebrier's version, which omits the waltz, is part of a three-volume series distinguished by clueless sleeve notes, lifeless recordings, and performances that make ditchwater seem interesting. By comparison, Jurowski acquits himself with honour and is well recorded with a walloping percussion section which film buffs will particularly enjoy.

A big hit in the USSR, *Golden Mountains* was Shostakovich's third film and, despite its propagandist plot (about a peasant "awakening" to revolutionary consciousness in St Petersburg), he was still interested enough in the medium to experiment. The most salient example of this is a 7-minute fugue for organ and orchestra which caused excited comment in 1931. Jurowski's reading of this bastard son of the passacaglia in *Lady*

Macbeth is comparatively reserved, although spectacularly recorded; Rozhdestvensky is more convincingly full-tilt, although less clearly produced and vitiated by tuning problems. Collectors of Shostakovich's popular hits will want to hear the Waltz; those on the lookout for echoes of his symphonic style will be fascinated by the tense Intermezzo, with its anticipation of the opening movement of the Eleventh Symphony. (Whether *Golden Mountains* concerns the 1905 period is unknown. Frustratingly, the sleevenote writer, who has done no research, cannot help us here.) The rest of the score is workaday stuff. (When Shostakovich hurriedly put together the suite in 1936, he could not even be bothered to write a short coda to the Finale, instead simply dropping in the already slapdash closing bars of his Third Symphony.)

The so-called suite from the "Maxim Trilogy", which accompanies *Golden Mountains* on the new Capriccio issue, actually consists of the Prologue from *Maxim's Youth* (1934-5) plus Lev Atoumyan's 1961 suite Opus 50a supposedly from the third of the Maxim films, *Vyborg District* (1938). (This picture is also known as *The Vyborg Side*, districts in Russian cities being referred to as "sides" according to which other cities they face). In fact, only one of the numbers in Opus 50a is drawn from the score for *Vyborg District*: No. 8, the Overture. The rest consists of five numbers (2, 3, 4, 6, 7) from the second of the Maxim films, *Maxim's Return* (1936-7), and two from *The Unforgettable Year 1919* (1951). Presumably Atoumyan imported the last two items because of the revolutionary songs they contain. This is unfortunate since they are composed in the faceless style of the era of Stalin worship after the Second World War, and, as such, clash with the uproarious irreverence of most of the rest of the music, written during the 1930s.

In the "Maxim Trilogy", Shostakovich was working with friends - Grigori Kozintsev and Leonid Trauberg - and clearly felt relaxed enough to have fun. The Prologue from *Maxim's Youth* is typical: a rumbustious march which, Ives-like, runs simultaneously with a fairground waltz before diverting into a jolly music-hall song (sung here by Svetlana Katchur). The fugue in the "Attack" scene from *Maxim's Return* is short but vintage Shostakovich. Without the intrusions from *The Unforgettable Year 1919*, this suite would be a perfectly acceptable representation of Shostakovich's film music of the mid-to-late 1930s. As it is, Jurowski's selection is well performed and, while not for generalists, will interest hardcore fans.

The second of these discs holds fewer attractions. The score for *Zoya* (1944) - a film by Lev Arnshtam about Zoya Kosmodemyanskaya, a girl partisan who, captured behind enemy lines near Moscow, was tortured and shot - is enlivened only by Shostakovich's

orchestration of his Prelude in E flat minor, Opus 34 No. 14, and an amusing "Hero's Victory" march which careers crazily from key to key. *The Fall of Berlin* (1949), which the composer wrote after his nadir *The Song of the Forests*, consists of bombast and false pathos in an uncharacteristic style which few would identify as Shostakovich were it not for the occasional passing references to his symphonies: the mounting intensity of the dirge "In the Ruined Village" (Eleventh Symphony: III); a brief snatch in "The Storming of the Seelov Heights" (Tenth Symphony: II); the first orchestral chord of "Scene in the Underground" (first chord of Fifth Symphony: IV).

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DMITRI SHOSTAKOVICH

CONTEMPORARY MUSIC INFORMATION CENTRE

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- The Centre is dedicated to the life and music of the most poignant composer of our century, Dmitri Dmitrievich Shostakovich. Open to researchers, musicians, students or fans worldwide, the Centre, based in the very modern Leonardo da Vinci University (Paris la Défense), makes available duplicates of the composer's family archives in addition to various other Western collections (including the world's largest audio collection of the composer's works).
 - In an attempt to add a geographical as well as artistic context to Shostakovich's vast musical heritage, the Centre takes in important documentation on other Russian musicians - interpreters and composers - from the earlier part of the 20th century as well as on young musicians from Russia today and from the former Soviet republics.
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 - The Centre's president is Mrs. Helene Ahrweiller, who was instrumental in its installation at the Leonardo da Vinci University at Courbevoie (Paris la Défense). Following an initiative by the composer's widow, Mrs. Irina Shostakovich, the "Dmitri Shostakovich International Association" has the ultimate goal of creating a "Shostakovich Foundation" which will include a music school and which will organize concerts, international competitions, and master classes.
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David Fanning (ed.). *Shostakovich Studies*.

Cambridge University Press.

[280pp. Publisher's recommended price: £37.50.]

This review, featuring a rebuttal of Richard Taruskin's polemical contentions about the Fifth Symphony made in the above book, has been combined with another article, "Fay versus Shostakovich: whose stupidity?", along with extensive additional material, into a single essay "Naive Anti-Revisionism: the academic misrepresentation of Dmitri Shostakovich". This appears in Allan B. Ho and Dmitry Feofanov's anthology *Shostakovich Reconsidered* (Toccata Press, 1998).

Those interested in reading the original review will find it in *DSCH Journal* No. 5 (Summer 1996). The original version of "Fay versus Shostakovich" can be found in *East European Jewish Affairs* Vol. 26 No. 2 (Winter 1996), available from the Institute for Jewish Policy Research, 79 Wimpole Street, London W1M 7DD.

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A reply to Frank Dudley Berry on "vector biography"

Posted in alt.fan.shostakovich
on July 6th 1995

by Ian MacDonald

Mr Berry's rejoinder to my [remarks](#) is the most substantial and well-written contribution I've seen in alt.fan.shostakovich. That contributors should begin to expand on what they feel can only be beneficial, whatever one may think of their opinions. It's good to talk, as we say in the UK.

My position is that there are no experts on Shostakovich, but that there are relative degrees of incomprehension concerning him. Mr Berry should not wonder that he is called upon to justify his observations. It doesn't matter who has written a book or who simply listens and enjoys. What matters very much is that we should speak and think responsibly when serious issues are at stake. It is a little-recognised fact that most of what is said in the West about Shostakovich is scandalously irresponsible, being based on no understanding of (nor any apparent interest in) the Soviet background. The hopeful purpose of this Web-site is, in small ways, to alleviate that situation.

Mr Berry's theory of "vector biography" is valid, there being two main classes of such work: the Hatchet-job and the Hagiography (together constituting the entirety of official Soviet literature). As for local examples, Margaret Thatcher's autobiography qualifies in that she likes to represent herself as superhumanly consistent, correct, and in control at all times. On the other hand, hers is a genuine example of a personality and life which, with its monomaniacal political ambition, fundamentally contradicts Mr Berry's model of universal chance and improvisation. The same, indeed, would have to be said of Lenin and Stalin, and, to a greater or lesser extent, of almost all authoritarian political figures. In the same way, most artists sense early in their lives what they are and bend all their energies to realising their gifts in the form of a career. In other words, the proportion of muddled chance-grabbing to calculated planning in a human life varies according to the individual.

Is *The New Shostakovich* an example of "vector biography"? The consensus of [reviewers](#) when the book appeared was the opposite. It was seen as a fair balancing of the issues in the light of what was then (1989) known about Shostakovich's life and the socio-political context within which it was led. Indeed,

some readers of *DSCH* thought I had shilly-shallied unnecessarily, overdoing my cautious equivocations in the first half of the book.

As for Russian reaction, this was uniformly friendly. Maxim Shostakovich spoke warmly to me about the book; the conductor Semyon Bychkov assured me that my evocation of the Soviet background and my assessment of Shostakovich's manoeuvrings within this milieu were accurate; the critic Andrei Navrozov wrote that *The New Shostakovich* was "a formal lesson to Western writers on post-1917 Russia, whether their subject is music or life itself"; and Vladimir Ashkenazy, who himself suffered at the hands of the KGB, enthused that "My views are identical with MacDonald's views! He really understands what happened, and he says what I said and what Rostropovich and Vishnevskaya said, and what Maxim said in the end. That's where the truth lies."

Mr Berry dismisses this sort of endorsement as intrinsically suspicious in that little of the sort was said by the Russian musical community prior to the fall of Communism in 1991. I will return to this point later. For now I should just like to point out that the view of Shostakovich and his interaction with Soviet culture which I put forward in my book is by no means isolated or idiosyncratic. Most Continental critics, quite independently, hold similar views. Furthermore, the same outlook has been broadly expressed by Kurt Sanderling, Daniel Zhitomirsky, Kyril Kondrashin, Lev Lebedinsky, Irina Shostakovich, Sofia Khentova, Yuri Temirkanov, Gennadi Rozhdestvensky, Rudolf Barshai, Rostislav Dubinsky, Marina Sabynina, Israel Nestyev, Vera Volkova, and Lev Mazel. If *The New Shostakovich* is truly "vector biography", it follows a vector emulated by a surprising number of other commentators. But let us look at Mr Berry's contentions in more detail.

(1) Mr Berry writes:

"In MacDonald's view, Shostakovich was an anti-Communist from the earliest days of his life, his career can be satisfactorily [accounted for] in those terms, and - most distressing of all - the musical content of many of his major works can be adequately described in terms of political reaction. This is a reductionism that only serves to trivialize a great composer and an inordinately complicated man."

It is untrue that I claim in *The New Shostakovich* that the composer was an anti-Communist from the earliest days of his life. What I actually say is that it is legitimate, arguing from correlations between music and background, to suggest that his lack of sympathy with Communism was lifelong. However, I did not espouse this position in 1989; nor do I now. Furthermore I've never argued that Shostakovich was a lifelong anti-Communist, which is crucially different from proposing that he never had an active sympathy for Communism.

For the record, I believe Shostakovich became actively anti-Communist in 1936-7, partly because of being "unpersoned" after the *Pravda* attacks and partly because of his experience of the Great Terror

(with a particular focus on the Tukhachevsky affair). I believed this in 1989 and attempted to convey as much in *The New Shostakovich*. As for the composer's earlier career, I proposed a complex view in which what eventually became active anti-Communism gradually evolved under the pressure of circumstances. Now that Elizabeth Wilson has published the testimonies of her various witnesses to this period of the composer's life, it has become more than legitimate to suggest that Shostakovich's lack of sympathy with Communism was lifelong; this has, in fact, become a probability. However, whether this means we can now backdate his transition to active anti-Communism to earlier than 1936-7 remains dubious. On the basis of correlations between the composer's music and its background, I would not argue this, though others might.

I have never suggested that Shostakovich's career can be satisfactorily accounted for in terms of viewing him as an anti-Communist (whether lifelong or converted in 1936-7), nor that the musical content of many of his major works can be adequately described in terms of "political reaction". What I do argue is that to leave this dimension of his mind out of critical consideration of his music is to distort the meaning of the latter so catastrophically as to vitiate further judgements made on the basis of such an exclusion. All the Russians listed above, and many of those quoted by Elizabeth Wilson, share this view (a fact which I discuss, along with its implications for modern Western music theory, in "Writing About Shostakovich", an essay to be anthologised later this year).

There is, in other words, no "reductionism" entailed here; on the contrary: an expansion of the usual, narrowly aesthetic, basis for judging music. (Again, I urge Mr Berry to read my essay [Universal Because Specific](#), where these issues are dealt with.) Trivialising Shostakovich begins when we attempt to leave the politics out of his music, as many aesthetically-based critics now do (having earlier been perfectly happy to treat him as a Communist). To ignore the politics is to eliminate the moral dimension from his art. The morality of art was central to him - and it is only when one fails to grasp this that he appears "inordinately complicated". Western observers, failing to understand the Soviet background, invariably project complications on Shostakovich which are in fact mainly complications arising from the socio-political context in which he lived and worked.

Free speech and going about unafraid of being suddenly arrested is something we in the West are so used to that it is difficult for us to identify with Shostakovich's predicament. It is because they shared this predicament, and the fear it engendered, that so many Russians hear in Shostakovich's music an evocation of experiences which they, like he, endured under Soviet Communism. Their life of whispered dissent and coded exchange needs to be understood and imagined by a Westerner before he or she can empathise with it enough to form a judgement on (for example) how "complicated" a man like Shostakovich really was. Interviewed by *DSCH* in 1992, Vladimir Ashkenazy was asked if he agreed that Shostakovich was an impenetrable enigma. He replied:

'Not, not at all. In fact, to call him an enigma, if I may say so, is if anything to simplify the issue... It is very hard for you to conceive how it was to be living in the former Soviet Union. A nightmare, really. You can become schizophrenic in the sense that you try to retain your "inner world" somehow and yet, in public, you have to be someone else. You

can't really be yourself, you can't speak your mind... So therefore just to put a stamp on Shostakovich as an enigma is simplifying the thing... He knew, I'm sure, that if he wrote *The Song of the Forests* and the Eleventh and Twelfth symphonies that he'd be able to do his own job, so to speak: "Why don't I write it. I'll pay them off! Then I can write the Thirteenth, Fourteenth, Fifteenth." But it's not an enigma!"

I submit that far from portraying Shostakovich as a lifelong anti-Communist and claiming that everything he ever wrote was conditioned by this, *The New Shostakovich* is the first attempt by a Western writer to get across to a Western audience the complexity of Shostakovich's situation under Soviet rule and the forces acting upon his art at any given juncture in his life. Not to have been systematic in pursuing this would have been spineless. The context of Shostakovich's life was consistently harsh, almost entirely because he lived in a totalitarian Communist state. Though he varied his idioms and moods with virtuosity, he had little scope for indulging inconsistency in his formative outlook since the influences which shaped this were unbendingly hostile to him.

(2) Mr Berry writes:

'DSCH was the scion of a liberal Russian family, opposed to the Czar; one would expect that the family would greet the Revolution with at least guarded enthusiasm of not outright rejoicing. The privations endured directly after the Great War and the early 20's were usually blamed on the West and counter-revolutionaries - not wholly without cause. The onset of totalitarianism came very gradually during the last years of Lenin and the early, consolidating years of Stalin.'

All "liberal" families were opposed to the Tsar, this being the definition of their liberalism. Shostakovich's family were unusual neither in this nor in being "apolitical" (according to his sister Zoya) during the early years of a revolution hijacked by a band of extremists at war with every other political faction in Russia. However, if Shostakovich (as Boris Lossky claims) wrote a piece against the dissolution of the Constituent Assembly, this sharpens his family's liberalism to something equivalent to Gorky's critical view of Lenin's regime as expressed in his *Untimely Thoughts*. (It also makes it likely, as I suggested in *The New Shostakovich*, that the composer, as a child of this kind of family, was infected with a certain amount of anti-Communism by the suppression - by his future ally Tukhachevsky - of the Kronstadt Uprising in 1921.)

As for greeting "the (October) Revolution" with "outright rejoicing", this will raise a smile from anyone who knows anything about 1917. The October coup, which ended a period of democratic freedom and plunged Russia into totalitarianism, was, at the time, a farcical scuffle applauded by nobody apart from Lenin's followers and the disaffected sailors and soldiers who sided with them.

The "privations" which Russia thereupon endured (including the loss of twenty-three million of its

citizens between 1917 and 1922), far from imposed by the West, were mainly inflicted by Lenin in his zeal to enforce "the cruellest revolutionary terror" (sic). Bourgeois families who had the ill luck to encounter Lenin's Cheka had no illusions that the "privations" they suffered were wreaked on them by Western imperialists. Totalitarianism arrived with Lenin and was imposed by him immediately with all its trappings: suppression of opposition, concentration camps, the resumption at high intensity of capital punishment, a policy of "extermination" directed against the middleclass, and an astoundingly stupid civil war against the peasants which matched Stalin's in bloodiness.

I don't know where Mr Berry gets his history from (the back of a cornflakes packet?), but he really should try to catch up with contemporary scholarship. (He might care to begin with Richard Pipes' *Russia Under the Bolshevik Regime*, Dmitri Volkogonov's *Lenin: Life and Legacy*, and Vladimir Zazubrin's story "The Chip", printed in Oleg Chukhontsev's *Dissonant Voices*.)

(3) Mr Berry writes:

"The relationship of DSCH to the Soviet state did not evolve as a continuum. There was a major break - the pre "Muddle Instead of Music" period and the post "Muddle Instead of Music" period. As difficult as it seems to imagine now, there was a day, as real as this one, when the editorial had not been written, when DSCH may even have looked forward to Stalin's reaction and built expectations upon it. (Consider how different his life would have been if Stalin had liked *Lady Macbeth*. But no such parallel universe exists in MacDonald's view. DSCH had been set on his course from day one.) What a fool he must have looked to himself afterward! What an idiot!"

More interesting than Mr Berry's surrealistic misrepresentation of my argument is his intriguingly private view of Soviet history, apparently dreamt up by him one afternoon in the bath. The idea that, by 1936, any artist, however stupid - and Shostakovich was, according to his closest friends, really rather clever - could possibly have looked forward to Stalin's reaction to anything, let alone built expectations upon it, is laughable. (Perhaps this is actually one of Mr Berry's jokes?)

The prevailing Western understanding of Shostakovich's life - based on an obsolete received idea of what was going on in the USSR in 1936 - is that everything changed for him overnight following the *Pravda* attacks. Before then (so it is vaguely assumed), he had been happily trolling along, either swallowing Communism without question or taking no notice of politics, being basically just a normal chap who happened to write symphonies and operas. One of my critics has accused me of ignoring the possibility that Shostakovich had a "real" life, distinct from his career as a persecuted genius. And of course he did. However, to understand what that might have been like, we need to get in closer and build a real, detailed, and practical understanding of Soviet society.

For example, it is commonplace in the West to speak of Russia in the '20s as a place where art

flourished, fraternal freedom reigned, and people continually tossed their hats in the air singing "Ho!" for the revolution. But when we focus more closely - year by year, month by month - a different picture emerges: a society shaken by a political cataclysm that killed a third of its adult males in the three years after the Bolshevik coup; a middleclass so badly persecuted by Lenin that, whether or not it wished to cooperate with the new dispensation, it was fundamentally afraid to do so; a cultural scene more violently divided against itself than at any other time in Soviet history; a febrile economy in which interludes of ghastly hardship were punctuated by outbreaks of freemarket plenty accompanied by gangsterism of exactly the sort we currently see in Yeltsin's Russia; and, most disquieting of all, an intensifying and pervasive pressure from above to divest oneself of individuality (conscience and all) in the interests of the holy collective.

If we read the literature of this time, we discover that disenchantment, doubt, unrest, even at times rebellion, were endemic throughout Soviet society. The image of hearty revolutionary unanimity projected on '20s Russia by Western Romantics was, from the beginning, a childish simplification, if not a downright lie. (Those looking for a clue to the flavour of late '20s life in urban Russia should ask their librarian to dig up Panteleimon Romanov's novel *Three Pairs of Silk Stockings [Comrade Kislyakov]*. Anatoli Rybakov's *Children of the Arbat* and *Fear* provide a similar - if deduced rather than lived - "street-level" guide to the same scene in the '30s.)

In Chapter 2 of *The New Shostakovich*, I went to some lengths to evoke the socio-cultural complexity of the late '20s and early '30s. Moreover, I introduced the subject of the Cultural Revolution of 1929-32, a tumultuous era of leftwing tyranny in which Stalin's proletkult proxies relentlessly persecuted (among many other leading cultural figures) Shostakovich, driving several of his major works out of the theatre and threatening him with dire consequences if he did not change his style and conform, as all of his colleagues had. Mr Berry is, sadly, not alone in ignoring this savage premonition of 1936 and the effect it is likely to have had in shaping Shostakovich's sentiments towards the political system of the country he was living in. I suppose it's easy to overlook events that took only two or three years to evolve in a foreign land a long time ago. Perhaps future generations will similarly forget what happened during 1966-68 in Mao's China.

Yet, in order to cling to the worn idea of the great 1936 watershed - prior to which Shostakovich was supposedly a merry innocent and after which he was apparently either traumatised or deeply confused - Mr Berry must studiously ignore not only the Cultural Revolution but also the attacks on Shostakovich at the Composers' Union in 1935 (which may have partially inspired the Fourth Symphony), not to mention the growing evidence that Shostakovich was politically independent (i.e., not a Communist) throughout the middle '20s. Yet to Mr Berry, it's a black and white issue. I can hear Solomon Volkov's voice: "Westerners are so naive." (He often includes me, btw.)

As for failing to consider a parallel universe in which Shostakovich was never censured in 1936 because, for some reason, Stalin turned out to be an awfully nice man, I can assure Mr Berry that I often brood on it with some feeling and have even written about it. The operas he might have given us! (The happiness he might have experienced.) Yes, it was a great pity. But it didn't happen.

(4) Mr Berry writes:

'In wondering about the truthfulness of his description of the meaning of the Fifth Symphony's finale, I am only suggesting that ordinary human motivation of day-to-day living by a man who was not blessed with precognition may have had more to do than he was willing to admit later. In 1937, he could hope to recover his artistic stature (and freedom) with one masterstroke. He could thereby protect himself personally, and provide for his child.'

Put yourself in Shostakovich's shoes, Mr Berry. It is 1937. You do not officially exist, have had an opera and a ballet banned, a symphony tacitly forbidden, and you're not being performed anywhere except by cinema orchestras. You live in daily dread of being executed, have just been interrogated by the secret police about your flagrant connection with an enemy of the people, and sit up all night beside a suitcase stuffed with clothes appropriate for wear in Siberia. A light goes on in your head: 'I shall write something that will recover my artistic stature and freedom with one masterstroke, thereby protecting myself personally and providing for my child.' What do you do?

It is all very simple, as the newspapers keep telling you. You must write a 'song-symphony', eulogising Lenin and Stalin (and perhaps the NKVD too, if you can manage to squeeze them in). This work should be in three movements of about twelve minutes each and, like Lev Knipper's Fourth Symphony, should feature a popular tune, suitable for mass-singing, which recurs as often as possible. The last five minutes should be choral, positive, and hugely heroic. You should on no account use minor keys and certainly not stray into a melancholy mood unless this is attached to some inscription lamenting the Illustrious Dead of Our Glorious Revolution. Should this be how you fill out your middle movement, be careful not to upset your audience too much. In particular do not make them cry, since, under Soviet rule, this is classified as the bourgeois indulgence of "tragic individualism". Nor should you make them applaud too long, since prolonged ovations are meant to be awarded only to Stalin and will tend to make the secret police in your audience suspicious.

In other words, the very last thing you should consider doing is to write Shostakovich's Fifth in D minor. Unless, of course, being in a strange mood of almost suicidal clarity, you absolutely have to. In which case, the audience's endless ovation (and possibly the will of God) will save you.

Does that get the point across, or does Mr Berry wish to view the signed execution orders?

(5) Mr Berry writes:

'One of the primary sources of the bitterness and depression of Shostakovich's last years,

lived in the utter stagnation of the Brezhnev era, was the recognition that all this compromise was in vain.'

This curious sentence depends on the assumption that Shostakovich had any choice other than to "compromise". In fact, he did have another choice - the one made by Meyerhold, Tsvetayeva, and Mandelstam: naively place your principles before your life and the lives of those who love you, and be brutally done away with. If Shostakovich was bitter it wasn't about the "compromises" he had to make but about the scum who forced him to make them (and the obtuse foreigners who, from a safe distance, ticked him off for doing so). Quite simply, Mr Berry is wildly wrong in his interpretation.

(6) Mr Berry writes:

'If there is cause to wonder about Shostakovich's later interpretation of the Fifth, the recasting of the Seventh is a proposition so counterintuitive that it has to be treated with extreme skepticism.'

If there is a lesson from what has been said here so far, I would have thought that it would be something along the lines of "In the case of the Soviet Union, intuition, unsupported by any knowledge of context, should be treated with extreme scepticism". But be that as it may...

Mr Berry doesn't give the composer credit for what he thought he was doing in his Seventh Symphony, even in a private conversation only months after finishing it. I expected this, and, as I foresaw, there's nothing I can do about it. Semyon Bychkov may find "utterly convincing" the idea that the Seventh was anti-Stalinist before it became anti-Nazi; Mr Berry is just as convinced of the opposite. Is this a stand-off? Mr Bychkov is a Russian, a conductor, and a musician who knows the Leningrad scene well. I leave others to decide. Lev Lebedinsky, who was close to Shostakovich during the '50s and was first to reveal the background to the [Eighth Quartet](#), holds that the Seventh Symphony was "planned and begun *before* Hitler's attack on Russia in 1941":

'The tune of the notorious march in the first movement was conceived by Shostakovich as the "Stalin" theme (all who were close to the composer knew this). After the war had started, Shostakovich declared it to be the "Hitler" theme. Later, when the work was published, he renamed it the "Evil" theme - justly, since both Hitler and Stalin met the specification.'

The leading musicologist Lev Mazel weighs the issue as follows:

'Naturally, until 1941, Shostakovich's notions concerning Stalin's criminality were far more complete, concrete, and personally experienced than any crimes committed by Hitler. However, by 1941, Hitler had had sufficient time to prove himself and, knowing

Shostakovich's feelings about racism and anti-Semitism, it is more than probable that he came to think of the two dictators as "partners in evil" (even more so after they'd become allies in 1939). If, therefore, the invasion theme had initially been inspired by Stalin, the artist's subconscious can almost certainly be said to have harboured Hitler's image as well.'

Will Mr Berry settle for that? Or does intuition reign supreme, unguided by fact or probability? I imagine it probably it does...

(7) Mr Berry writes:

'I must comment on MacDonald's use of sources. One does not have to be a scholar to note that the present day situation of what used to be the Soviet Union is much like Nazi Germany in 1950 in one important respect. Now that the regime has collapsed, it turns out that not only aren't there any more Communists, there never were any to begin with. Disavowal is the order of the day, and everyone has his own story of private resistance... The point is that the non-contemporaneous statements collected by Wilson and others have to be examined very critically at this (1995) point in time. As the life of DSCH, recounted, is beginning to take on heroic aspects, the motivation to magnify that perspective grows as does the tendency to minimize the others. The provenance of statements that enhance the image of Shostakovich must be examined carefully, and particularly those that suggest some immunity of his to the prevailing temper of his times. This is the problem with using statements made decades after the fact, to "prove" that DSCH's also belated statements represent the one and only truth.'

This is the nub of it: where Frank Dudley Berry, eloquent as he is, reveals that, like every other Westerner who hasn't troubled to study this subject, he fundamentally fails to understand it.

He speaks of Shostakovich's alleged "immunity to the prevailing temper of his time". I will ask him bluntly: what prevailing temper was that, Frank? Are you aware of the way Soviet intellectuals talked to each other, how they wrote, the attitudes they held? Do you honestly believe that there was any such thing as a "prevailing temper" in a country like the Soviet Union (a place Ashkenazy - who only knew it in the '50s and '60s - describes as "a nightmare, really")? If you do believe in this great sentiment to which all acceded, then I sincerely urge you to cure yourself of this delusion by reading some of the books I list in the bibliography of *The New Shostakovich*. Spend some time with them; let it sink in. (Try *The Gulag Archipelago* - all three volumes. Read it twice, if you can spare the time. Take a look at Mikhail Heller's *Cogs in the Soviet Wheel*. Read, in particular, Czeslaw Milosz's *The Captive Mind*. Ponder the Rumanian dissident saying: "One cannot be honest, intelligent, and a Communist. One may be any two of these, but not all three.")

It took me ten years of study to understand the Soviet background, but maybe you'll master it in five.

When you begin to understand it, you'll realise that anything said or written by Russians since 1990 is immeasurably more dependable than anything they may have been obliged to say while the system was still in place. (Another aspect of *The New Shostakovich* I humbly put forward as important is that it was the first book to puncture the idea that we can take at face value anything about music said or written under official Soviet sponsorship. This, I hasten to add, wasn't news to students of Soviet literature, who remain decades ahead of musicologists in this respect.)

If Shostakovich is assuming heroic dimensions, that is probably because he WAS a hero in his way. Certainly those in the Russian musical community who, from the war onwards, clustered protectively around him, are unanimous in regarding him not only as a genius but as a moral giant and an instinctive resister of everything violating the canons of human decency. Mr Berry will wonder whether they always thought this or are now merely pretending to have done. He wonders this, I would like in all friendliness to suggest, because he lacks the feel for the subject that study and conversation with people from Russia and Eastern Europe would confer. There are no short cuts to this, but if he hasn't read Rostislav Dubinsky's *Stormy Applause*, a racy evocation of life as a musician under the former Soviet dispensation, he will, I'm sure, find it illuminating.

(8) Mr Berry concludes:

'Anything like a good Shostakovich biography has yet to be written. Perhaps Ian MacDonald will be the man to write it.'

I wrote *The New Shostakovich* as a study of what then was the problem of writing a Shostakovich biography. My publishers called it a biography; I didn't. Those who know enough to judge it are aware of its value; those who don't aren't. It is a flawed book, certainly, but I would submit that its flaws are enormously outweighed by its virtues. (I offer this opinion, you understand, in a spirit of magnificent objectivity.)

As for my ability to write the sort of Shostakovich biography we all now await, i.e., the real thing, I must be more realistic. I'm not qualified. In fact, I'm not sure any one human ever will be. Shostakovich's ideal biographer must thoroughly know not only classical music but also Russian popular, revolutionary, and folk music. (All the worthwhile Russian authorities insist that Shostakovich's music is a collage of quotation and cross-reference, much of this referring to specifically Russian sources.). In addition, this paragon will need to know Russian and Soviet literature and drama, be completely versed in Soviet politico-cultural history, and be blessed with both a supreme aesthetic sensitivity and the spiritual insight of an advanced yogi.

All non-Russian commentators can do at the moment is consolidate and publicise what we know (as I'm trying to do here) whilst waiting for new in-depth studies to emerge from Russia. This could take years. Meanwhile we tread water, bickering on the Internet... (But thanks for writing.)

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Posted on June 26th, June 28th, and July 2nd 1995

 **Reply to Frank Dudley Berry on "vector biography"**


Posted on July 6th 1995

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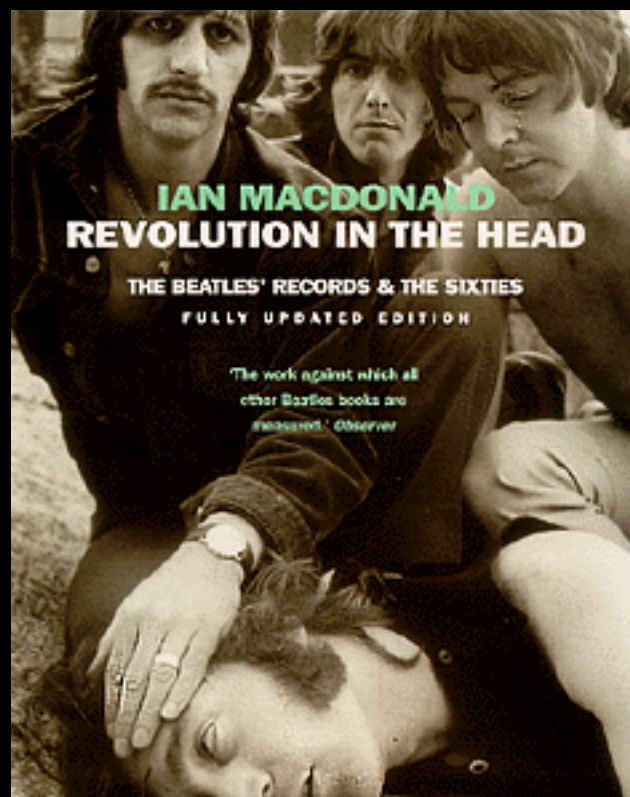
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Posted on 4th December 1999



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New Babylon I

Posted 4th December 1999

Louis Blois writes: "Fay makes it clear that the reasons for *New Babylon's* ultimate failure was a combination of political and musical difficulties. Fair and complete enough." I'm sorry to have to disagree. Almost all of what Fay says about the "failure" of *New Babylon* revolves around technical problems. Nor has she explored the context sufficiently deeply to comment on the reported mismatch between the artistic principles of FEKS (Kozintsev and Trauberg's Theatre of the Eccentric Actor) and the expectations of Soviet cinema audiences, let alone to reveal anything of the political background, which, in 1929, was tense and ominous. Shostakovich, though, specifically cites political "interference" as a key factor: "My troubles on the political side began with *New Babylon*... The KIM [Communist Youth International] leaders decided that *New Babylon* was counter-revolutionary." Although Laurel Fay declines to quote from *Testimony*, she would nevertheless have been wiser to deal with this political "interference", since ignoring it risks the suspicion that she has deliberately played it down.

Quoting this passage from *Testimony* in 1994 in DSCH Journal, John Riley (the leading expert on Shostakovich's film music) did not mix his words in saying that "the *New Babylon* affair was one of several [similar flashpoints] that pointed to a change in Soviet artistic life in the late 1920s and early 1930s as the avant garde/proletarian split was forced together and pushed down the proletarian path". Indeed, as Riley reports it (DSCH Journal 1 [Summer 1994]. pp. 31-2), "the *New Babylon* affair" became something of a politico-cultural cause celebre: "[KIM] denounced it as counter-revolutionary, though RAPP (Russian Association of Proletarian Writers) defended it, with Alexander Fadeyev's signature heading the letter. There were calls for a public debate (a common way of addressing issues in the 1920s) and for its makers to be put on trial for 'jeering at the heroic pages of revolutionary history and the French proletariat'." That is to say: some Leftist critics, having interpreted FEKS's and Shostakovich's juxtaposition techniques as satirical attacks on the Communards (sacred ikons in Soviet mythology), indignantly demanded that the film's creative team be arrested and arraigned before a Soviet court. Not surprising, then, that Shostakovich in *Testimony* recalls, "things could have ended very badly and I was only in my early twenties then". This was, after all, the start of the Cultural Revolution. Within months, other artists would be similarly denounced and put on trial in just this way.

Riley continues: "Factory workers to whom [*New Babylon*] was shown disagreed about its quality, and newspaper opinions were divided, some urging their readers to see it and some calling for the makers to be punished [sic]. The level of hostility can be gauged from an article by Pavel Petrov-Bytov ["Why We Have No Soviet Cinema", *Zhizn Iskusstva*, 21/4/29]. *New Babylon* is mentioned rarely by name -- [Petrov-Bytov] prefers to speak of the poor general state of cinema -- but it is obvious that [*New Babylon*] was the catalyst, and the article foreshadows many criticisms that would be made of artists in the following years."

Petrov-Bytov wrote as follows: "I am not denying the virtues of these films [*New Babylon*, Eisenstein's *October*, and others]. The virtues do of course exist and they are not negligible. Great formal virtues. We must study these films just as we study the bourgeois classics'." Riley, however, observes that Petrov-Bytov nevertheless "subtly denounced [these films] as irrelevant, or even positively harmful, to the revolution. Retrogressive and possibly counter revolutionary, [in P-B's view] their only 'virtue' was the possibility they gave of learning from their mistakes."

New Babylon was premiered just as Stalin's proletarianisation campaign was reaching its peak. At that time, to be denounced as "alien to the People" or "divorced from ordinary life" was, by inference, to be condemned as "bourgeois" or tainted with the "depraved and unprincipled" values of NEP. Petrov-Bytov voiced just such criticisms: "The people who make up Soviet cinema are 95% alien, aesthetes or unprincipled. Generally speaking none of them have any experience of life." There is no doubt that, by this, he meant to attack, among others, FEKS and Shostakovich.

Riley notes: "[Petrov-Bytov's use of] the word 'alien' -- and [his] plea not to 'transform the Russian language into Babylonian' -- echo the xenophobia encouraged by [Stalin's] policy of Socialism in One Country. [With] Soviet life [becoming] increasingly seen in physical terms, [the] aestheticism and lack of experience [of the film-makers whom P-B was attacking] meant that they could have no role in the revolution." Only by a process of ideological rehabilitation could they be "re-generated" so that "their hearts [could] beat in unison with the masses". Addressing his enemies directly, Petrov-Bytov concluded: "I am sorry, but you will not lead [the masses] with *Octobers* and *New Babylons*, if only because people do not want to watch these films." (That this proved to be true was blamed by FEKS and Shostakovich on the technical problems caused by late cuts enforced by the Moscow film censorship committee, and by the hostility of cinema bands -- which is all that Laurel Fay reports of this whole "affair".)

John Riley adds: "This sort of criticism had been mounting for some time and, though it was probably not orchestrated by the government, they certainly encouraged it. As early as May 1924 Stalin had noted that "Things are going badly in the cinema. The cinema is the greatest means of mass agitation. The task is to take it into our own hands." Riley shrewdly concludes (re the situation in 1929) "Shostakovich must have seen what was happening and began to take an active part in the productions of the Leningrad Youth Theatre, whose proletarian credentials were beyond doubt. Up to this point 'other work' had been his excuse for doing no work for them in two years, despite being on the musical staff, but the time had come to buy some time and he quickly knocked out music for a couple of frankly propagandist ["proletarian"] plays..." [These were *The Shot*, Opus 24, and *Virgin Land*, Opus 25.]

That Fay fails to address what amounted to Shostakovich's first clash with Stalinist ideological aesthetics is, on the face of it, another case of misrepresentation by omission -- the familiar methodology of anti-

revisionism. Allan Ho has already shown me her treatment of *From Jewish Folk Poetry*, which seems largely to repeat the evasions and misrepresentations of her ill-starred *New York Times* article of 14th April 1996 (see my criticisms in *Shostakovich Reconsidered*, pp. 686-720). I gather that Louis Blois has, with admirable fairness, conceded that Fay's conduct in this instance is questionable, to say the least. I shall be interested to learn of his verdict on her treatment of "the *New Babylon* affair" as reported by John Riley in DSCH in 1994 (and, in case she missed it, again in DSCH Journal 4 in Winter 1995).

Indeed, to these two cases of ostensible misrepresentation, I must add a third -- right opposite the paragraph dealing with *New Babylon*, on p. 51. This concerns Shostakovich's next work, his incidental score for Mayakovsky's *The Bedbug*, which Fay describes as a "scathing satire of the new bourgeois spirit" (i.e., Nepovshchina, the ethos of the New Economic Policy, or NEP). I wonder if she bothered to read this play? If she did, she has misunderstood it; if she did not, she has presumably followed the judgements of earlier musicologists who accepted the disingenuous Soviet interpretation. In fact, it's standard in Mayakovsky studies that *The Bedbug* embodies not so much an attack on Nepovshchina as an appearance of this designed to accommodate the expression of its author's rejection of the increasingly coercive collectivism of the Soviet regime under Stalin and his Left proxies. (E.g., Sally Laird, *Voices of Russian Literature* [OUP, 1999], p. 19: "[Mayakovsky] became disillusioned with the development of the new regime, a scepticism expressed in satirical plays such as *The Bedbug*. Despair at the Stalinist clamp-down on literary experiment, compounded by personal difficulties, led to his suicide at the age of 37.") In fact, Mayakovsky was hounded by RAPP for counter-revolutionism during 1929-30. Eventually he joined RAPP in a desperate effort to escape persecution, but they would not leave him alone and he shot himself three months later. This persecution began with the Left's furious reaction against *The Bedbug*. The play, to musical accompaniment by Shostakovich, can fairly be said to have ultimately cost Mayakovsky his life.

Since Fay has presumably read my book (1990), she must have seen the passage in it about the background to *The Bedbug* (pp. 58-60). *The New Shostakovich* is out of print, so here it is:

"[*The Bedbug*] was the theatrical debut of the legendary Mayakovsky, whose notorious willingness to place his muse at the disposal of every whim of Soviet propaganda must have been, if nothing else, a phenomenon of pressing curiosity to Shostakovich. As a boy, Shostakovich had, like most of his contemporaries, admired Mayakovsky's pre-Revolutionary verse. However, the poet's later role as a mouthpiece for the Central Committee had alienated much of his audience and none more than Shostakovich's literary friends, who no doubt let their feelings concerning the proposed collaboration be known to him. (Nor would their case have been difficult to make. Some of Mayakovsky's work of this period resembles recruiting notices for the GPU, and lines like "Think / about the Komsomol.../ Are all of them / really / Komsomols? / Or are they / only / pretending to be?" were bringing vers libre into disrepute.) An additional source of potential tension lay in the fact that the composer, as rising star of Soviet music, was poised to inherit the poet's mantle as figurehead of Soviet youth culture. Under these circumstances, their meeting was bound to be chilly.

Mayakovsky, whose musical taste was rough and ready, appears to have treated Shostakovich as a jumped-up bourgeois poseur, which, whether or not true at the time, was certainly an instance of bickering amongst soiled kitchen utensils. The dislike was mutual and the description of Mayakovsky given by the composer to *Literary Gazette* in 1956 as 'a very gentle, pleasant, attentive person' appears to be one of his deadpan jokes. (Eugene Lyons recalled Mayakovsky as 'a burly, bellowing fellow', whilst to Max Eastman he was 'a mighty and big-striding animal -- physically more like a prize-fighter than a poet -- and with a bold shout and dominating wit and nerves of leather... probably the loudest and least modulated thing and nearest to the banging in of a cyclone that poetry ever produced'.) The irony is that, professional jealousy aside, the two artists almost certainly had something important in common: disaffection with the ruling regime.

Western musicologists, who have either never read *The Bedbug* or are unsusceptible to its sarcasm, tend to accept the line, fed them by Soviet critics, that the play satirises the NEPmen or 'grabbers' of the mid-Twenties private enterprise culture. This is untrue. Like Olesha, Katayev, and Ilf and Petrov, Mayakovsky was using apparent satire on NEP as a front for satirising the government. The poet's disillusion with Communism set in after his idealised view of progress had foundered on first-hand acquaintance with it during a visit to the industrial heartland of America in 1925. By 1929, his revulsion against the soulless banality of the Collective was bitter and -- owing to his compensating interest in alcohol -- incautiously frank. Though *The Bedbug* uses the yurodivy technique of voicing its criticisms through the mouth of a buffoon (in this case, the Mayakovsky-like drunkard Oleg Bard), they are open and become steadily more blatant as the play proceeds.

Shostakovich thought the piece 'fairly lousy' and few would disagree with him. A hasty, manic, and finally insufferable farce, *The Bedbug* was knocked out chiefly in the hope of earning its author enough foreign royalties to pay for a sports car. On the other hand, it is also, in parts, a funny and occasionally brilliant satire, at least some of which must have rung a reluctant chuckle from the composer. (Serious, too. The scene where the 'Zones of the Federation' block-vote on whether to 'resurrect' the cryogenically-preserved hero Prisyarkin alludes to the Soviet regime's liberal recourse to capital punishment. 'We demand resurrection!' chorus the conformist Zones where, a few years before, they would just as confidently have demanded death.)

Doing *The Bedbug* partly for the money and partly to please Meyerhold, Shostakovich was himself too much the satirist not to have known exactly what Mayakovsky was saying and must therefore have still been sufficiently naive to imagine that there would be no repercussions to himself for having participated in the project. If this is true, he was soon cured of his illusions. Opening in Moscow in February 1929, *The Bedbug* was attacked by the Proletkult for its form and by the Komsomol for its content. Meyerhold's theatre was soon finding audiences hard to come by and Left activists marked Mayakovsky down for special treatment. His passport was confiscated and, within a year, they had hounded him to suicide.

I must own that it puzzles me that Laurel Fay should be content to recycle the old Soviet whitewash about *The Bedbug* being an attack on Nepovshchina -- unless she has done this to further reinforce the thesis (which she proposes with Richard Taruskin) that Shostakovich was a nobly earnest "civic servant" who became embittered in his old age (subsequently turning to late musical dissidence in works like the Eighth Quartet and the Thirteenth Symphony).

--Ian MacDonald

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New Babylon II

Posted 6th December 1999

Further to my post concerning Laurel Fay's omission of the information, provided by John Riley in DSCH in 1994, about the political furore surrounding the screenings of *New Babylon* in March 1929, I would like to support Allan Ho in his view that Fay not only disregards the politics of the state-mandated Left's reaction against *New Babylon*, but sets aside the aims of the artists who made the film, prominent among whom, of course, was Dmitri Shostakovich. This omission casts doubt not only on her understanding of the man who is nominally her subject, but also on her basic grasp of the politico-cultural context he worked in.

The creative organisation behind *New Babylon* was FEKS, the Factory of the Eccentric Actor, founded in Petrograd in 1922 by a group of young Jewish artists from the provinces, chief among them being the subsequent directors of *New Babylon*: Grigory Kozintsev (b. 1905) and Leonid Trauberg (b. 1902). Owing to the clash with the authorities in 1929 which caused the ban on *New Babylon*, FEKS and its work for stage and screen were effectively erased from official Soviet history, obliging Western scholars to piece together from available data what this turbulent group was about. Since doing so depends on understanding the dynamics of cultural life in the USSR of the 1920s (and since, till recently, the truth of this mythical Golden Age has been difficult to discern through the soft focus of nostalgia projected on it by Soviet disinformation and the credulity of Western arts pundits), FEKS has remained an enigmatic body, rendered more obscure by its apparent contradictions.

For example, Katerina Clark, in her 1995 book *Petersburg, Crucible of Cultural Revolution*, introduces FEKS as "the contemporary masters of parody" in early 1920s Petrograd: "The FEKS members, or FEKSy, were most representative of [the blend of Russian revolutionary culture with the Jazz Age] -- Westernism, co-option of Western lowbrow culture, Americanization, jazz, and a racy pace. They were young -- they saw the Great War as teenagers -- and they took these trends to an extreme." With their proclaimed enthusiasm for clowns, acrobats and circuses, the FEKSy inherited the pre-revolutionary shock tactics of Meyerhold as well as elements from Radlov's Peoples Comedy Theatre (which, Clark points out also called itself "eccentric"). She continues: "They were nevertheless careful to define themselves as younger and more truly avant-garde than such predecessors. In this endeavor they were joined by their Moscow friend and ally, Sergei Eisenstein (some claim that Eisenstein's theory of montage was really first conceived by FEKS)... The FEKSy were more radical than Eisenstein and went well beyond him in the area of epatage."

FEKS revered America as the home of Edison ("as emblem of electricity and inventor of the cinema"),

of strident sounds, advertisements, and lowbrow culture, including jazz, film thrillers, and "Pinkertons" (the pulp genre of the detective novel). "Yet," says Clark, "they were also fervent revolutionaries, insisting that art be 'truly agitational, entertaining, and eccentric'." For her, these juxtapositions are "a conundrum": "In some senses, FEKS represents a sort of zany version of Constructivism -- Dadaist Constructivism, if you will". [Yet] the FEKSy did not, like many Dadaists, "look to the 'gratuitous gesture' as a paradigm for [their] system-confounding art; though they took the ideal of playful experimentation to an extreme, they were also absolutely serious about their pro-Soviet message." The extent of the contradictions in FEKS's work which Clark is struggling to reconcile is best illustrated by her account of their staging of Gogol's *The Marriage*:

[This production] affronted its audience of 1922 with a cacophony of competing sounds, flickering lights, and a confusion and profusion of action on the stage. Figures dressed in garish clothing exchanged shouts and reprises about topical issues; they sang couplets and acted out strange pantomimes with dances and acrobatic feats. The affianced pair from Gogol (in conventional theatrical guise) were mixed in with constructions moving about on wheels. Then, in a flash, the backdrop was changed into a screen on which was projected a clip of Charlie Chaplin fleeing from the cops. Actors dressed and made up in the same way as those on the screen burst onto the front of the stage to act in parallel play with the movie. A circus clown, shrieking ecstatically, turned on a salto mortale right through the canvas of the backdrop, while "Gogol" bounced around on a platform with springs from which he was propelled to the ceiling. [op. cit. 180]

Solomon Volkov, in his fine study *Petersburg: A Cultural History* (1996), describes the same production as follows:

The poster had promised operetta, melodrama, farce, film, circus, variety, and grand guignol all in one. The whole thing was called "A Trick in Three Acts" and Kozintsev and Trauberg were its "engineers," rejecting the antediluvian term "director." The characters in this amazing *Marriage* were Albert Einstein, Charlie Chaplin, and three suitors who came on stage on roller skates: robots running on steam, electricity, and radioactivity. The latter explained, "Marriage today is ridiculous. The husband away, the wife suffers. Radium, a new force, works at a distance. A radioactive marriage is truly modern." The outraged public, suspecting it was being mocked, went wild. Kozintsev came out on stage and thanked the shouting patrons "for a scandalous reception of our scandalous work".

Volkov further describes FEKS's unusual methods and ideas:

The action of *The Marriage* was a cascade of acrobatic tricks, satirical couplets, tap dancing, foxtrot music, and sound-and-light effects. The performers had to be specially trained, because no one in Russia knew how to do all these things. The Factory of the Eccentric Actor prepared them in a marvelous old town house whose owner had fled to the West. Here seventeen- year-old Kozintsev and twenty-year-old Trauberg and their

acolytes lived according to the motto borrowed from Mark Twain, "It's better to be a young pup than an old bird of paradise." [Here] is a description by Sergei Yutkevich, a leader of the early FEKS, of a visit by Annenkov, who was already a famous avant-garde artist and director, in a letter to Eisenstein from Petrograd: "Yuri Annenkov, a fine fellow, joined 'eccentricity', and our respect for him grew when he came to see us in striped pajamas (black and orange), in which he previously appeared in the circus, riding on the back of a donkey. Besides which, he can do handstands, tap dance, and draw smutty pictures. He wanted to get in on an exhibit of eccentric posters and we said 'Well, well, where were you before?'"... FEKS's experimentation resembled (in some cases outstripped) the attempts by Meyerhold and the early Eisenstein. In a huge hall with marble figures in niches along the walls reflecting in a multitude of mirrors, students dressed in "feksosuits" -- white shirts and black overalls with big breast pockets and wide shoulder straps -- boxed, tumbled, and danced the foxtrot to piano accompaniment. [op. cit. 301-2]

In the light of such accounts of Eccentricity, as FEKS called its own artistic movement, it's no wonder that Katerina Clark is puzzled by precisely how this gang of seemingly completely anarchic Russian dadaists related to Soviet ideology and its high (and almost entirely solemn) Leninist idealism. Volkov, while considerably more at home with the Petersburgian arts, having interviewed so many of its latterday stars, is no more inclined to expound on the subject of FEKS's politics than Clark. He does, though, refer to Lenfilm, the studio to which Kozintsev and Trauberg were affiliated, as "'a collective of committed individualists', as it was sometimes called". No one who understands Soviet cultural politics in the 1920s will have difficulty decoding this phrase. Individualism was the credo of those independent writers of the period who distrusted Soviet collectivism and, in various oblique ways (some not so oblique, e.g., Zamyatin's *We*), worked against it in their novels and plays. Was the eccentricity of FEKS, then, no more than an obstreperous and surreal "young man's" individualism? If so, can it be true, as Katerina Clark suggests, that these wearers of feksosuits were "absolutely serious about their pro-Soviet message"?

Volkov's account of FEKS arose from his interviews with Balanchine, whose ballet corps worked with Kozintsev and Trauberg at FEKS's Petrograd HQ. Though an expert on the Leningrad dadaist group Oberiu (Association for Real Art) who recognised FEKS as fellow absurdists, Volkov lacked other information on FEKS for the same reason that most writers have until recently: the Soviet documentary dearth on them. This is where Marek Pytel's book *New Babylon: Trauberg, Kozintsev, Shostakovich* (Eccentric Press, 1999), recently announced on DSCH-L by John Riley, is important.

Pytel began researching FEKS over twenty years ago while a student at the Slade, making it the subject of his 1978 thesis (unpublished). Meeting Trauberg on several occasions, Pytel subsequently researched everything ever published on FEKS as well as translating the original 1922 FEKS Manifesto and carrying on a long and detailed project to reconstruct the original, pre-censorship cut of *New Babylon* (matching it, so far as possible, shot for shot with Shostakovich's score, as FEKS and the composer

intended it). Pytel is in no doubt that individualism was the inner orientation of FEKS throughout its film oeuvre (notwithstanding that, as Trauberg acknowledged, each film used an aesthetic method different from its predecessor). FEKS's films, insists Pytel, were indeed "revolutionary", but certainly not in any collectivist or proletarian sense:

To my mind, the three surviving FEKS period films focus on the sense of revolution in the individual. A humanist, pacifist sense pervades all three films. None of their heroes or heroines ever win. It's about how innocence and vulnerability get hammered every time. The crucial difference between the message of the full length original *New Babylon* and the last-minute re-edit which got premiered is that the former looks and feels like the two previous FEKS period films *The Cloak* [1926] and *SVD* [Soyuz Velikogo Dela, or the Society for the Great Cause/1928]; that is: a linear narrative with emphasis on the personal. The re-edit is something akin to a Proletkult version of [Eisenstein's] *October* [likewise re-cut]. This changes the meaning of both the film and of Shostakovich's music for it.

It would be wrong to pre-empt Pytel's interpretation of the original message of *New Babylon* -- for that you should buy his book, with its accompanying "25fps reconstructed European Export edit" video-transfer of the film itself -- but it's true to say, from his work on FEKS and his personal knowledge of Trauberg, that he believes *New Babylon* was in no sense a communist film, instead being conceived, like all of FEKS's work, as "psychologically revolutionary": a call to the individuality of each member of its audience to awake, "real-ize", and thence transform society in a way which the merely political revolution of Bolshevism could never do, even by totalitarian rule.

The latter, of course, was what Stalin attempted with his "revolution from above" of 1929-31, the psychological by-product of which was to be the fully "collectivized" and "proletarianized" Homo Sovieticus. Though FEKS was suppressed in the first stages of Stalin's revolution, it can be said to have embodied a sort of "anticipatory resistance" to Homo Sovieticus: an attempt, by dropping artistic depth-charges into the minds its audience, to propel them into self-awareness before they became robotised by Stalinist terror and propaganda. On the other hand, it would not do to idealise FEKS, no matter how bright and talented its members. They were also young men in a time of a "reevaluation of all values" (NEP, 1921-8), and as excited by the moral chaos this induced as anyone else of their age. At least some of their work was done simply to scandalize, riotous epatage for the hell of it. Marek Pytel:

When I asked Trauberg what was the aim of *New Babylon*, he told me: "Scandal. In those days it was very easy; you just showed women with big cleavages. But what worked then is not necessarily what would work now." I later gave him a present of Kenneth Anger's *Hollywood Babylon* with Jayne Mansfield's rouged nipples spilling out her dress on the cover (first paperback edition). He blew me a kiss from across the room. When I showed him my 1978 thesis manuscript [on FEKS], he called me a "scholar". He also called me a "freebooter" after I showed him my working script of *New Babylon*. I took it as a great compliment. That's what FEKS were: "Freebooters."

This, of course, will upset those who accept the Golden Age version of the Soviet 1920s in which all avant-garde artists worked earnestly for communism and the Bolshevik revolution. However, the fact is that this Soviet-generated myth is no longer accepted in contemporary Soviet studies. Most of the primary research into Soviet history has been done in the West over the last thirty years. (For obvious reasons, such research was impossible within the Soviet Union until after c.1986.) The volume of Western Soviet studies is now vast and, in the 1980s generated a bitter war over statistical interpretation between revisionists and anti-revisionists (signifying the exact reverse of what these labels mean in Shostakovich studies). During the 1990s, that war simmered down and something of a spirit of co-operation ensued, partly brought about by the sheer profusion of primary research materials available under glasnost' and after the fall of the USSR.

One product of this renewed primary research has been the documentary demonstration of hitherto unsuspected depths of popular socio-cultural autonomy and resistance to the Soviet regime among peasants, workers, and intelligenty, extending through the worst period of Stalin's repressions in the later 1930s (e.g., Sarah Davies' *Popular Opinion in Stalin's Russia*, Sheila Fitzpatrick's *Everyday Stalinism*). But the real bombshell dropped last year: Vladimir Brovkin's *Russia After Lenin: Politics, Culture & Society, 1921-29*.

Brovkin's primary research on the 1920s has found that, far from the Soviet myth of a people basically united behind "the great Party of Lenin", the Bolsheviks then occupied only the upper positions of power, were elsewhere thinly spread and, as the decade progressed, found themselves losing most of the support they'd managed to muster, mostly from the proletariat, during the Civil War (1918-21). The peasants would have nothing to do with them, urban workers were either apathetic or divided across a political spectrum ranging from revived SR/Menshevik groupings to varieties of far-right nationalism, and the Russian intelligentsia was so fundamentally alienated that, in 1927-8, the GPU reported that professors and students across Russia were campaigning against Communist candidates in local soviet elections.

Brovkin's chapter "The Komsomol and youth" is particularly remarkable in its documentary depiction of drunkenness and cynicism among Soviet youth. Here's part of his summing up:

The gap between the official representations of Soviet youth and reality was enormous. Instead of conscious proletarians building socialism under party leadership, Soviet youth showed hostility to NEP, denounced miserable living conditions, and openly attacked inequality, party privilege, and low wages. The Komsomol as a transmission belt of Communist ideology into urban working-class youth failed dismally in the 1920s. Very few were inspired to become class-conscious fighters for the party of Lenin. The trend was, in fact, in the opposite direction. In the realm of political ideas the Komsomol was a breeding ground for many "anti-Soviet" political and religious associations.

The 1920s saw the revival of interest in populism, liberalism, Menshevism, and religiosity. Dissident groups proliferated and religious associations eclipsed the official "transmission belt" in their popularity. Many espoused prejudice against Jews and other ethnic minorities.

The vast majority remained apolitical and could not have cared less about socialism. They craved entertainment, not politics; for vodka, sex, and foxtrot rather than for Lenin or the ABCs of communism. Attitudes to women were anything but socialist. Bolshevik "new morality" campaigns seem to have made things worse. Sexual contact became freer and the family structure weaker. Most youths were attracted to Western popular culture and music, ignoring Agitprop's message and propaganda. In their lifestyles, tastes, dress, and aspirations, Soviet youth espoused "bourgeois" values rather than some ephemeral proletarian consciousness.

Despite hundreds of thousands of rural members, the Komsomol remained a marginal force in the countryside. It attracted only those who wanted to leave and make a career in administration elsewhere. Moral standards alienated women, and anti-religious campaigns offended the rest of the rural community. The sheer numbers of young people affiliated with religious congregations and the Peasant Union dwarf the Komsomol's presence in the countryside. Ten years of ceaseless Communist propaganda among the youth in the conditions of a press monopoly, expenditure of enormous financial resources, and the absence of a legally tolerated opposition failed to generate enthusiasm or excitement. [op. cit. 132-3]

Everything in the FEKS Manifesto is consistent with the 1920s youth culture. What they stood for was what young people enjoyed (and vastly preferred to Soviet Communist propaganda): Chaplin movies, detective stories, clowns and cardsharps, pop songs, foxtrots, funfairs, fast cars, sex, free expression, and vodka -- mixed with a dry dislike of the business sharks of NEP, the privileges flaunted by the Party's place-men, the persisting fact of slum housing, the demand for greater productivity without wage rises, and the social programmes of "positive discrimination" which saw uneducated proletarians promoted over the heads of those genuinely qualified to occupy their posts. Like most young people, and most artistic groups of that era, FEKS resented the Bolshevik usurpation of power. As far as they were concerned, the revolution belonged to the people and should be (a) democratic and (b) an ongoing carnival.

This ethos encompassed revolutionary conviction but not in any revolution imposed and enforced from above. This (1921-28) was the only period in Soviet history in which it was possible to draw a distinction between "soviet" and "communist", even if that difference was delusory. In trying to claim back the revolution for the people, certain young radicals did draw this distinction -- only to collide with the GPU and Komsomol *aktiv*, who viewed such discrimination as heretical and counter-revolutionary. When Stalin came to power in 1928, he set about totalitarianizing the Soviet Union, eradicating any

lingering sentimental distinction between "soviet" and "communist". There was to be only one socialism: Bolshevik/Leninist socialism. Vladimir Brovkin shows that the Bolshevik party was fighting for survival. It was a question of crushing politico-cultural pluralism or losing control of the country. This why Stalin ordained the policy of proletarianisation and encouraged the Cultural Revolution: not just to crush dissent in the intelligentsia, but to end dissent across all classes in general. Similarly, the collectivisation campaign was aimed at destroying deeper dissent in the countryside. October 1917 was a coup without any widebased support. What happened during 1929-31 was, in effect, a consolidating second (totalitarian) revolution.

The special interest for Shostakovich students is that it's likely that the Cultural Revolution itself, like the later cultural convulsions of 1936 and 1948, was sparked by a work involving Shostakovich: *New Babylon*. Its title reflecting both the sobriquet of 1870s Paris and the clamorous social and ethical pluralism of the Soviet Union of the mid-1920s, the film explosively fused the two genres Lenin considered the most important in terms of propaganda: film and music. Embodying the clash between free thought and what we now know to have been a fairly beleaguered Bolshevik government whose policies were failing and whose credibility among the majority of its citizens was at rock bottom, *New Babylon* was caught in the crossfire at the precise moment at which Stalin took political control. As such, this film may come to be seen as the inaugural event in the cultural transition from NEP pluralism to Stalin's "revolution from above".

Katerina Clark's idea that FEKS was seriously "pro-Soviet" is either a misunderstanding of a distinction between pro-soviet and pro-communist which was current only in the 1920s -- or a complete misreading of FEKS's essential apoliticism. Called to endorse Proletkult demands for the proletarianization of Soviet literature, Trauberg, speaking on 1st January 1929, fired back: "Re-education is an absurdity. We don't endorse reading a series of increasingly inferior hacks before reading the classics." Soon after this came the crackdown, and free speech ended. Newly camouflaged as Soviet artists, Kozintsev and Trauberg continued to work for Lenfilm -- "highly paid prostitutes", as they ironically noted. Trauberg had the last laugh, observing to Theodore Van Houten during the 1980s that his enemy Petrov-Bytov finished his days in an asylum.

As for Shostakovich, the *New Babylon* affair begins to look far more significant in his career than hitherto. His score for *The Bedbug*, while mostly composed after *New Babylon*, was premiered a month earlier, and thus started the succession of clashes he experienced with the Leftists of the Cultural Revolution during the next three years. But, perhaps because Stalin put more emphasis on cinema than on theatre, the scandal over *The Bedbug* was almost immediately superseded by that attendant on *New Babylon*. Following the Stalinist "rule of two", the film was linked, as a target of censure, with Eisenstein's *October*. Later in 1929, Zamyatin's *We* was likewise paired with Pilnyak's *Mahogany*, and, in 1930, *The Nose* was coupled with Lev Knipper's *The North Wind*. Of course, *The Nose* was as much a reflection of 1920s Soviet youth culture as *New Babylon* (for example, incorporating a prurient assault on a woman, this being one of the dominant sexual themes of the time: rapes and gang-rapes were

constant news). Perhaps no opera could have achieved the impact of the "first" film-with-music; in any case, *The Nose* had to wait nearly two years to be performed -- whereupon more scandal ensued. No surprise, then, that Shostakovich slipped away to the Black Sea to dash off his Third Symphony (the quickest-composed of all his symphonic scores). Early in 1929, the times had suddenly changed. He needed to take rapid evasive action.

What's most striking about this new view of *New Babylon* is Shostakovich's relationship with FEKS. This considerably sharpens our perception of him, reinforcing the contentions of those then acquainted with him that he had no serious interest in politics, and certainly none in ideology. [See [Witnesses for the Defence](#).] His opus list of the period (as I argued in *The New Shostakovich* and as Elizabeth Wilson concurred in *Shostakovich: A Life Remembered*) is, under a superficial appearance of Soviet conformity, essentially individualist (trending towards a more considered form of dissidence in the mid-1930s). To judge by his attitude to Bezymensky's verses and his own feelings expressed to Tanya Glivenko whilst composing it [see [Recent Commentary](#)], Shostakovich imbued his Second Symphony with no genuine Soviet ardour. *The Nose*, *Tahiti Trot*, *New Babylon*, *The Bedbug* -- all were individualist works, accordingly attacked by Bolshevik critics, or their Leftist cohorts. Shostakovich hated the libretti for *The Golden Age* and *The Bolt*, neither of which he appears to have thought much of as compositions. *The Shot*, *Virgin Land*, and *Rule, Britannia* were hack works knocked out for TRAM in order to gain brownie points with the proletarian groups. *Lady Macbeth of Mtsensk* is arguably the most extreme of all of Shostakovich's individualist pieces. That leaves the Third Symphony, which is not hard to interpret as (a) opportunistic and (b) darkly foreboding and pessimistic.

Incidentally, Solomon Volkov, in *St Petersburg*, gives a clue as to how Shostakovich might originally have become aware of FEKS. In 1924, the Leningrad magazine *Teatr* published a satirical attack on the impresario Akim Volynsky. This wasn't signed, but everyone knew the authors were Kozintsev and Trauberg. Shostakovich's own run-in with Volynsky -- mentioned in *Testimony* and Wilson's *Shostakovich: A Life Remembered* (p. 60) -- may have drawn his attention to FEKS's satire on his employer, a man he was then about to sue. He would also presumably have approved FEKS's membership of the Gogol cult and enjoyed their advertised address: "Eccentropolis (formerly Petrograd)." John Riley (in *DSCH Journal* 1 [Summer 1994], p. 34) records a claim by Kozintsev that Shostakovich had, during his time at the cinema piano, accompanied FEKS's third film *The Devil's Wheel* (1926). Trauberg thought not, and it would have been very late in Shostakovich's accompanying days. (Apart from being a funfair attraction, the "devil's wheel" was also a colloquial reference to the life of disaffected Soviet youth in the mid-1920s: listless and underpaid at work, bored with political indoctrination, longing to get away from factory or office to "polish" the street all night, strolling, talking, drinking, fighting and fornicating before snatching a few hours sleep, and back to work.)

Laurel Fay's shallow treatment of *New Babylon* confirms what I've suspected: she reads no Soviet history and has little idea of what's been going on in Soviet scholarship over the last fifteen years. In effect, her book seems to be an attempt to turn the clock back in Shostakovich studies to 1978 -- before

Testimony. Few music critics will grasp this, since most of them know no more history than she does; but, in time, what amounts to a historical whitewash and a grotesquely distorted view of Shostakovich will become more obvious.

--Ian MacDonald

NOTE. Vladimir Brovkin is NATO research fellow, adjunct professor of history, and scholar in residence at the American University, Washington DC. A colleague of Sheila Fitzpatrick and Richard Pipes, he is the author of *The Mensheviks after October: Socialist Opposition and the Rise of the Bolshevik Dictatorship* (Cornell UP, 1987); *Dear Comrades* (Stanford, 1991); *Behind the Front Lines of the Civil War: Political Parties and Social Movements in Russia* (Princeton UP, 1994); *The Bolsheviks in Russian Society: Revolution and Civil Wars* (Yale UP, 1997); *Russia After Lenin: Politics, Culture and Society, 1921-29* (Routledge, 1998).

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New Babylon III

Posted 14th December 1999

In this third post on *New Babylon*, I'd like to talk about Marek Pytel's book and video, and make one or two further suggestions about the background to the film. The last time I saw *New Babylon* was in the version televised by BBC-2 on 11th January 1985. My impression was much the same as the *Times* reviewer's (quoted by Pytel, p. 54): "a virtuosic, if highly propagandist, montage of fact and symbol." Having anticipated a measurable alteration of emphasis in Pytel's reconstructed synchronisation of the film and music in the 1929 European Export Edit, I confess that, at first sight, I retained my original impression. Kozintsev and Trauberg's juxtaposition of virtuous downtrodden workers against top-hatted bourgeois "bloodsuckers" (standard imagery in late 1920s Soviet cinema) seems too sustained, indeed too crude, to be readily interpreted otherwise. When, for example, the melodramatically downcast Parisian washerwomen perk up and start to scrub with beaming smiles because the Commune lets them work for themselves and not for "the bosses", it's difficult to discern any ironic intention. (Coarse hatred for "bosses" is the standard fare of Communists, who, naturally, always leave themselves out of it.) Only Shostakovich's music gainsays this initial impression -- often very provocatively. Yet other evidence suggests that something else is going on which does not immediately meet the eye. At the very least, there is reason to think that the story behind *New Babylon* is pregnant with significance both for our understanding of Soviet culture in the 1920s and for Shostakovich's role in it.

What is important to realise is that the 1929 European Export Edit (used by Pytel for his synchronisation reconstruction) is the shortest extant version of *New Babylon*, removing around ten minutes of film from the Gosfilmofond version approved by the Moscow censorship board at the beginning of 1929. (These shots consist mostly of female cleavage, come-hither expressions from prostitutes, and other erotic images then unacceptable to censors in France, Britain, and America.) The Gosfilmofond edit, in turn, is shorter by nearly a third of its length (about 700m of film) than the German Export Edit (Cinematheque Suisse), which was somehow despatched to Berlin before the censorship process intervened. And even the German Export Edit was cut for its local market (including a lopped ending). Furthermore, the incarnation of the *New Babylon* shooting script used for the pre-censorship "German" version is itself a substantial revision of the version of the script approved by the Sovkino board at the beginning of 1928. In other words, the version of *New Babylon* which appears in Pytel's early 1980s video reconstruction is at least three stages removed from Kozintsev and Trauberg's 1927 scenario.

Pytel's book contains many evocative stills from the film, as well as some posters, a few rare photographs of the FEKSy themselves, a bibliography and filmography, and a mass of information on every aspect of *New Babylon*. Among this profusion of data we find the curious coincidence that the

Commune's military leader, General Jaroslaw Dombrowski, was aided in escaping a Tsarist prison camp (to which he was sent for his part in the 1863 Polish Uprising) by none other than Shostakovich's paternal grandfather, Boleslaw. Whether this held any great significance for the 23-year-old Shostakovich is, for now, impossible to say, though he's sure to have known about it, if only because it was for this act of Polish nationalist solidarity that his grandfather and family were internally exiled to Siberia. (Dombrowski plays no part in the film, so the subject need not have arisen.)

As a producer/director, Pytel shows his expertise in several ways, some of them subtly perceptive. For instance, among citations of *New Babylon* which he unearths is an extract from Graham Greene's film journalism published in 1938:

Trauberg, the director of *New Babylon*, that magnificent, ludicrous, and savage version of the Paris of 1871 [...] has a genius for legend. One is sometimes still haunted on evenings of rain and despair by the midinette of *New Babylon* with her rain-soaked face and her gawky body, her expression of dumb simplicity and surprise, as she plods painfully in her own person through the stages of evolution and dies with the first glimmer of human intelligence.

Pytel stresses that Greene acquired this impression from the European Export Edit of *New Babylon* in which the central portion of the frame was zoomed into and enlarged, thereby forfeiting "approximately 35% of the film's screen area". This distortion of the original image, says Pytel, creates a close-up narrative "Eisensteinian in its intensity". Thus was Greene's haunting memory quite unintentionally created.

Was Graham Greene nevertheless correct in identifying the transformation undergone by Yelena Kuzmina's character (with its accompanying suggestion of an objective, critical stance on the part of the directors of this "ludicrous" film)? If so, can this transformation be addressed as an instance of the "revolution in the individual" to which Pytel has referred in attempting to isolate a unifying creative aim in FEKS's seven films? On the face of it, this is a matter of opinion. Few would lightly demur with the judgement of so insightful a writer as Greene, even if his conception was arrived at from viewing unintentionally intensified cinematic images. On the other hand, nearly all dramatic art involves change in the protagonists, even if this amounts to little more than a rise in pulse-rate due to physical exertion. Kuzmina's character can certainly be said to realise the ghastly truth of her situation, but it's a moot point as to whether this cocksure young woman would have modified her abrasive behaviour had she not perished while making her discovery. At first glance, the thrust of the film is that such abrasiveness is the very stuff of revolutionary consciousness and will in time prevail. Do not all surviving prints of *New Babylon* perorate on the avenging cry of Communard utopianism, "We shall return"?

Yes, acknowledges Marek Pytel, but Kozintsev and Trauberg's original script ended differently: the soldier Jean digs the grave of Louise (the character, subsequently anonymous, played by Kuzmina); a

photographer shouts "Strike a pose! I'll take your picture for the Album of Heroes"; a sergeant pats Jean on the shoulder and says "Don't worry, son, you'll get used to it"; THE END. -- A much darker, more downbeat conclusion. For Pytel, this indicates an entirely different interpretation:

With this ending, the film is changed. No longer an exhortation for revenge, *New Babylon* becomes an incitement to mutiny and an exercise in sedition. The film's message [is] no longer "We shall return" but the far more specific and unspoken "Don't join the army".

There is a certain justification for this pacifist reading in the opening images of the film, where jingoism is linked, satirically, with decadent eroticism and business interests. The trouble with this is that there was no pacifist context in contemporary Soviet Russia. True, there was a war scare in the USSR during 1927 (offering Stalin a context for his final moves towards supreme power) and there were constant popular rumours during 1926-9 that Russia's enemies were about to invade and that the Soviet government would thereupon collapse... but there was no Russian anti-war movement. At the very most, the original ending of *New Babylon* can be described as bitter and cynical -- quite subversive enough in the Soviet context. (Endings were a perennial issue for Soviet arts watchdogs. The fundamental proposition of Soviet Communist doctrine was that society was advancing towards the "radiant heights" of the "final victory of Socialism": pessimism was counter-revolutionary and endings had to be upbeat. Accordingly, Bulgakov's play *The Days of the Turbins* had its ambiguous ending changed into something more acceptable to Russia's new rulers in 1926; nor are musical instances of this syndrome hard to adduce.)

Nevertheless, in drawing attention to the evolution of the script of *New Babylon*, Pytel raises a key question: how did the original script (described by Trauberg in 1984 as "a real love story, an excellent melodramatic scenario like *S.V.D.*") become the stylish but schematically propagandist final work? As a film-maker, Pytel's main interest is in FEKS and its opus of seven cinematic features: *The Adventures of Octiabrina* (1924), *Michka Versus Udenich* (1925), *The Devil's Wheel* (1926), *The Cloak* (1926), *Little Brother* (1927), *S.V.D.*, *The Society for the Great Cause* (1928), and *New Babylon* (1929). One of his upcoming projects will be a history of FEKS, incorporating an account of how their aims and methods changed, from the dadaist anarchy of their stage production of *The Marriage* (1922) to *New Babylon* with its evolution from melodramatic love story to melodramatic "historical" propaganda during the course of its making. We shall have to wait for the full story, but Marek has meanwhile given me some clues as to FEKS's creative evolution which cast light on the curious conceptual transitions behind *New Babylon*.

FEKS began in a mocking spirit, treating Soviet institutions as subjects for oblique satire (as in the contemporary work of Ehrenburg, Bulgakov, and Zoshchenko). According to the first study of FEKS (Nedobrovo, 1928), the group's now lost debut film *The Adventures of Octiabrina* featured a surreal sequence in which aviators who hadn't joined ODVF (Voluntary Share Association for Assisting the Development of Aviation) were thrown out of an aeroplane. (Pytel: "a satire on the fairly well-known 1923 Rodchenko Dobrolet poster.") A camel declines to assist these unfortunates because they don't eat

cakes baked by the state monopoly; a tractor regards them as enemies because they're opposed to the "alliance" between city and village; and so on. Similarly, the finale of *The Devil's Wheel* contains an exhortation to turn the guns of the cruiser *Aurora* once more against Leningrad -- this time in order to demolish its slum tenements (which the Soviet government had done nothing about during nine years in office). Thereafter, says Pytel, FEKS's angle shifts:

The Cloak is more Formalist in structure than *New Babylon*, using mirror-images and levels of filmic dream subjectivity. *S.V.D.* is more linear and uses different photographic textures. *The Cloak* contains no politics, but has a gentle anti-bureaucratic slant and looks with horror at parade-ground punishments. The scenario of *S.V.D.* deals sympathetically with the failed uprising of the Decembrists in 1825. Neither film, though, is intensely propagandist. There's no didacticism in them.

FEKS's focus, insists Pytel, remained "humanist, pacifist" in these films, a trait still visible in the final version of *New Babylon*. Moreover, the group's interest in individuals -- as opposed to the contemporary Proletkult emphasis on "mass" representations (choral songs, corps dances, spectacles, etc) -- persisted into the original script for *New Babylon*, with its intricate love story and sub-plots. Kozintsev (*The Deep Screen*, Moscow, 1966; i.e., under Soviet constraint) spoke as follows of the development of the script for *New Babylon*:

In *Assault on the Heavens* (the first version of the scenario), various episodes of the subject were elaborated across numerous pages. Little by little, we lost our taste for the labyrinthine complexities of the plot... A social generalization appeared... a collective portrait of the epoch interested us infinitely more. The pages of the scenario dwindled, to be replaced by the "unique musical thrust" of the era, a dynamic fresco.

This passage, quoted by Pytel, bears the hallmarks of Soviet reportage rather than the actual words of Kozintsev himself. The phrase "the 'unique musical thrust' of the era" is Soviet officialese, analogous to the phrase "the rhythm and pace of the Revolution" ascribed to Lev Arnshtam in the article that appears on pp. 20-23 of Elizabeth Wilson's *Shostakovich: A Life Remembered*. Such vague politico-aesthetic formulae, inherited from Proletkult texts of the 1920s, were as much a reflexive feature of official discourse throughout the Soviet period as the notorious "stormy applause rising to an ovation" (customarily said of the receptions "given" to the speeches made by Politburo figures). Sometimes such routine locutions were used by interviewers or their subjects to alert readers to the presence of opinions which, owing to Soviet censorship, could only be expressed by means of their mirror opposites. Hence, Kozintsev could, in fact, have been hinting that FEKS, while developing the scenario of *New Babylon*, was obliged by official pressure to give up its artistic focus on individual psychology and turn to the collectivist ethos then being promoted by RAPP, RAPM, and the Komsomol.

On the other hand, Trauberg (speaking to Theodore Van Houten in Moscow in 1984), ascribed the change of direction in the *New Babylon* scenario to his viewing of Vsevolod Pudovkin's *The End of St Petersburg* in December 1927: "I called Kozintsev and told him that something had happened which

would change all our plans and that we couldn't work according to our scenario." Seeing *The End of St Petersburg* with Trauberg and Pudovkin in Berlin in early March 1928, Kozintsev supposedly agreed with his colleague's view and the original scenario was dumped in favour of the one now most fully preserved in the German Export Edit. Yet speaking to Natasha Nusinova in 1990, Trauberg seemed rather less confident and adopted a distinctly opaque line of argument:

What will be difficult for me will be questions regarding the FEKS movement itself, because from a certain point (this point began around the middle of making *New Babylon*) we followed the path of treason. What do I mean by that? [Mikhail] Romm says that we did everything we were ordered to. But this was not because we were mere bootlickers, that we wanted to get one up on anyone, or just wanted to make money. We sincerely thought that, in the Soviet interest, it was right to do this or that.

It's unclear how far old scores are being settled here (with respect to Romm) -- or whether Trauberg's evasive obscurity indicates a compromise he wished to avoid talking about, even sixty-one years later. (He never emigrated from the Soviet Union and so, in old age, remained at the mercy of the state, unable freely to speak his mind.) It is, in fact, more than possible that he and Kozintsev had been pressured by the Soviet authorities.

Like Lenin, Stalin saw cinema as a vital arm of revolutionary expression and, in 1924, urged that the film industry be placed under direct Party control. During 1927, Soviet cinema was mandated to produce films in celebration of the tenth anniversary of the October Revolution. Among these were *The End of St Petersburg* by Pudovkin, Esfir Shub's propagandist documentaries *The Fall of the Romanov Dynasty* and *The Great Way*, and Eisenstein's *October*. The latter film, made with the participation of the Soviet armed forces, was four hours long when delivered in November 1927. Stalin, though, had just ousted Trotsky, so a third of the print had to be cut to remove references to him. Furthermore, Eisenstein had used *October* to experiment with "intellectual" montage -- a step forward from the theories of his teacher, Lev Kuleshov, whose ideas on montage were predicated solely on visual or emotional associations (the so-called "Kuleshov effect"). Eisenstein, though, wanted to work with ideational associations (what we now call Conceptual Art). This new approach, linked with the theories of the Formalist group of literary critics, was too much for Stalin's ideological watchdogs and the proletarian art groups who, together, attacked *October* for "Formalist excess" (intellectual "elitism", "bourgeois aestheticism").

Stalin, who kept up with Soviet arts (except for painting) but whose favourite genre was film, decided that the USSR's cinema intelligentsia required reform. During 15-21 March 1928, the Party convened a conference on film which, among other things, produced a resolution signed by Eisenstein, Pudovkin, Yutkevich, Kozintsev, Trauberg, and others, which called for "the forming of an organ directly under the Central Committee's Agitprop section which will present producers with comprehensive tasks of a political and cultural nature" -- in effect, a recommendation for the removal of film planning from Glavrepertkom (State Repertoire Committee) and the placing of all such control in the hands of the

Party. No doubt this call for ideological dictatorship in the film industry was itself dictated to the signatory directors, who had no choice but to add their autographs. (A formal end to semi-independence in the Soviet film industry followed in 1929 when Stalin removed Sovkino from the aegis of the Commissariat for Enlightenment, renaming it Soyuzkino, and placing it under the control of the Socialist Realist bureaucrat Boris Shumyatsky.)

Those in the Soviet film industry would have been aware of this change in the weather from as early as December 1927. Yet there was no possibility of overt protest against the "proletarianisation" of their art; indeed, for public purposes, they were obliged to conform with the way in which such issues were presented by the Party. Kozintsev and Trauberg's references to *The End of St Petersburg* may be evasions of this sort (or possibly even Aesopian statements, Pudovkin having warned them of the coming crackdown). Certainly they were not at liberty to say, in so many words, what was almost certainly the truth: that Party-deputed watchdogs had overruled the original, Sovkino-approved, scenario for *New Babylon*, informing them that they could junk it completely or rewrite it on propagandist lines.

If, in March 1928, Kozintsev and Trauberg had been given direct orders to "proletarianise" *New Babylon*, setting them on "the path of treason" (treason to their own artistic principles), they could only have confided this in private. Indeed, they seem to have done just this, to judge from a statement by Eisenstein made soon after the 1928 Conference: "FEKS can tell you a funny story about how and why the Paris Commune was accepted, rejected and then accepted again. There was nowhere they could go and complain." As for the horse's mouth, there is very obviously something Aesopian being "signalled" in the joint statement made by Kozintsev and Trauberg in the December 1928 issue of *Sovetskii Ekran* (given as Afterword I in Pytel's book):

We have been asked to communicate some of what we know about the modernity of our picture. Unfortunately the modernity of *New Babylon* is as nothing to us. Modernity is just a name... This is also unfortunate. The film was originally to be called *Assault on the Heavens*; a name rejected as too indefinite and unconvincing. Then we wanted its name to be *La Canaille* [the mob, the vulgar rabble; also: rogue, rascal]: regrettably that, too, was rejected as being too inflammatory and too convincing [...] We know nothing else except that the thematic plan of *New Babylon* definitely means that [it] is in the "historical-revolutionary" genre. But we can't talk about this theme nor about the message of the film, even if it were possible[...] We are surprised at the late realisation of something unnoticed at the time of release of *The Cloak* or that of *S.V.D.* Our film would have been like neither of these, but at first our faces were found to be a little too alarming to interested viewers. Therefore we have no time to write or speak -- rushing to assemble the film because we thirst to know and want to see the 7 reels of the film *New Babylon*. [Act 7 of the film is reproduced in the same issue of *Sovetskii Ekran*.]

These virtually uncoded lines suggest that the authors, being under constraint, wished to urge a special

alertness among viewers with respect to their film, and that the particular point at issue involved both "outside interference" and a hidden agenda in the work itself. Marek Pytel, whose family is Polish and who thus has Aesopian blood in his veins, is convinced of such a hidden agenda, partly on the basis of pure instinct but also on the rational grounds that Formalist theory (as imported into FEKS by the writer and critic Yuri Tynianov, scenarist for *The Cloak* and *S.V.D.*) indicates not only consistent use of double meaning but also historical double-images, i.e., using one historical event as an analogy for another recent or contemporary one (as Lev Lebedinsky, among others, claimed of 1956 in respect of Shostakovich's Eleventh Symphony, *The Year 1905*). Pytel: "I have always thought that *New Babylon* carries a strong subtext about contemporary Soviet society, viz., the First World War, the mutiny of the Russian troops, the revolution, etc." (Another possible candidate would be the Kronstadt Uprising of 1921, which, as a barometer of anti-Bolshevik unrest throughout the country following the Civil War, prompted Lenin to decree the New Economic Policy as a palliative to allow the national economy to recover and let off some social steam.) What we can be fairly sure of is that, when Kozintsev and Trauberg write "We know nothing else except that the thematic plan of *New Babylon* definitely means that [it] is in the 'historical-revolutionary' genre", they mean that their film is definitely NOT merely "historical" but also contemporary.

There is little evidence of such seditious intent in the filmic side of *New Babylon* as it survives in the twice-cut European Export Edit. The character of the Journalist, played by Sergei Gerassimov, is made up to resemble a young Lenin (cf. Gerassimov as Medox from *S.V.D.* on Pytel, p.83). His visible shock at the failure of the Commune, of which he is represented as the rather smug ideological convener, might perhaps be construed as subversive. Some other facets of the film are likewise open to speculative interpretation. The main visual impression, though, is melodramatically propagandist.

The only aspect of *New Babylon* which systematically casts doubt on the surface impression of the film is Shostakovich's music. How far Pytel's synchronisation of music and image is dependable is unclear. The full-length film, approximated by the German Export Edit, runs about 20 minutes longer than the European Export Edit used by him for his experimental reconstruction (made in Abbey Road, 1981). He has detailed cue notes and is satisfied that the structural relationships of music and image in this video are "fairly accurate". (On the other hand, he has also made a video rough-cut reconstruction of the full length film, assembling frames from the European, German, and Gosfilmofond versions and using music from the 1985 BBC broadcast: "Basically it fits like a hand and glove.")

Without a definitive full-length synchronisation it's hard to make secure inferences about Shostakovich's intent in respect of specific juxtapositions. His stipulations about projection speeds (quoted and explained by Pytel) indicate that he was concerned to preserve his synchronisation structure in some detail, especially at key transitions. As for the theory behind his image/music juxtapositions, he (defensively?) explained some of his intentions in *Sovetskii Ekran* in March 1929:

In composing the music for *Babylon*, I was led least of all by the principle of obligatory illustration of each shot. Essentially I started from the principal shot in each sequence. For

example: at the end of the second reel. The principal movement is the attack on Paris by the German cavalry. A deserted restaurant closes this section. A deep silence. But, despite the absence of the German cavalry on the screen, the music of the cavalry persists, reminding the viewer of the terrible force that has been unleashed.

It is the same with the music for the seventh act, when the soldier stumbles into a restaurant full of bourgeois in the throes of hilarity after the Commune has been crushed. The music, despite the gaiety which reigns over the restaurant, takes on the sombre sentiments of the soldier who is searching for his sweetheart, condemned to death.

I also constructed a great deal on the principal of contrasts. For example, the soldier who meets his love on the barricades is filled with despair. The music becomes more and more cheerful and is finally resolved in a giddy and "obscene" waltz reflecting the Versailles army victory over the Communards. An interesting process is used in the opening of the fourth reel. While rehearsals for an operetta are being shown, the music performs variations on a well-known "galop" which takes on different nuances in relation to the action. Sometimes a gay mood, sometimes bored, sometimes terrifying.

Shostakovich's technique of juxtaposition contradicted the approach he'd been obliged to use during his years as a cinema accompanist, where his (improvised) music was expected to complement, if not further "illustrate", the images. As such, he may have brought his own disruptive ideas to the commission for *New Babylon*. Yet the FEKS team seems to have conceived this novel approach before Shostakovich became involved. Reflecting, under conditions of constraint in Russia in 1966, Kozintsev spoke as follows:

Our ideas coincided. In those years, film music was used to strengthen the emotions of reality or, to use the current terminology, to illustrate the frame. We immediately came to an agreement with the composer that the music would be linked to the inner meaning and not to the external action, that it should develop by cutting across events, and as the antithesis of the mood of a specific scene. Our general principle was not to illustrate, and not to complement or coincide on this point.

The most extreme instance of "antithetical" synchronisation (and one of the few such juxtapositions of which we can be certain) occurs in the ostensibly tragic final scenes where The Soldier digs his lover's grave and the Communards die by firing-squad in a gloomy downpour of rain. This is set to a mutation of Offenbach's can-can, segueing into the burlesque circus march with which the score commences. The contrast here is too violently confrontational to have been missed by *New Babylon's* audiences. Even if Left activists had not objected to the "personalisation" of the film's subject-matter (the individual love story of Jean and Louise, as they were called in the first draft), they could scarcely have avoided being outraged by the image/music juxtapositions of the finale. Indeed, this contrast remains shocking today and it is no surprise that proletarian and Komsomol voices were soon accusing FEKS and Shostakovich of "jeering at the heroic pages of revolutionary history and the French proletariat". To the Left of the

time, this apparently brazen insult to canonical revolutionary principles must have been highly offensive. It's less puzzling that KIM should have attacked the film than that its makers managed to survive the ensuing furore at all.

What was KIM and why did it adopt the "vanguard" role in attacking *New Babylon*? The Communist Youth International (KIM) was one of a cluster of organisations affiliated with Comintern in Moscow. (Others included the Trade Union International, the Peasant International, the International Labour Relief Committee, and so forth). Comintern itself was founded by Lenin in March 1919 to sideline his rivals ("social traitors") in the Second International, its job being to fund and coordinate the activities of communist and socialist parties abroad. Until 1926, Comintern represented the core of Bolshevik internationalism. In 1925, however, Stalin had staked his political future on the policy of Socialism in One Country (simultaneously calculated to save resources for building up the USSR and to give him a platform from which to oust his main "internationalist" enemies: Trotsky and the head of Comintern, Zinoviev). Bukharin replaced Zinoviev as head of Comintern in 1926 but, under Stalin's orders, the organisation was already being penetrated by the OGPU. In 1928, Stalin ordained a shift in Comintern policy from so-called "united front" internationalism to one of polarised isolation. Foreign social democratic parties were denounced as "social fascists" and, under Mikhail Moskvin (Meer Trilisser), Comintern's role switched to subversion of all foreign parties not under OGPU control. (Stalin meanwhile steadily purged Comintern of Old Bolshevik intellectuals until finally terminating it in 1943.)

KIM's function was to organise and control communist youth associations abroad. Little has been written about KIM and we can only speculate as to how it came to be used to denounce *New Babylon*. Given that Comintern and its affiliates were being purged and brought under Stalin's control in 1928, the year in which *New Babylon* was being shot abroad, KIM's interest in the film can hardly have been coincidental. Since foreign communist youth organisations were prime targets for Soviet propaganda cinema, KIM very probably shared some responsibility for vetting new films. Conceivably, a few KIM delegates sat on the Moscow film censorship board; equally conceivably, since cinema was very much a young person's medium (Trauberg was 20 and Kozintsev 17 at the time of the FEKS manifesto), KIM's Komsomol activists might have been deputed to keep a special watch on Soviet cinema in general. Under Stalin's internal reform of Comintern during 1928-9 (and in view of the strictures on the cinema industry laid down at the Party conference on film in March 1928), KIM's spying eyes would have been especially sharp and censorious.

As for how the German Export Edit of *New Babylon*, with its extra twenty minutes of pre-censorship footage, managed to get out of Russia in late 1928, that, too, would probably have been via a sub-operation of Comintern. KIM may have been involved (they would not, then, have heard Shostakovich's score in conjunction with the film); but a likelier route was the export side of Mezhhropohmfilm Russ, the Comintern-controlled Moscow film company which distributed the work of Pudovkin, Dziga Vertov, and Aleksandr Dovzhenko. This company was part of the network run by Willi Münzenberg, a Comintern agent who, from Berlin, organised the clandestine operations to recruit Western Leftist intellectuals ("fellow travellers"). Prometheus Films, the German distribution company for Soviet films,

was also Münzenberg-owned -- the channel through which Eisenstein's films were exported to the West or sent to leftwing student groups (i.e., it was linked to KIM). Trauberg's brother Ilya, himself a director, happened to work for UFA in Berlin, where the creators of *New Babylon* stopped off on their way to Paris, ostensibly to see Pudovkin's *The End of St Petersburg*. UFA's studio, courtesy of cash-injections by Paramount and MGM, was very well-equipped and advanced in the coming development of soundtracks. Marek Pytel thinks the idea of an orchestral score for *New Babylon* may have sprung from what Kozintsev and Trauberg saw at UFA: that their final intention was to record their envisaged score to soundtrack. (Ilya Trauberg was then shooting *Blue Express* with a score by Honegger. He subsequently made a disc-soundtrack version with music by Willi Münzenberg's in-house composer Edmund Meisel.)

So much, then, for the KIM connection -- except to add that there is a possibility that Volkov misheard Shostakovich, who might actually have been referring to KEM (Experimental Cinema Workshop), a censorious left-wing production collective organised in Leningrad in 1924 by the feared GPU officer turned film director Fridrikh Ermler. But what was the image/music juxtaposition technique, which so annoyed KIM (or KEM), originally intended to convey? The fact that Kozintsev and Trauberg found that their ideas "coincided" with those of Shostakovich presumably means that it wasn't a matter of mere anarchic irresponsibility or misjudgement on the part of the 23-year-old composer. They agreed together what was required and Shostakovich gave them what they wanted. There must therefore have been a conceptual basis for the choice. Was this concept purely aesthetic or in some way political?

The nearest thing to pure aesthetics in 1920s Russia was the Formalist literary school, centred on the theoretical writings of Viktor Shklovsky, Boris Eikhenbaum, and Yuri Tynianov. Tynianov was head of scenarios for FEKS during 1926-7, scripting *The Cloak* and co-scripting *S.V.D* with Yuri Oksman. Of the first of these, Dmitry Shlapentokh and Vladimir Shlapentokh write:

Another excellent example of a movie brimming with hints of the oppressive nature of the Soviet regime. The very fact that well-known writer Iurii Tynianov wrote the script demonstrated that the movie had an oppositional political viewpoint. Tynianov's dislike of the regime was well known. His writings often dealt with the era of Nicholas I -- an era characterised by bureaucratisation, regimentation, and brutal repression. During this time, not only was real political protest suppressed but even the most innocent deviation from the prescribed way of thinking was enough to invite disaster.

These characteristics of the reign of Nicholas I were also prevalent during the NEP period. Like the tsarist regime, this was a time of intense bureaucratisation of Soviet life. Additionally, as in Nicholas's time, the Soviet government allowed a certain degree of freedom for those engaged in purely economic activity. On the other hand, it was suspicious of intellectuals, especially freethinking writers. Given its parallels with the Soviet NEP period, the reign of Nicholas I provided excellent allegorical material. It was

also open to attack because the period was officially designated as having been reactionary...

The use of Gogol's theme was additional protection for Tynianov and the movie's directors against criticism for portraying the life of a clerk, who was a petty bourgeois and deserved neither attention nor sympathy. In the film, the clerk was formerly a part of the state bureaucratic machinery but had become alienated from it and victimized by it. The leviathan confronting the clerk not only represented the bureaucratic machinery itself, but, together with all aspects of life in the city, represented a cruel and repressive regime. The entire movie was infused with an air of irrationality that emphasised the omnipresent bureaucratic regime as poisoning society. From this perspective, the movie followed the familiar anti-Bolshevik theme of the revolutionary period that viewed the Bolshevik victory as the ultimate victory of the forces of evil.

The director[s] took a very fatalistic approach, implying that any attempt to change the existing order was doomed and would ultimately result in the subjugation of the individual and the creation of an all-embracing bureaucracy. To compound this pessimistic view, the film also implied that any attempt by the individual to absorb him- or herself in private life, or seek solace in family ties, was also doomed to failure. It is clear that the director[s] saw no hope for humanity. [Soviet Cinematography 1918-1991: ideological conflict and social reality (Aldine de Gruyter, NY, 1993), pp. 65-7.]

Tynianov left FEKS before *New Babylon* was originated, becoming head of the cinema department of the Institute of the History of Arts in Leningrad. Marek Pytel sees elements of Tynianov's Formalist ideas in his two FEKS scenarios and identifies similar structural concepts (e.g., mirror-symmetry of "acts") in the mostly uncut German Export Edit of *New Babylon*. Could the shock effect of the musical mirror-symmetry at the beginning and end of the film have resulted from blindly following Tynianov's ideas? This is unlikely -- if only because, while Formalism might seem purely aesthetic to Western readers, in Soviet Russia its principles of "defamiliarisation" (Shklovsky) and multiple voices or "heteroglossia" (Bakhtin) were innately opposed to monopolistic ideology and certainly against totalitarianism.

Formalism inescapably stood in a political relationship with Bolshevik rule. The Jakobson-Tynianov theses of 1928, now important to postmodern literary theorists, were drawn up by Roman Jakobson and Yuri Tynianov partly in defence of a movement which was about to be proscribed under the Cultural Revolution. There is, then, no chance that FEKS and Shostakovich could have followed Tynianov's precepts in *New Babylon* without an awareness of their political consequences. Shostakovich, according to Volkov (*St Petersburg*, p. 389), read Tynianov "avidly", importing aspects of the critic's work on Gogol into his treatment of *The Nose* (and later, perhaps, becoming aware of the poet Kiukhelbeker through Tynianov's *Kiukhlia: The Tale Of A Decembrist*). Likewise, Ivan Sollertinsky, a friend of Bakhtin, introduced Shostakovich to the critic's *Problems of Dostoyevsky* and drew his attention to the

presence, in *The Nose*, of Bakhtin's "carnival" principle. During the late 1920s, Formalism flourished in Leningrad's underground intellectual circles, including those of the individualist ethos -- and Shostakovich and FEKS were part of this.

The question arises: how could people as intelligent as Kozintsev, Trauberg, and Shostakovich -- with their often even more brilliant colleagues among the Leningrad arts intelligentsia looking, as it were, over their shoulders -- possibly have been serious about the propaganda aspect of *New Babylon*? That the proletarianisation of Soviet culture had commenced early in 1928 could not have been lost on such astute minds. It was clear by late March of that year, with the Party conference on film, that things were on the turn. In Moscow, the proletarian Oktyabr Group, which included the film directors Sergei Eisenstein and Esfir Shub, issued its manifesto in the March issue of *Sovremennaya arkhitektura*:

[The purpose of Oktyabr] is to unite the most advanced production-artists [sic] in the fields of architecture, industrial art, film-making, photography, painting, graphics, and sculpture, who wish to devote their creative efforts to the concrete demands of the proletariat in the work of ideological propaganda, and in the production and shaping of the collectivist way.

The Oktyabr Manifesto went on to castigate individualism as mere bourgeois aesthetic elitism which "canonises the old way of life and saps the energy and depresses the will of the culturally underdeveloped proletariat". There were, among Russia's artistic avant-garde, more than a few who vaguely incorporated what they understood to be "Marxism" into their work and tried, if only for a while, to work with the Soviet bureaucracy (rather than, surreptitiously, against it, as those of both the progressive and retrogressive individualist type did). But appearances could be as deceptive as the times were, to some, confusing. Many who signed proletarian-collectivist declarations (and even, like Shostakovich with TRAM, worked for organisations that operated within the proletarian ethos) were ambivalent or even frankly cynical about ideology in art.

Eisenstein's anecdote concerning the vicissitudes of FEKS's Commune scenario shows that he was one such. Another, Adrian Piotrovsky, who worked with both FEKS (the scenario for *The Devil's Wheel*) and TRAM (the Agitprop play *Rule Britannia!* with music by Shostakovich), was equally hard to pin down. A leading classical scholar, he nevertheless put himself at the service of the Bolshevik arts bureaucracy in 1920, deploring petty entrepreneurialism and middlebrow taste (he was himself a highbrow) and issuing the slogan "Let the theatres be empty, let the philistines stay at home!". This was not far from the FEKS manifesto of 1922 (except that, being young and disposed to annoy aesthetes by embracing popular vulgarity, the FEKSy welcomed the culture of the *café chantant* which offended men of Piotrovsky's cultivated background). Seeking to imbue the new revolutionary culture with the Ancient Greek democratic spirit, Piotrovsky must have sensed defeat when Stalin took over. In the turnaround month of March 1928, he commented in *Zhizn' iskusstva* on the "proletarian" edit of Eisenstein's *October* (already cut before screening on Stalin's orders):

There can only be one conclusion. Work on *October* cannot be considered finished. We have a second version of the film on our screens now. It differs greatly from the first version, which was shown during the 10th anniversary celebrations. And this is both good and bad. Now we have a right to ask for and expect yet another version of *October* or, more correctly, several new versions.

Given that Piotrovsky prostrated his sophistication before the promise of the revolution (or at least his vision of its promise), is not the absurdity of this statement of an order jarringly incommensurate with a man of his intelligence? Within the imperium of the Communist world (Absurdistan, as it was referred to by certain of its inhabitants), absurdity was at once a naturally occurring phenomenon and a subject for the deliberately contrived artifice of irony. We have a choice: either Piotrovsky was, in phases, an idiot; or, on occasion, he was sufficiently intelligent to be able to mimic idiocy for special effect. (There is a third possibility, of course: that he was mad. With tragic irony, he does seem to have gone mad in prison soon after his arrest in 1938.)

The totalitarian environment offers a heightened version of the philosophical proposition that one can never really know who anyone else is -- and our dilemma in the case of Piotrovsky is typical in this respect. Probability, based on context, is all that removes such dilemmas from pure abstraction. In this case, the fact of Piotrovsky's high intellectual gifts, taken together with the ambiguity of his manoeuvring between a company like FEKS and a company like TRAM, suggest that the absurdity of his request for endless multiple "remixes" of Eisenstein's *October* was quite deliberately calculated. Far from obvious to all who read it, the Aesopian absurdity of Piotrovsky's statement would have had a ready alibi: the fact that contemporary proletarian arts ideology advocated "endless revolution", a notion which, in an aesthetic rather than a political sense, was also part of Formalist theory. (Piotrovsky also had links with Formalism.) If challenged, depending on the company, he would have a perfect defence.

Such straightfaced absurdism was absolutely integral to what, in Soviet Russia, was called Aesopian discourse and which, as such, has often been referred to as form of *yurodstvo*. (Cf. Shostakovich's notorious observations on the length and yet also the shortness of certain aspects of his Tenth Symphony.) Often Western critics take this sort of thing at face-value, accepting deliberately ridiculous statements under political constraint as representative of the real views of those who made them. (In a nutshell, it is this problem which bedevils so much Western would-be evaluation of Shostakovich.) Yet we only have to delve a little into the details of individualist intellectual life in Russia to see that the people making such seemingly ridiculous or self-contradictory statements were often highly intelligent. Take Yuri Tynianov, a man among whose "anti-Bolshevik allusions" is the satirical story *Lieutenant Kije* and whose various books, according to Nikolai Chukovsky, "appeared every few years [and] were read by the intelligentsia eagerly and anxiously" (Volkov, op. cit., pp. 387-8). Is this a man -- close to FEKS and respected by the young Shostakovich -- who could have fallen for propagandistic art as operatically exaggerated as that of *New Babylon*? And are Kozintsev and Trauberg -- the authors of the barely encoded announcement reproduced above from the December 1928 issue of *Sovetskii Ekran* --

any more likely to have done so? As for Shostakovich, he was the composer of an opera which Leningrad Formalists had welcomed, in terms of its aesthetics, as one of their own.

Contextual knowledge, even of this provisional sort, together with reasonable deduction, leads us inexorably to the logical conclusion that either there is more to the filmic aspect of *New Babylon* than meets the eye, or that its raw propagandism was largely forced upon FEKS by a proletarian intervention (or a visit by the GPU) during the same month, March 1928, which produced the Party conference on film, the Oktyabr manifesto, and the ambiguous utterance of Piotrovsky concerning the infinite editability of Eisenstein's *October*. Since neither Kozintsev nor Trauberg ever left Russia, it is hardly surprising that they were reluctant, after 1928-9, to say anything about *New Babylon* which might have indicated other explanations for its metamorphoses. In 1928, Trauberg's wife was pregnant with their daughter Natalya (now known for her Russian translations of P. G. Wodehouse); as a family man, he had no choice but to knuckle under. Later, of course, he suffered during the anti-Semitic campaign of 1948-53 -- in itself enough to explain his evasive pronouncements of later years (e.g., the "Ghent Statement", reproduced as Afterword II in Pytel's book, where Trauberg sticks firmly to the line that the extra footage in the German version is illegitimate).

Self-published, Marek Pytel's book is not perfect, lacking the supervising hand of an editor, the long-stop of a proof-reader, and, most vital, an index. Technical glitches aside, this book is visually elegant (courtesy of Clifford Harper's design) and is valuable in itself for the way it opens up cultural areas so far little addressed (and there's plenty more to come). It's also valuable to students of Shostakovich in drawing attention to the deeper surroundings of *New Babylon*, and the effects which understanding this background may have upon our grasp of the work itself. One may not agree with Pytel's estimate of *New Babylon* as "a leading example of libertarian art rarely seen in any media let alone in national state cinema", but one is left deprived of the superficial response of dismissing his claim outright by the fact that his work discloses, in passing, that perhaps nine-tenths of the Shostakovich story is yet to be revealed. (Pytel, for example, is one of the few people outside the 1930s USSR to have seen *Alone*, Shostakovich's next film with post-FEKS Kozintsev and Trauberg. He reports its opening reels as satirising the nascent Socialist Realist aesthetic.)

There remains the question of what Shostakovich, together with Kozintsev and Trauberg, intended to effect with his score for *New Babylon*. It is, for example, a fair assumption that he would have been aware of the wider politico-cultural hiatus of March 1928 and of its effects on the *New Babylon* project in particular. (For the First All-Union Party Conference on Cinema, see Richard Taylor, *The Politics of the Soviet Cinema 1917-1929*, [publ. 1979]; Richard Taylor and Ian Christie, *The Film Factory: Russian and Soviet Cinema in Documents, 1896-1939* [publ. 1988].)

Returning, finally, to Laurel Fay, I hope I've shown why it's so extraordinary that, during twenty years of

access to primary Soviet research material, she has never bothered to look into why KIM chose to attack *New Babylon*, let alone to investigate the wider culture and politics of the mid-1920s or to probe the intellectual company Shostakovich kept during that time. Instead, she has chosen to pursue her conviction (in the face of personal testimonies to the contrary from those who knew him) that Shostakovich was a communist throughout this period. In her essay "Shostakovich as Man and Myth" (in the booklet for the Chicago Symphony Orchestra concerts of June 1999), Fay declares that "there is no reason to doubt the sincerity of Shostakovich's political or aesthetic convictions [in 1927-36]. He was not an elitist composer. He was a patriot with a deep commitment to his people and culture [...] endeavouring to create a progressive new art necessary and appropriate to the new socialist reality." (The elementary mistake of confusing patriotism with Soviet orthodoxy is astonishing in 1999.) Fay goes on: "That art did not exclude overt propaganda; for the climaxes of his Second and Third symphonies, Shostakovich used a chorus to deliver stirring idealistic texts."

It is Laurel Fay's prerogative to ignore whatever documentary material she wishes. It is ours to judge her conclusions accordingly. Take, for instance, her assertion that, in his Second Symphony (1927), Shostakovich, out of "sincere political convictions", used the "overtly propagandistic" verse of Alexander Bezymensky in the service of "a progressive new art necessary and appropriate to the new socialist reality". How can this be squared with Shostakovich's admission, in his contemporary letters to Tatyana Glivenko, that he wrote the Symphony in haste, became "tired of occupying [him]self" with it, and thought Bezymensky's (supposedly "stirring, idealistic") poem so "abominable" that he feared he'd be unable to set it? We are further entitled to enquire how Fay reconciles her claim with the fact that Glivenko told Elizabeth Wilson in 1989 that Shostakovich had considered Bezymensky's propaganda verses "quite disgusting", and that Nikolai Malko, who conducted the premiere, recalled that "Shostakovich did not like [Bezymensky's verses] and simply laughed at them; his setting did not take them seriously, and showed no enthusiasm whatever". Where is the stirring, idealistic political sincerity of which Fay speaks? (And why does she talk in Communist jargon: "a progressive new art necessary and appropriate to the new socialist reality"?)

As those who've studied the unfolding of the documentary record on Shostakovich during the 1990s will be aware, the case of the propaganda poem in his Second Symphony is merely part of an extensive sequence of evidence which indicates a conclusion about his "political" beliefs quite contrary to Fay's assumption. Indeed, Elizabeth Wilson comes to precisely that contrary conclusion in her narrative for *Shostakovich: A Life Remembered*, where Shostakovich is shown as evading or skimping his musico-political responsibilities wherever he could. Why, then -- aside from her decision to ignore (i.e., not even try to explain away) testimony in conflict with her prejudice -- does Fay reach a conclusion about Shostakovich's beliefs in 1927-36 diametrically opposed to that of her "close friend" Wilson (DSCH Journal 9, p.49)? I would suggest that it's because she lacks the deeper understanding of the background to this period which would lead her to -- at the very least -- lend some consideration to the aforementioned contrary evidence which Wilson has fully accepted. The example of *New Babylon* is merely one indication of the lack of depth in Fay's approach.

--Ian MacDonald

NB. I wish to clarify my statement, made in my second post on *New Babylon*, that Marek Pytel met Leonid Trauberg "on several occasions". The preface to his book states that he and Trauberg began a "brief" correspondence in 1977 and met "for a few hours" in 1983. In fact, these few hours took the form of three separate encounters spread throughout one week, during which Trauberg called him a "friend" and, referring to Pytel's manuscript thesis on FEKS of 1978, told him, "if anyone asks you about it, tell them Trauberg has seen it and gives it his full authorisation".

(Also on-line: the 1922 [FEKS manifesto](#) and a site devoted to [the Commune](#).)

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Communism and Fascism

Posted 26th February 2000

Peter McNelly's post about the parallels drawn between Nazism and Communism in Vasily Grossman's *Life and Fate* raises an issue much-discussed among the Soviet-period intelligentsia, whose extension of the term "fascist" to include their Communist masters became a standard ingredient of post-Stalin dissidence (e.g., the writings of Vladimir Bukovsky and the "anti-fascist" placards raised against the attempted Old Guard coup of August 1991, referred to by Yevgeny Yevtushenko as a "fascist putsch"). Nor were the Soviet *intelligenty* unusual in drawing this parallel. In the West, the similarities between the two systems were virtually a commonplace of intellectual life during the 1930s, notably in the work of economist Peter Drucker who foresaw the Hitler-Stalin Pact (see Orwell, *Collected Essays, Journalism, and Letters*, III, p. 137). During the 1940s, such perceptions were assimilated by James Burnham into his theory of Managerialism, a significant influence on Orwell's *Nineteen Eighty-four*. Likewise, those who follow the academic study of Fascism, paradigmatic and otherwise, will be aware of similar theses advanced in the last twenty-five years by scholars like Zeev Sternhell and A. James Gregor (not to mention Alan Bullock's monumental comparison of Hitler and Stalin). In short, the theoretical equation of Fascism and Communism was well-established in Western historiography for most of the twentieth century.

Of course, one has to take an interest in the subject to know about this, something which David Fanning, for example, clearly does not. Replying (AMS meeting, Boston 31/10/1998) to my colleague Dmitry Feofanov's contentions along these lines, Fanning professed to be "disconcerted": "I'm worried about equating practice with principles. International Socialism and National Socialism are significantly different as ideologies, aren't they?" (DSCH Journal 11 [Summer 1999], p. 39) Once again, one is surprised by the casual historical vagueness current in musicology. It is as if other disciplines -- historical, sociological, literary, cultural -- barely exist so far as contemporary musicologists are concerned.

There is no doubt that, owing to such unfamiliarity with the common features of Fascism and Communism, the Soviet Communist regime has got off relatively lightly in the general Western intellectual purview compared with Hitler. However, much of this blindness to fact has been, and continues to be, a matter of deliberate policy. The Western left-liberal intelligentsia has a lot to answer for in terms of averting its eyes from anything incompatible with its idealised vision of the Soviet Union -- most egregiously in the Brezhnev era, after the Thaw had openly exposed to Western discernment the repressive nature of Soviet rule. I remember going into the leftwing bookshop Colletts in Charing Cross Road in 1978 to buy *The Gulag Archipelago*. Failing to find the book in the shop's basement History department, I was dismissively informed by a shop assistant that it was "upstairs... in Fiction". In other words, a 2000-page history of the Soviet labour-camp system was so inconvenient to the worldview of

those in charge of Collett's History department that they refused it shelf-space alongside the complete works of Lenin -- the man who founded the Gulag in 1918.

Forever Flowing, Vasily Grossman's most explicit contention that Lenin was Stalin's progenitor, was written alongside *Life and Fate* during 1954-64. Refused Soviet publication, it was first published in Frankfurt in 1970 and translated into English two years later. The Western left-liberal constituency entirely ignored it. Only after the novel was published in the USSR in 1989 -- accompanied by what Grossman scholar Frank Ellis calls "an article bearing the unmistakable stamp of the CPSU's Central Committee: a discursive and tortuous apologia which desperately attempted to dissociate Lenin from Stalin, and thus preserve Leninist hagiography intact" -- did Grossman's critique even begin to be acknowledged by Western left-liberal intellectuals.

It was for the milder contentions about Lenin and Stalin in *Life and Fate* that the KGB "arrested" the manuscript of Grossman's novel in 1961 -- the only time in history a book has been taken into custody. Further to Peter McNelly's observations on the overlaps between *Life and Fate* and [Shaporina's diary](#), it's worth adding that Grossman's second wife, Olga Mikhailovna, was among the arrested of 1937 (probably because her first husband, Boris Guber, had been a member of the Pereval literary group [see [Shaporina's diary](#)]). Grossman wrote to Yezhov, begging for her release and Olga was let out in 1938. Almost certainly his plea was allowed because of the contemporary success of his novel *Kolchugin's Youth*, journal-published during 1937-40; indeed, it was nominated for a Stalin Prize. This, though, was personally vetoed by Stalin in 1940, who condemned the book's political slant, calling its author a "Menshevist". Luckily for Grossman, the Terror was by then winding down and he soon found an opportunity to justify his existence by means of his front-line war correspondence.

Returning to Shostakovich, another novel worth reading in connection with his symphonies of the Terror is Lidiya Chukovskaya's *Sofya Petrovna*. Chukovskaya, then an editor of children's books under Samuil Marshak in Leningrad, lost her husband, the astrophysicist Matvei Bronshtein, to the NKVD (who arrested him and shot him in jail in 1937). Grief-stricken yet resolute, she stood with her friend Akhmatova in the city's prison queues. While Akhmatova was writing *Requiem*, Chukovskaya wrote *Sofya Petrovna*, a touching portrayal of the slow breakdown of an honest but self-deceiving woman whom fate gradually forces to confront the reality of the Terror. As with Grossman's *Life and Fate*, the manuscript of Chukovskaya's acutely atmospheric novel was sought for by the NKVD, but the outbreak of war saved the author, and the exercise book containing *Sofya Petrovna* survived in the care of some friends (who themselves perished during the siege of Leningrad).

--Ian MacDonald

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More on Soviet dissidence

Posted 3rd March 2000

Peter McNelly wrote:

>>Many of my professors were quite openly Marxist. Some of
>>them were quite involved in the anti-Vietnam war movement.
>>I remember one particular philosophy professor urging us to
>>study Lenin ASAP because he was the only one who was tough-
>>minded enough to know how to go about winning a revolution
>>and if we were going to bring down American Imperialism,
>>etc. we had better get tough fast, etc. blah, blah, blah.

PM's memories of the intellectual left in the United States during the 1960s mirror mine of the same period on the other side of the Atlantic. I went up to Cambridge in 1968, four months after the "events" of May in Paris and London. Posters of Lenin, Mao, and Guevara were everywhere. In many campus conversations, the word "revolution" seemed to occur in every sentence. While the atmosphere was by no means entirely serious and urgent, this sort of mood, reflecting the far more confrontational ethos of contemporary student life in Europe and North America, was already a consistent undercurrent in British universities, emerging openly in 1969-71. Student life in this period largely consisted of bunking off lectures to attend "demos" or meetings -- and the uncommitted, like myself, often found themselves roped in and dragged along.

Within a few weeks of arriving at Cambridge, I -- then a quasi-hippie political naif -- was informed by a couple of kind and sensible fellow students whom I liked and respected that the Soviet invasion of Czechoslovakia in September had been a necessary measure "to safeguard the revolution". As a "love-and-peace" type, I was taken aback; and more surprised to find this point of view shared by several of the Cambridge alumni I subsequently befriended (though the sort of Leninist professor recalled by Peter McNelly didn't arrive on British campuses till the beginning of the 1970s). I should stress that these were all highly intelligent people, quite unlike the sloganeering Mao/Trot agitators who made up the fighting forefront of the Grosvenor Square demo in March 1968. (My Cambridge radical friends routinely mocked such bellicose Spartacists with their crass march-chants of "We shall fight, we shall win, London, Paris, Rome, Berlin" and so forth.)

Throughout my years in this, then predominant, environment, there was never a mention of the name "Stalin", nor a single reference to the Gulag. I once spied a copy of Solzhenitsyn's *One Day in the Life of Ivan Denisovich* on somebody's shelf, but I doubt it had been read. The general sentiment seemed to be that such stuff constituted reactionary pessimism; indeed, I often heard otherwise humane people

discussing who would be "the first" to be sent to our own British labour camps when "the Revolution" arrived. I must again emphasise that such assumptions were part of mainstream student life at that time -- and, when I moved to London, I found them to be common among the formerly peace-loving counterculture. The driving force of this attitude was an ardent faith in the ideal of revolution, an impulse which then engulfed everything. To people of this mind-set, the Stalin scandal of '56 was merely an embarrassing car-crash on the road to the Revolution, quickly forgotten and detoured around. All that was different about Left revolutionism in the late 1960s and early 1970s was that it was anarchically anti-Party (Maoist) with fringe influences from the Situationists and a hippieish input of post-Freudian "sex politics" (Reich, Marcuse, etc). The USSR was less frequently invoked as a totem than Cuba or China, but it was still, in the main, firmly believed in as the "vanguard of socialism" with -- this was always the defence -- an exemplary health service and education system. In reality, nobody knew the first thing about the Soviet health service or education system; they were merely recycling propaganda and spouting theory. But, of course, theory was all anyone was interested in. Fact and practice were tiresome details -- more minor impediments on the road to Revolution.

My own political engagement was mild. I tagged along on some "peace" marches but steered clear of the incessant "sit-ins" and the violent stuff. Even so, I fell for some of the more emotionally appealing aspects of Revolutionism, sheepishly buying a couple of Red Chinese propaganda posters for my wall (mainly because they were rather beautiful) and dutifully struggling through David Hare's interminable play *Fanshen* in the interests of "solidarity" with Third World radicalism. It was easy to morally blackmail conscientious young people by appealing to them with images of worthy peasants and grim allusions to the tracts of Frantz Fanon. I duly succumbed. As a young journalist in London during the 1970s, I devoted my "political" energies, such as they were, to documenting the resurgence of Fascism in British fringe politics. As a result of this, I became reasonably learned in the study of Fascism in general, a complicated and slippery subject if ever there was one. My Maoist posters came down around the time of the end of the Chinese Cultural Revolution and the arrest of the Gang of Four in 1976 -- but I remained in the dark about the realities of communism until 1978, when I read one of the few books of the 20th century which can plausibly be described as essential reading: Solzhenitsyn's *The Gulag Archipelago*.

It was as if a light, a harshly sarcastic light at that, had been suddenly switched on to illuminate the neglected dark side of modern history. I was absolutely stunned by *Gulag*. Nothing in my generational milieu had prepared me for this. As a fan of Shostakovich's music since my teens (early '60s), I realised, within a few days of beginning my journey through Solzhenitsyn's enormous chronicle, that "this" -- this world, this experience, this sensibility -- was what lay behind that music. I tried to speak about this with my friends, but none of them, even the rightwingers, was interested. No one wants to hear bad news, it seems. I was, moreover, made well aware that the atmosphere of the time -- the post-punk period of leftist anarchism and the Anti-Nazi League -- had no use for anything that might impede the cause of socialist Revolution. I found myself politically in a minority of one: anti-Fascist but also now anti-Communist -- though not in any ideological sense. Theory did not fascinate me as it did so many of my contemporaries. I was, in effect, in "moral shock". Communism was suddenly vile to me for what it

became *in practice*. (I went on to study not only Soviet history but to read whatever I could on every communist regime in the 20th century world.)

I soon saw that plays like Hare's *Fanshen* (and the British radical theatre was full of them at this time) were classic examples of Socialist Realism -- which is to say: deliberate lies designed to entice the innocent. Not that David Hare was himself a deliberate liar; he was merely adopting a genre out of aesthetic expedience. His play was, nevertheless, no more than a fantasy of post-revolutionary Chinese rural life as a decent idealistic Western leftwinger would have wanted it to be. Hare knew nothing of the savage genocidal lunacies which Mao had inflicted on his people during the previous twenty years. Until then, almost nothing had been written about the Chinese Revolution by those affected by it. Books like Nien Cheng's *Life and Death in Shanghai* (1986), Zhang Xianling's *Half of Man is Woman* (1988), Jung Chang's *Wild Swans* (1991), and Harry Wu's *Bitter Winds* (1994) were unwritten. Hare, though, might have read several books on the Chinese annexation of Tibet -- except that Tibet was not then the popular cause it has since rightly become. (Back in the '70s, the spurious Maoist claims that Tibet is historically part of China and a repressive theocracy were generally conceded.)

So far as I know, David Hare is no longer an unwitting Maoist stooge. Everyone is entitled to make political mistakes; and -- short of inflicting damage on others as a result -- all that counts is that one acknowledges these mistakes and turns to something a little less dangerously stupid. Of course, the longer one persists in self-deception or lazy ignorance, the less forgivable the crime -- especially if one happens to be a "media person" through whose broadcast misconceptions other people's minds may be warped. (A minor instance of this would be David Pownall's monumentally idiotic play *Master Class* which presents Shostakovich as a fragile neurotic traumatised by Russia's war dead, his incessant tearful breakdowns being defended, against the gruff impatience of Stalin and Zhdanov, by an uncharacteristically astute and solicitous Prokofiev. This amazing rubbish was transmitted on BBC Radio 3 in 1983 -- and listened to by the present writer with gritted teeth.)

Fanshen, like so much political fantasy emanating from the Western left-liberal milieu, was predicated on a conception of how things should be, rather than on how they are or were. This brings me to Gene Homel's interesting post. Gene wrote:

>>Ian is mistakenly equating the 'left-liberal intelligentsia'
>>with the Stalinist left, which in reality formed only one
>>(minority) section of the left from the 1920s to the 1970s.
>>The reality is that various sections of the left were among
>>the first and the most vehement opponents of Stalinism. This
>>includes non-Stalinist Marxists such as Trotskyists and
>>others, "anarchists" such as Emma Goldman (who wrote a

>>pioneering critique of the USSR), and, most importantly, the
>>predominant democratic left in Western Europe, Canada, the
>>United States and elsewhere, which was not shy about
>>criticizing Stalinist totalitarianism, from Koestler's
>>*Darkness at Noon* to the American collection *The God that Failed*.

Gene misconstrues the scope of my argument. I'm not talking solely about the Western anti-Stalinist reaction; nor about the isolated few who grasped the truth of Stalinism prior to Khrushchev's denunciation in 1956 -- especially not about the Trotskyites, whose fealty to Bolshevik principles makes them as reflexively revolutionist and dictatorial as anything they carp at as if from higher moral ground. (Likewise, Goldman's rejection of the USSR was built into her political outlook.) I'm surprised Gene mentions neither Raymond Aron's *L'Opium des intellectuels* (1955) nor, indeed, George Orwell, whose writings of the 1940s had more influence in terms of forming anti-Stalinist opinion in the West than those of any other writer -- certainly more than Koestler, significant though his contribution was. Orwell, of course, had much trouble finding British and American publishers for *Animal Farm* owing to the pro-Stalin/fellow-travelling preponderance in contemporary Western left-liberal intellectual circles. (His journalism and essays record his virtually solitary struggle against this preponderance in British intellectual life of the time, while *Nineteen Eighty-four* is the most informed and detailed attack on Stalinist society prior to the first publications of the "totalitarian" school of historians.)

Of course, it would be easy to juxtapose Gene's few examples of anti-Stalinist leftists with the far more numerous (and considerably more famous) roll-call of Western intellectuals who either openly supported Stalin or attempted to shield the USSR from criticism of its innate illiberality by means of Socialist Realist deception and misdirection in their work. (See, for example, David Caute's *The Fellow Travellers* [1973/88], Bernard-Henri Lévy's *Les Aventures de la liberté* [1991], and Stephen Koch's *Double Lives* [1995].) Martin Anderson has mentioned Shaw and the British doyens of self-deception Sidney and Beatrice Webb; I would add -- just for starters -- the Sidney and Beatrice Webb of France: Louis Aragon and Elsa Triolet, whose faith in Soviet Communism survived 1956 and whose response to the 1968 invasion of Czechoslovakia was to leave the Soviet fold whilst retaining their membership of the (Stalinist) French Communist Party. As Gene will know, the list of such celebrity Stalin-groupies is rather long. (I'll trundle it out, if asked.) Furthermore, such celebrities addressed not a local political constituency but their societies at large -- and it was their influence, rather than the specialist analyses of non-Stalinist Western socialist thinkers and party leaders, which did the damage.

Gene mentions Camus, but Sartre was far more important in his popular effect -- and this was a man who, in 1977, striving not to "drive Billancourt [a proletarian suburb of Paris] to despair", objected to publicisation of facts about the Gulag, claiming that those who harped on about such things were in the pay of the CIA. Apart from the characteristic trait of the Western fellow-traveller of trying to steer the layperson away from anything which might prejudice him or her against the ongoing project of bringing about Marxian revolution -- expressed quite honestly, it must be said, in Sartre's case -- what is ironic is that Sartre, with Merleau-Ponty, had been the first leading French intellectual (in 1950) to raise

objections to the Soviet labour camp system, albeit that he did so with same reluctance and for the same reasons that characterised his attitude 27 years later. Thereafter, his philosophical peregrinations led him first to a rapprochement with the hardline French CP, a second rejection of it after 1956, a love affair with Castro's Cuban sub-variety, and a final flirtation with the Red Brigades. Sartre could argue himself into and out of almost anything, including the idea that it could possibly be morally right to hush up the Gulag.

The post-war French intellectual scene abounded with such sophisticated figures, each bent in some way on obscuring the issues surrounding communism. Gene will be familiar with the notorious court-cases involving David Rousset and Viktor Kravchenko in 1949-50 when French intellectuals, among other Western Soviet stooges, turned out in force to deny that the Gulag existed and that claims to the contrary were forgeries by Western counter-intelligence. (See Conquest, *The Great Terror*, pp. 472-4; Cauter, op. cit., pp. 110-11.) The truth is that the West was fully aware of the scale of the forced labour system in the USSR in the immediate post-war years. What kept this quiet, or tarnished as rightwing propaganda, was left-liberal intellectual denial in the service of the treasured ideal of international revolutionary socialism.

Gene is, of course, correct to list some of those who were "not shy about criticising Stalinist totalitarianism", even if that wasn't a particularly difficult accomplishment after 1956. He's also correct to point out that European Communist parties haemorrhaged members following the Soviet actions in Hungary and Czechoslovakia. However, he oversimplifies when he claims that the New Left of the 1960s and early 1970s "had absolutely no use for the Soviet system". On the contrary, while properly deploring Soviet imperialism and neo-Stalinist repression under Brezhnev, the New Left, like all socialists, democratic or otherwise, retained its essential faith in the "Soviet socialist experiment" -- and, more to the point, in Lenin (whose Western esteem accordingly rose as if to balance the damage done to revolutionary socialism by the revelation of Stalin's crimes in 1956). In this fundamental sense, the broad continuum of socialist organisations outside the USSR indeed "retained their idealised vision of the Soviet Union". All they rejected was the alleged "aberration" of Stalinism.

What survived the exposé of 1956 is what Sartre (contrasting this favourably against the dictatorship of the Party) called "revolutionary idealism" -- the paramount impulse to overturn the existing order and replace it with something imposed by those who, blessed with socialist vision, know better. This was what I encountered at Cambridge in 1968. Partly attached to Mao, partly to Guevara, partly to Situationism (less so to the distant yet undoubtedly godlike Lenin), this new impulse represented a seizing of the socialist initiative by youth in the cause of "a break with history": instant revolution. To the extent that it had ever been popularly understood in the West, the question of "Stalinist totalitarianism" was not an issue for this generation, for whom the overthrow of society had a wholly fresh appeal, however bolstered with theoretical references to Marx and Lenin (and, to lesser extents, Gramsci and even Kropotkin). There was among that Western milieu not the slightest grasp of totalitarian reality -- of the fact that, had they been born in any of the "socialist" societies about which they so idiosyncratically theorised, they would themselves have been subjected to repression. As it

happened, they found they couldn't knock down their own societies that easily, so turned either to terror -- bombings, kidnappings, assassinations -- or to undermining social cohesion through their education systems (the project, conducted in varying degrees of awareness of its ends, known as deconstruction).

Meanwhile, the process of "virtuous misdirection" continued. Wedded to the theoretical viability of the "Soviet socialist experiment", neo-communist and quasi-communists in the West sought to preserve Lenin as an ideological ikon, to present Solzhenitsyn as a crank, even to exonerate Stalin. As time went by, this became harder, especially after the events of 1989-91, although I can testify from personal experience that the left-liberal intellectuals in my part of the world subtly retarded this process of disillusionment with their almost subconscious reluctance to relinquish the cherished dream of a successful revolutionary socialist state, based on their idealised impression of the USSR. Even during the late 1980s, I met, in conversation with writers, journalists, and editors in London, the same old self-deceiving romanticism about the Soviet system. Friends returning from glasnost-facilitated trips to the USSR enthused about the restaurant they'd been allowed to dine in or the model kolkhoz they'd been taken to, quite prepared to believe that these experiences were typical and that the Soviet people were perfectly happy with their lot. As late as 1989, I found that a short article I wrote about Lenin's appallingly brutal decrees was turned down by several papers on the grounds that it was "unrepresentative". The magazine that eventually accepted it balked at its title ("Lenin as Bastard") but went ahead, despite the popularity on London's trendy streets at the time of Lenin t-shirts. (It appears that Guevara is now back as a student hero figure...)

Trivial as these examples are, they typify a still-surviving, if currently quiescent, mind-set: revolutionary idealism. I gather the most popular "module" in secondary-level history in Britain is the Second World War with an emphasis on Nazism and its origins. All to the good -- except that the latent revolutionism in many young teachers, themselves educated under the bamboozling rule of deconstruction, conspires to render the corresponding course in Leninism-Stalinism and its origins somehow rather less popular. Again, the indication is relatively slight and no doubt contestable. The fact remains that Britain, like most other European countries, now honours Holocaust Day -- yet no one has even suggested that something similar deserves to be considered with regard to the global victims of Communism; indeed, the very idea will come as a shock to the pampered idealism of the left-liberal outlook.

Just how shocking such a suggestion would be was demonstrated by the scandal attending the publication in France in 1997 of *Le livre noir du Communisme: Crimes, terreur, répression*, a massive compendium of the crimes against humanity wreaked by the various Communist regimes which have installed themselves in our world since 1917. Editor Stéphane Courtois reflects:

How are we to assess Communism's crimes? What lessons are we to learn from them? Why has it been necessary to wait until the end of the twentieth century for this subject to show up on the academic radar screen? It is undoubtedly the case that the study of Stalinist and Communist terror, when compared to the study of Nazi crimes, has a great

deal of catching-up to do (although such research is gaining popularity in Eastern Europe).

One cannot help noticing the strong contrast between the study of Nazi and Communist crimes. The victors of 1945 legitimately made Nazi crimes -- and especially the genocide of the Jews -- the central focus of their condemnation of Nazism. A number of researchers around the world have been working on these issues for decades. Thousands of books and dozens of films -- most notably *Night and Fog*, *Shoah*, *Sophie's Choice*, and *Schindler's List* -- have been devoted to the subject.

Yet scholars have neglected the crimes committed by the Communists. While names such as Himmler and Eichmann are recognised around the world as bywords for twentieth-century barbarism, the names of Feliks Dzerzhinsky, Genrikh Yagoda, and Nikolai Ezhov languish in obscurity. As for Lenin, Mao, Ho Chi Minh, and even Stalin, they have always enjoyed a surprising reverence. A French government agency, the National Lottery, was crazy enough to use Stalin and Mao in one of its advertising campaigns. Would anyone even dare to come up with the idea of featuring Hitler or Goebbels in commercials?

The extraordinary attention paid to Hitler's crimes is entirely justified. It respects the wishes of the surviving witnesses, it satisfies the needs of researchers trying to understand these events, and it reflects the desire of moral and political authorities to strengthen democratic values. But the revelations concerning Communist crimes cause barely a stir. Why is there such an awkward silence from politicians? Why such a deafening silence from the academic world regarding the Communist catastrophe, which touched the lives of about one-third of humanity on four continents during a period spanning eighty years? Why is there such widespread reluctance to make such a crucial factor as crime -- mass crime, systematic crime, and crime against humanity -- a central factor in the analysis of Communism? Is this really something that is beyond human understanding? Or are we talking about a refusal to scrutinize the subject too closely for fear of learning the truth about it? [op. cit., pp. 17-18.]

Courtois notes the factors inhibiting a systematic disclosure of Communist atrocities comparable with that devoted to the atrocities of the Nazis: the adeptness of Communist tyrants at covering up their crimes (made all the easier by having the leisure to do so); their concerted campaigns to discredit those who try to expose these crimes (Solomon Volkov being just one of many in this regard); the willingness of so many Western intellectuals to aid and abet these crimes by means of hagiographical apologies or gross historical distortions; the incessant gale of Communist propaganda and crosswind of disinformation; the self-delusion of political idealists and fellow-travellers; the moral indifference of a world with too much horror to contemplate (including, of course, the Nazi Holocaust). In the case of the USSR, there is also the issue of what Solzhenitsyn grimly calls "gratitude for Stalingrad" -- the disinclination of many Westerners who fought in the last war to question the government and system of the country which, at calamitous cost to its people, drained the blood of the Nazi monster in the ghastly carnage of the Eastern Front. But Courtois adds a further factor which we do well to note:

...The fascination with the whole notion of revolution itself. In today's world, breast-beating over the idea of "revolution," as dreamed about in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, is far from over. The icons of revolution -- the red flag, the International, and the raised fist -- re-emerge with each social movement and on a grand scale. Che Guevara is back in fashion. Openly revolutionary groups are active and enjoy every legal right to state their views, hurling abuse on even the mildest criticisms of crimes committed by their predecessors and only too eager to spout the eternal verities regarding the "achievements" of Lenin, Trotsky, or Mao. This revolutionary fervour is not embraced solely by revolutionaries. Many contributors to this book themselves used to believe in Communist propaganda.

Courtois's analysis is persuasive. However I add would two more categories: (1) the naivety of the noble -- the sort of naivety which causes George Steiner to contemplate the mess left by Communism in Eastern Europe (a mess administered by communists in new democratic clothes) and to wish wistfully that the Soviet system might come back as the lesser, as he imagines, of two evils; and (2) the stubborn self-deceit of the childishly willful. The latter syndrome is all around us. In personal terms, I still have many friends on the Left, including a married couple of Trotskyists whose otherwise cheerful sanity is replaced by sinister delusion as soon as the subject of politics is raised. Without exception, all my leftwing friends still think Lenin a great man and remain impervious to the damning evidence of his ugly intolerance. Nearly all of this is based on wanton ignorance of the facts. I have a (former) friend who maintains his idealistic faith in Communist China by refusing to read any of the history or literature which would disabuse him of that fatuous illusion. He chooses instead to accept Red Chinese propaganda and to indulge to the maximum the characteristic anti-Americanism of the British Left. He is no fool in any other respect of his life. He is a complete baby in respect of Chinese Communism.

In the field of Shostakovich studies, we have the similar cases of Christopher Norris, who thinks it insults the composer to suggest that he was not a believing Communist, and who refers to revisionism as a "Cold War" phenomenon; and Robert Matthew-Walker who, in his various sleeve notes, confidently describes Shostakovich as a convinced Communist whilst knowing so little of Soviet Communist history that he imagines Zhdanov to have been a "a famous war-time soldier [chosen by] Stalin to outline the Party demands".

Courtois and his fellow scholars have an undeniable point. In 2000, we know almost every nook and cranny of the Nazi death camp system -- but we know only the general outlines of the Gulag, something which deserves to be mapped and documented in such detail that the human race will never forget it, as it stands in danger of doing now. Certainly the FSB/KGB have control over many of the necessary resources -- yet there is spy-plane photography and copious eye-witness testimony to rely on. A full atlas of the Soviet Gulag should be available to historians NOW. It is a scandal that no such thing exists. (If the difficulty involved is undeniable, the difficulty in producing a comparable schematic for the Chinese Laogai must be greater, inasmuch as the system is still fully operational -- yet Jean-Luc Domenach's

map of the Laogai in his 1992 book *Chine: L'archipel oublié* is extraordinarily comprehensive at the general level. The task is, in other words, far from impossible -- especially with suicidally brave men like Harry Wu engaged in fetching out the necessary information...)

I thank Gene Homel and Peter McNelly for their posts. I hope Gene sees why I wrote what I did, even if he disagrees with it. For those interested, *The Black Book of Communism* (edited by Stéphane Courtois and five others) is now available in English from Harvard University Press. On China, I would recommend Kate Saunders' *Eighteen Layers of Hell: Stories from the Chinese Gulag*, published by Cassell in 1996.

--Ian MacDonald

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Some responses to recent posts

Posted 8th March 2000

Belatedly, here are some responses to a few recent posts...

Nora Avins Klein raises a query concerning my statement that "the West was fully aware of the scale of the forced labour system in the USSR in the immediate post-war years... what kept this quiet, or tarnished as right-wing propaganda, was left-liberal intellectual denial in the service of the treasured ideal of international revolutionary socialism". I should, perhaps, have said "to a large extent, what kept this quiet..." That Western governments knew all about the Gulag during and straight after the war is beyond dispute:

The size and nature of the labor-camp system only became known in the West through defectors, some of them former inmates. After the Poles in Russia were released in 1941 and 1942, thousands of accounts were available for checking, and dozens of first-hand descriptions were readily available in print. By 1948, a very full analysis of the system listing hundreds of camps, together with reproductions of camp documents, was published by David J. Dallin and Boris I. Nicolaevsky. The United Kingdom delegation to the United Nations was able to circulate the Corrective Labor Codex of the RSFSR; free trade-union bodies produced their own analyses. The evidence was as complete and consistent as it could conceivably be. It was widely rejected... During the 1940s and 1950s there were many attempts to silence or discredit the evidence of men who had been in the camps, or otherwise given information about the Purge. [Conquest, *The Great Terror*, 2nd edn., p. 472.]

Plus ça change... But why didn't the free world speak up? Thomas Widlar has quoted Chomsky on the cynical pragmatism of Western leaders -- and, up to a point, I agree with him. Principle plays little part in international politics. Bad behaviour calls for condemnation regardless of its political origin and the crimes of capitalism are no different in that general respect from the crimes of communism. But we happen to be talking about Shostakovich and the society in which he lived, with its systematic recourse to savagely cruel forced labour (to which his uncle and brother-in-law, to name but two, fell victim), not to mention its mass-production use of the death-penalty against anyone it regarded as expendable.

If Mr Widlar genuinely does not see the relevance of this to our understanding of Shostakovich, one can only ask whether he has read, for instance, the books by Rostislav Dubinsky, Elizabeth Wilson, and Allan Ho and Dmitry Feofanov; or the related testimonies to have emerged from Russia since the fall of the USSR; or the statements made by Rostropovich, Vishnevskaya, Ashkenazy, and others who left the USSR before its fall? If he has read this material (the latest example being Mark Aranovsky's essay "[The](#)

[Dissident](#)"), and yet still fails to see its relevance, may we know why? If he does see the relevance but wishes to dispute it (or even, in Taruskin's word, "quash" it), it would be honest of him to say so frankly and give his reasons. As for his suggestion that to address these matters in relation to Shostakovich amounts to "paying back for personal slights" or "gloating over Russia's demise" or "to justify the Cold War, mourn its cessation, or start a new one", I join Per Skans in asking Mr Widlar to decode his "agenda" for us. If he can identify such "coded language, doublespeak" in my writing on Shostakovich, let him do so.

To return to Nora Klein's query, Noam Chomsky is right about Western cynical pragmatism at governmental level during and just after the war, but his is a partial picture. The Allies were exhausted by their struggle with the Axis powers and had no wish to be drawn into a new fight with the USSR over its internal policies, especially now that nuclear weapons were part of the equation. Communism was robust in France. Britain had a Labour government through which left-liberal "blind eye" sympathy for the USSR found expression. And the "gratitude for Stalingrad" syndrome was, rightly, strong at that time, as it continues to be today. There were also the demands of realpolitik -- of having, in some way, to deal with Stalin, just as present democratic governments have to deal with Communist China. Behind governmental policy, on the other hand, lay the realm of intellectual cogitation -- and, as Conquest, Cauter, and Lévy make clear, that domain was inordinately influenced by left-liberal idealists like Sartre, who thought it better to conceal the Gulag from the Western "workers" than dash their hopes of "liberation". Am I right in detecting something similar in Mr Widlar's posts? If I'm not, I shall, of course, withdraw the suggestion...

In his useful post on the Second Quartet, George Holley asks "When were DDS and other members of the Soviet intelligencia aware of the scale of the Holocaust?", pointing out that the first Soviet encounter with Nazi death camps came in summer 1944. May I draw George's attention to Aleksandrov's memo to the Central Committee of 17 August 1942, as described on pp. 691-3 of *Shostakovich Reconsidered*? Anti-Semitism may have been more apparent to Shostakovich in the USSR than Germany before writing the Second Quartet and Second Trio. (Also, re the Recitative in II of the Second Quartet as "the Lament of Israel", see Rostislav Dubinsky, *Stormy Applause*, p. 118.) Fred Johnson correctly points out the quote from the Fourth Symphony's finale. It's at 8:07 in Kondrashin's recording, or rehearsal number 181 (p. 160) in the Sikorski edition (no measure numbers). I mention this in *The New Shostakovich*.

Stepan Kana raises three points of detail with respect to my review of Laurel Fay's book, adding two general objections. His first general objection is that I argue that "facts are worthless without their background". He interprets this as implying that "there are [no] facts, only interpretations". One gathers that such a contention is anathema to Mr Kana -- yet he goes on to insist that "everyone is entitled to interpret [things] in his own way", a statement which gives primacy to interpretation, thereby sinking his own argument.

Unfortunately, Mr Kana's interpretation of my point of view is incorrect. I nowhere claim that facts are "worthless", with or without their background. Facts are facts. Some facts are more significant than others. For example, the temperature outside my house is presently 10 degrees centigrade; this fact is not worthless but neither is it very significant. By contrast, when Churchill asked Stalin how many died during collectivisation, Stalin held up both hands with fingers spread, indicating ten. Did he mean ten people died during collectivisation? No -- or at least not according to historians, who *interpret* Stalin to have meant "ten million". Everything is relative, but I would suggest that Stalin's gesture, in the light of the vast array of statistics accumulated by historians whereby they reach this interpretation, is a fact of some significance.

Contrary to Stepan Kana, I claim neither that facts are worthless in themselves nor that "there are [no] facts, only interpretations" (a view taken by some deconstructionists). What I actually say is that "when dealing with places as large and eventful as the former USSR... accurate summaries of character and actions become critical". To spell it out: I am pleading for exegesis in the interests of justice. For example, it is a fact that, while a young man, the great musician Vladimir Ashkenazy was recruited as an informer by the KGB. Without some exegesis, this fact might very well be considered prejudicial by those unfamiliar with the Soviet system. By contrast, in a court of law such a fact would be presented *in context* by the defence -- i.e., it would be pointed out that in Soviet society such "recruitments" could be forced on anyone at any time; that to refuse to comply would be to invite official retribution; that decent people often chose to comply with concealed reluctance in the hope of never giving any seriously compromising information to the secret police; and that this was exactly what Ashkenazy did until able to escape the clutches of the Soviet system. (As Lyubov Shaporina observed in her [diary](#) in respect of one of the KGB's earlier avatars, the NKVD, "you must not name names, though there are some you can -- and those because you know perfectly well how close they are to the NKVD...")

Ashkenazy is a model of decency; a great man. Yet if we did not know better, he might be made to seem otherwise to us. Mere fact, in his case, urgently demands interpretation. The parallel with Shostakovich surely doesn't need underlining.

Where significant facts are concerned, particularly in a context like life in the Soviet Union, there is a crucial choice: interpretation may be offered by way of exegesis (mitigation or, at any rate, explanation); or interpretation may be withheld, with the inevitable result of inadequately informed, and hence prejudicial, judgements. My main case against Fay is that she very often withholds such exegesis, squirrels it away in her footnotes, or blurs the issues by adducing Soviet propaganda sources as more reliable than the testimonies of those who knew and worked with Shostakovich. Mr Kana fails to address this or any other of my objections to Fay's presentation; this, it seems, is his "entitlement" as an interpreter. I never know where any of us obtain these supposed entitlements; I certainly have no such certificate pinned to my wall. On the other hand, I understand that, by strict legal definition, I am "entitled" to a fair trial if summoned to court -- and, apart from law itself, the basis of all legal procedure, as Dmitry Feofanov will confirm, is (1) fact and (2) interpretation of fact. The Soviet justice

system differed in this regard. Few living under that system ever obtained a trial, let alone a fair one. If Shostakovich could have hoped for no justice in his own society, neither did he receive much in the court of Western opinion until Allan Ho and Dmitry Feofanov set out their quasi-legal case in respect of *Testimony* in *Shostakovich Reconsidered*. My brief is similar to theirs, though more general and various.

Turning to Stepan Kana's claim that I insist that the only correct interpretations concerning Shostakovich are mine, I would draw his attention, for example, to note 65 on page 667 of *Shostakovich Reconsidered*. I ask only for a fair and open trial of the evidence without concealment, falsehood, or other purely personal prejudice. Others in the present arena will, I hope, confirm that if a fact is incorrectly adduced by me, I immediately correct it, and that if someone else's interpretation seems better than mine I say so promptly, always giving credit where credit is due (as I have with regard to Fay, Taruskin, Fanning, Tamara Bernstein, Louis Blois, and others). I began my Fay review with the words "So far as I am aware (a phrase we would all do well to contemplate for a second or two, whatever our point of view and whatever the extent of our knowledge)..." I believe we're all here to learn and that DSCH-L is one of the forums for doing this. If anyone wishes to correct me on any issue, I'm happy to acknowledge this and incorporate it in alterations to anything I've written on-line or in *The New Shostakovich* (which is due for revision). The truth is all that matters here -- not irrational private agendas.

Returning to Stepan Kana's objections to my review of Laurel Fay's book, he takes me to task for criticising Fay's method in her Notes of not translating her transliterated source titles in situ. He's right in the sense that she does this in her Bibliography; however, since so much of the material which she apparently considers extraneous is situated in her Notes rather than in her main text (where her readers might weigh ostensibly conflicting evidence without referring to the back of the book), I would suggest that the difficulty is compounded for Western readers by having to further refer to the Bibliography in order to identify the sources cited (except for their initial mentions under chapter headings in the Notes) solely under transliterated titles and without author identification. (The difficulty is compounded by the peculiarities of the Index. For example, Hans Stuckenschmidt is mentioned only in the Notes. Try finding out where.) The issue of transliteration in the main body of Fay's Notes is, in the end, a matter of opinion. I suggest in my review that her protocol in this regard reflects her apparent view that only an élite (presumably a few of her colleagues) are truly interested in Shostakovich -- a view seemingly confirmed by her promise to reply to Allan Ho and Dmitry Feofanov only in Russian and in a Russian magazine. More significantly, Fay's otherwise scrupulous Notes display several mystifying blanks concerning which Mr Kana's opinion would be of interest. For example, she twice mentions "sardonic political commentary" in the composer's letters. No quotes, no citations. Why?

The first of Mr Kana's specific textual objections concerns my comments on Fay's presentation of Shostakovich's alleged quotation from Ostrovsky in *Pravda* and, later, his recorded reference to the same quotation before the "closed" premiere of the Fourteenth symphony. The difference I point out is an issue of interpretation -- one advanced by Manashir Yakubov in the extract I quote. The issue is that of the question of morality in the Soviet context, as raised by Shostakovich's pointed exclusion of Ostrovsky's propagandist phrase "All my life has been devoted to the struggle for the liberation of

mankind". Fay fails to identify the subversive antithesis in Shostakovich's address: his stress on living by traditional "bourgeois" values (honesty, nobility, decency) rather than for the "liberation" of mankind (a concept bitterly ironic to citizens of the Soviet police state). Unlike Fay, Yakubov is alive to this subversive antithesis. Because Fay neglects to address this issue -- whether deliberately or not -- she fails to adopt a properly cautious attitude to the Ostrovsky quotation ascribed to Shostakovich in *Pravda*; as a result, she misses a likely explanation for why Shostakovich raised the subject of "that remarkable Soviet writer Ostrovsky" as a prelude to discussing Mussorgsky, Verdi, and Britten at the "closed" premiere. *How the Steel Was Tempered* is an almost fascistic depiction of its hero Pavel Korchagin's forging of his own inner steel -- his voluntary hardening of himself against all tender human emotions or any hint of individuality in the service of the Communist collective. A view of Shostakovich which encompasses the possibility that he would refer approvingly to such a nightmare vision would, at the very least, require justification in the light of our present documentary knowledge. The ball is in Fay's court.

Fay's failure to probe the issue of the Ostrovsky quotation would be minor in isolation. It isn't isolated. Time and again, she refers to statements ascribed to Shostakovich in Soviet publications (including forty citations to *Pravda* and *Izvestiya*) as if these statements were actually his. A large part of my [review](#) is devoted to showing why this assumption is undependable. Fay's biographical methodology consists of taking Soviet sources at face-value and rejecting as much as she can of the contrary testimony of the composer's friends. I'm curious: does Stepan Kana approve of this methodology?

Mr Kana's second textual objection refers to a paragraph in my review which concludes as follows: "Litvinova goes on to recount the Picasso anecdote (Wilson, pp. 271-2), leading to Shostakovich's outburst 'No, communism is impossible'. Fay neither quotes nor cites any of this." Kana points out that Fay quotes the phrase "No, communism is impossible". He is quite correct and I shall alter this paragraph in my review. However, the sentence "Fay neither quotes nor cites any of this" is more significant, since it refers to material from Litvinova which we might have expected Fay to have quoted in connection with "one of the most puzzling episodes" (p. 216) in Shostakovich's biography: his allegedly "unanticipated" application for membership in the Communist Party in 1960.

Viz: "Knowing his views, I [Litvinova] could not bear to hear that he intended to join the Party... We had been told how pressure had been exerted on him from certain quarters, but we did not know if this was so for sure, and we hardly dared to ask him outright." This is from Litvinova's diary for 27th October 1956, nearly four years earlier -- the same entry that contains the phrase "communism is impossible", as well as much more of relevance to Fay's discussion of this "puzzling episode" (including the conversation about "that bastard Picasso" and the outburst "you can understand that I'm living in a prison, and that I'm frightened for my children, and myself"). Picasso is absent from Fay's Index. Likewise unmentioned are Shostakovich's first experience of pressure to join the Party in 1956 and his outburst about being "in a prison". Since such matters shed light on his decision to "apply" for CP membership in 1960, it was Fay's omission of them which I meant to draw attention to in that paragraph.

I wonder: do these omissions trouble Mr Kana?

One of the most useful facilities of the WorldWide Web is that documents stored on Web-servers may not only be kept available for reference for long periods, but updated within seconds whenever this is required. Stepan Kana, who accuses me of intending to dictate opinion in Shostakovich studies, has presumably not come across the [Introduction](#) to my site (Music Under Soviet Rule), which commences as follows:

This ongoing collection of documents is offered to travellers on the WorldWide Web who happen to be drawn to the classical music made in the former Soviet empire, or by composers and musicians who were active within its borders between 1917 and 1991. The opinions expressed here, whether by the author/collator or those he quotes, are set out for consideration by all, whatever their beliefs or prejudices. Their simple availability is the primary reason for this site. Some of these pieces have appeared in journals either inaccessible to general readers or now out of print. Here they are on-line for access at any time anywhere in the world.

The documents stored at Music Under Soviet Rule, including my review of Laurel Fay's book, are resources, placed there on a longterm basis so that anyone interested may consult them, free of charge. My review of Fay's book -- which is 54,000 words long -- is lengthy and detailed because it is intended as a resource available for consultation for many years. It isn't mood music for those who wish to get a feel for Fay's book with a view to buying or not buying it. It is a close examination of what she says, how she says it, what she includes, what she leaves out, what this tells us about her view of Shostakovich, and what her view is worth. Sold at average British magazine rates, this article would earn me around £13,000. Instead, it was written as a free permanent resource -- written, in other words, in my spare time. It took a month to write. The three textual objections raised by Stepan Kana relate to passages late in the review, by which time I was very tired (not least of Fay's book). It is hardly surprising that one or two minor errors crept in; not surprising to me, at any rate -- but then I've written well over a million unpaid words about Shostakovich, most of which are available at no charge at Music Under Soviet Rule.

Mr Kana's third textual objection refers to the very end of my review of Fay's book. By this time, I was cross-eyed from leafing to and fro between her main text, her Notes, and her Index. Consequently, as he points out, I did not notice that she refers, on pages 337-8, to the letter which Shostakovich wrote to Glikman on 18th November 1961 in which he announces that he has just finished his Ninth Quartet but, in "a fit of healthy self-criticism", has immediately burned it in his stove (the first time he had done that, he observes, since 1926). Mr Kana quotes at length from Fay's account of the "prehistory" of the Ninth Quartet given on page 243 of her text -- pointlessly, since the passage in question, like so much of

supposedly controversial material, is actually given in her Notes. There, Fay suggests that the letter to Glikman of 18th November 1961 "has been misdated and really dates from 1962" on the basis that "it seems distinctly improbable that Shostakovich could have written, and destroyed, two Ninth Quartets before completing a satisfactory one".

What is ironic in this case is that, if the first version of the Ninth Quartet was written at the time indicated by the letter, it would have followed the Twelfth Symphony, a work which appears to have gone through three versions during the two years between its composer's announced intent of writing it in 1959 and its actual completion in 1961. Is the notion of three versions of the Ninth Quartet any more "improbable" than three versions of the Twelfth Symphony (or, indeed, the notion that the obsessively punctilious Shostakovich mistook the date by a whole year when he wrote to Glikman in 1961)? Mr Kana will presumably have read the account, in Part 5 of my review, of the way Fay skims over the delayed chronology of the Twelfth Symphony. If (as I point out at the end of Part 6 of the review) the first version of the Ninth Quartet dates from November 1961, it must have been the first thing Shostakovich composed after finishing the Twelfth Symphony: "The obvious inference is that he was so sickened by having written an apparently conformist work that he immediately dashed off a quartet so scathingly satirical (perhaps of Lenin) that he had to throw it straight into the fire."

Stepan Kana is right in pointing out my erroneous statement in this case, but disingenuous in pretending that it is of any consequence, particularly in view of its connection with another part of my review in which fundamental questions are asked about Fay's political assumptions about Shostakovich. Because of the nature of the WorldWide Web, I have already made the two necessary minor adjustments to my review (just as I can and will make any similar minor adjustments if anyone else can find justifiable causes). However, if Stepan Kana seriously thinks these trivial errors reflect in any fundamental way on my credibility, I would say that he is no judge of what is significant in this field of study. He is certainly no judge of my contributions. About a week ago in DSCH-L, I painstakingly explained (for the nth time) that I do not write from "an ideologic position" (sic) in this debate, but from a moral-aesthetic one. Mr Kana either missed this or failed to understand it. But let us put his comprehension to the test. I've asked him three questions so far. Here's a fourth: what does he think of Fay's failure to mention the testimony of Abraam Gozenpud (Wilson, p. 238) in connection with her discussion of *From Jewish Folk Poetry*?

Coming, finally, to Richard Taruskin's "bubble" outburst in Sunday's *NYT*, I suspect that those who can spot what I've called "irrational private agendas" will understand what's going on here, whilst those prepared to put up with almost any nonsense from him in deference to his non-Shostakovich scholarship will turn the usual blind eye. (I'm glad to see that Judy Kuhn, at least, is becoming uneasy. However, I would suggest that the "din" she hears in my writing comes from between her own ears: the "interference" caused by her uncertainty concerning the sinister realities of Soviet life and their relationship with the experience and works of Shostakovich and others in his creative milieu. I should add that I'm regretfully unaware of her "balanced, probing work on Shostakovich". May we perhaps see some of this?)

Taruskin still pushes his elementary distortions of Soviet intellectual history. I see he has got around to reading the books by Sarah Davies and Sheila Fitzgerald I've mentioned in previous articles. I gather that he imagines that he has thereby acquired sufficient knowledge on this subject to dismiss intelligentsia resistance to Stalin during the 1920s and 1930s as "private grumbling and joking". Perhaps he will presently catch up with Lyubov Shaporina's diary, with the poems of Anna Akhmatova and Osip Mandelstam, with Lidiya Chukovskaya's *Sofiya Petrovna* and *Going Under*, and the memoirs of Nadezhda Mandelstam. Come to that, perhaps he'll also deign to do some basic research: the various historical works referred to in my critique of his spurious account of the Soviet reception of the Fifth Symphony (*Shostakovich Reconsidered*, pp. 656-67). This critique, to which Taruskin has never responded, answers his jejune misconceptions about the question of dissidence (pp. 656-7). If he has read this, why serve up the same stuff in *The New York Times* five years after I first criticised it in DSCH J?

I hardly need draw attention to the link between Taruskin's allusions to "thought control" and his frankly expressed wish to "quash" any conception of Shostakovich which does not accord with his own views. As for his reference to dominating "cults" of opinion, it must be pointed out that he heads one of the two main study centres for Russian music in the USA (Berkeley), that his associate Malcolm H. Brown formerly headed the other (Indiana), that David Fanning is eminent at the equivalent centre in Britain (Manchester), that Taruskin and Fay have open-door access to the columns of *The New York Times*, that Taruskin has written the revised *Encyclopaedia Britannica* article on Shostakovich, and that Fanning has written the revised article on Shostakovich for the next edition of the *New Grove*. If there is a dominating cult of thought control at work here, I'd suggest that its Wizard of Oz is Richard Taruskin. The pity that this wizard understands so little about Soviet history is surpassed only by the shame of his continuing pretence to the contrary.

--Ian MacDonald

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***The New York Times* grubs in the gutter**

Posted 10th March 2000

Since I'm aware that there's little chance of this letter appearing in *The New York Times*, I'm posting it here...

One of the certain signs of a writer who lacks background in Soviet studies is that he or she is casual in blaming people who lived under the Soviet system for being supine grovelers and self-excusing cowards. The longer and deeper one looks into this subject, the less such easy condemnation appeals; indeed, it soon becomes repellent and is displaced by compassionate insight and awed empathy for the predicaments of those caught up in that nightmare. As a consequence, most of the best Western historians of the USSR are characterised by a fundamental humility. Among those denizens of the USSR whose names have come down to us, only out-and-out monsters -- of whom there were as many as there are in any society -- draw severe condemnation from experienced writers on Soviet affairs; lesser disciples of evil -- those who, for petty vengeance and personal advantage, willingly aided these monsters -- are treated with fastidious irony. To those used to this ethos, the clownish capers cut by certain people on the margins of understanding in this subject never fail to evoke a feeling of sick distaste. Thus it is with the antics of writers like Richard Taruskin and Bernard Holland, whose shallow pretensions to insight on this subject now litter the arts pages of the increasingly shameless *New York Times*.

Mr Holland, concerning whose credentials on the subject of Shostakovich I have no information, speaks of the composer as a "conformist" who "toadied and cringed before his Soviet bosses" (*NYT*, 9 March 2000). The sad crassness of Holland's knockabout language recalls his mentor Taruskin's crudely adolescent allusion to William Steig's cartoon in *The New Yorker* of a cowboy-suited boy taking Hitler prisoner ("Casting A Great Composer As A Fictional Hero", *NYT*, 5 March 2000). Shostakovich, it seems, was an innate milksop because, "frail and bespectacled", he lacked the requisite rugged jaw-line. This is arts criticism as burlesque -- cultural commentary on the level of Tom and Jerry. It is embarrassing that grown men should write like this and shameful that editorial standards in America have sunk so low that such a pernicious descent to the tone of the tabloid should be countenanced in a national broadsheet.

Shostakovich no doubt cringed whilst being publicly insulted by individuals whose intellectual attainment was a fraction of his own and whose moral scruples were even more debased than those of Taruskin and Holland. Answering back was never an option in these circumstances; on the contrary, he had to toe the line or follow the horrible fate of colleagues like Tukhachevsky and Meyerhold, knowing

that his relations would suffer in the same appalling way that theirs did. Indeed, by 1937, four of Shostakovich's close family had been arrested. Such a situation, observes his daughter Galina (interviewed by Larry Weinstein in his film *The War Symphonies*), "makes a profound impression. [My father] was very austere, very reticent about this subject." Do we jeer contemptuously at Shostakovich for "cringing" under such circumstances? Only if, like Bernard Holland, we neither know nor care what we are talking about, seeking only to score a trashy point.

As for "toadying" to his Soviet "bosses", I can think of no recorded instance of this sort of behaviour by Shostakovich. He never fawned on his superiors, curried favour with them, or wheedled for personal advantage from the apparat, whose representatives, as we are informed by several of his close friends, he loathed and avoided wherever possible. The only pleas he made to officialdom seem to have been those (many) he made on others' behalf. When the Soviet establishment sought to draw him into their propaganda effort by forcing him join the Communist Party (a process which, to judge by Flora Litvinova's comments of 27th October 1956, he fought off for at least four years), he was so morally shattered that he came close to suicide, composing his Eighth Quartet as his musical last will and testimony. Bernard Holland's claim that Shostakovich was a "toady" is a repulsive libel.

Holland reports Shostakovich "signing petitions on request (some of them damaging to his colleagues)". It is true that, as an old and very ill man, he was among Soviet celebrities rounded up to sign letters against Sakharov and Solzhenitsyn -- yet we cannot know what pressures were put on him to do so (whether, for example, his family or his access to proper medical treatment were threatened). Rostropovich tells us that Shostakovich was "forced, really forced" to sign the letter against Sakharov and that he "agonised" about it: "I don't blame him. He was very ill with cancer." Apart from these regrettable cases, which other "colleagues" does Mr Holland imagine Shostakovich "damaged"? There were none. On the contrary, his record otherwise is of endless assistance afforded to those who begged him for help, including the unimaginably brave act of hiding a Jewish musicologist in his flat during the anti-Semitic ravages of the late 1940s.

Excoriating Shostakovich for "writing patriotic pieces, rebuking what he was asked to rebuke, dispensing the government line as directed", Holland adds: "He may not have liked some of it, but there is little evidence that he showed much hesitation when his own skin was in question." One can only ask who, "when their own skin was in question", did otherwise? Some brave dissidents during the Sixties -- younger, tougher men -- fit Holland's callous requirements. They suffered accordingly, harassed by the KGB and often confined in mental hospitals where they were pumped full of hallucinatory drugs. Does Holland seriously expect a man afflicted with multiple illnesses (almost certainly brought on by around thirty years of continuous stress in the face of pressure and persecution) to have risked such treatment in his sixties, to have watched while his children's careers were ruined and his own name dragged through the mud for the fourth time in his life? I count the Cultural Revolution as the first case of Shostakovich's public persecution -- yet I doubt Holland has even heard of this, so transparent is his unfamiliarity with the documentary record. "I am not," he writes, "the first to point out that composing relatively superficial pieces was for Shostakovich not a chore at all. He was good at flag-waving and populist dumbing-down;

he seemed to enjoy the process." On the contrary, as anyone who has read Elizabeth Wilson's book knows, Shostakovich hated having to write his occasional pieces and populist film scores. Similarly, Mr Holland seems entirely unaware that Shostakovich himself drew attention to the "hidden clues" in his Eleventh Symphony (confirmed by his third wife Irina in DSCH Journal 12, p. 72). "Tortured speculation" is redundant.

Claiming that Shostakovich behaved like a cowardly animal, Holland derides him for failing to "martyr" himself -- as if martyrdom was the only alternative to crawling conformism in the Soviet Union. Even given the fact that Bernard Holland sits under "a softly murmuring fan" somewhere in comfortable bourgeois North America, such wild historical ignorance is astounding. As for Shostakovich's own allegedly comfortable life style ("far above that of nobler Soviet citizens around him"), is Holland aware of how often the frugal Shostakovich found himself effectively on the bread-line, forced to write rubbish merely to feed his dependents? Does he realise that the composer returned his Stalin-donated dacha to the state after the dictator was gone -- and asked no money for it? Is he aware that Shostakovich refused his right to nomenklatura preferentiality at Zhukovka? Mr Holland's insinuation that Shostakovich lacked nobility because he had a roof over his head, which at times he could scarcely pay for, is vile.

I'll refrain from insulting Bernard Holland in the manner in which he has so gratuitously insulted Shostakovich -- other than to say that people like him prospered very nicely under Soviet rule despite barely aspiring to the mediocrity which he falsely ascribes to Shostakovich. Mr Holland, who has the nerve to suggest that his own life has been no more nor less tragic than the composer's, shows little competence in this subject, let alone enough to justify his cocksure judgements. His comments are disgusting and *The New York Times* stands self-condemned by the conscienceless act of publishing them.

--Ian MacDonald

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Who's speculating?

Posted 11th March 2000

One of the commonest justifications for ignoring the case advanced by revisionism is that "it's all speculation". John Dalmas adopts this device by quoting Polonius's "very like a whale" as a supposed epitome of revisionist wishful thinking (or naive auto-suggestion under the control of myself as an Hitlerian guru). The paradox is piquant: vague generalising impressionism ascribes its own characteristics to a body of fact, testimony, and argument it prefers not to contend with.

Here are fifty Russians and East Europeans, who, in various ways, have independently conveyed what we in the West call a revisionist view of Shostakovich (sources: Wilson, Ho and Feofanov, DSCH Journal, *The War Symphonies*):

Ilya Musin, Mstislav Rostropovich, Galina Vishnevskaya, Yuri Lyubimov, Daniil Zhitomirsky, Edison Denisov, Vladimir Zak, Vladimir Rubin, Mikhail Druskin, Marina Sabinina, Maxim Shostakovich, Vladimir Ashkenazy, Flora Litvinova, Lev Lebedinsky, Fyodor Druzhinin, Yevgeny Mravinsky, Alisa Shebalina, Dmitri Tolstoy, Abraam Gozenpud, Mark Aranovsky, Rostislav Dubinsky, Grigori Kozintsev, Rodion Shchedrin, Yuri Temirkanov, Vera Volkova, Yevgeny Yevtushenko, Mariya Konniskaya, Kurt Sanderling, Valery Gergiev, Semyon Bychkov, Yakov Milkis, Boris Khaikin, Natan Perelman, Galina Shostakovich, Gennadi Rozhdestvensky, Zoya Tomachevskaya, Kirill Kondrashin, Rein Laul, Krzysztof Meyer, Natalya Vovsi-Mikhoels, Yuri Yelagin, Isaak Glikman, Rudolf Barshai, Thomas Sanderling, Irina Shostakovich, Isaak Schwartz, Karen Khachaturian, Andrei Bitov, Manashir Yakubov, Vladislav Uspensky.

Quite a substantial "cult" -- and formed, it seems, solely for the purpose of annoying Richard Taruskin.

If it looks like a whale and spouts like a whale, I'd say it's a whale. In the biographical study of any other artist, the overwhelming similarity of views on the part of those acquainted with the subject would have been accepted by now. Taruskin speaks of revisionism as a bubble that's about to burst. Some bubble.

--Ian MacDonald

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Unpublished letter to *Gramophone*

Posted 14th March 2000

For the record, here is a Shostakovich review in *Gramophone* (March 2000, p. 76) about which I wrote the letter below, refused publication.

For those unfamiliar with *Gramophone's* writers, David Gutman took over as the magazine's main Shostakovich reviewer from David Fanning around five years ago. An implacable anti-revisionist, he often expresses such opinions in his reviews and is not above misrepresenting those who take a different view. (In one such instance, *Gramophone* published a letter of complaint from me [December 1997].) Unfortunately, Mr Gutman knows too little about the Soviet background to support his bullish opinions, as the aforementioned review illustrates:

The St Petersburg Quartet confirms its sinewy and extrovert approach in this second instalment of its Shostakovich cycle. The short opening movement of the Fourth Quartet is characteristically nervy, intense in a way that threatens intonation, but betokens real commitment to the cause. While the outer sections of its finale are deliberately paced, the central climax presses home excitedly, parting company with most recent accounts. Robert Matthew-Walker's serious-minded booklet notes commend the music's lucidity and subtlety, aspects which the St Petersburg might be thought to underplay in its quest for folkish immediacy. Some of the Borodin's fabled nobility and focus is lost, but you won't be bored. The Sixth is arguably more successful, its wistful, would-be serenity admirably caught.

The Eighth Quartet completes the programme. By far the most familiar of the 15, it remains to some degree a work apart. Revisionist orthodoxy presents it as not so much a memorial to the victims of totalitarianism and war, as an anti-Communist tract-cum-suicide note. Without, perhaps, plumbing the depths of despair, the St Petersburg turns in a performance of winning directness, full of colour and contrast in a score more often painted in shades of grey. The second movement, a real *Allegro molto* here, explodes with all the ferocity you could hope for, and it has succeeded by being a memorably inflected waltz [sic]. The reluctance to linger in the framing *Largos* is typical of this Quartet.

Hyperion's Russian-made recordings are technically impressive, though not as perfectly judged as BIS's for the Yggdrasil. The Scandinavians' equally tight (if less strongly characterised) playing in No 8 makes a rather different appeal. There's red meat on offer in St Petersburg, but look elsewhere for coolheaded exegesis.

David Gutman

My rejected letter runs as follows:

In his review of the St Petersburg Quartet's recording of Shostakovich's Fourth, Sixth, and Eighth quartets (March, p. 76), David Gutman refers, as if scornfully, to "revisionist orthodoxy" concerning the Eighth Quartet, i.e., that it is "not so much a memorial to the victims of totalitarianism (sic) and war, as an anti-Communist tract-cum-suicide note". Readers should be aware that this prejudicially presented "orthodoxy" stems from statements made by Shostakovich himself, by his son Maxim, and by his colleagues Isaak Glikman, Lev Lebedinsky, and Rostislav Dubinsky (see Allan Ho and Dmitry Feofanov, *Shostakovich Reconsidered*, pp. 160-4). As such, this view is shared by the curator of the Shostakovich Archive in Russia, Manashir Yakubov (concert notes to the LSO's 1998 Shostakovich seasons, pp. 60-62), by Elizabeth Wilson (*Shostakovich: A Life Remembered*, pp. 336-41), and even by arch anti-revisionist Richard Taruskin (*Defining Russia Musically*, pp. 493-5). If David Gutman has an argument against all this, perhaps he would care to let us in on it?

As for his general posture of superior knowledge about Shostakovich and the ethos he worked in, Mr Gutman might also care to explain why, in approving Robert Matthew-Walker's "serious-minded booklet", he failed to notice the wild historical howlers these sleeve notes contain. Matthew-Walker writes: "Soon after the end of World War II, Stalin chose Marshal Zhdanov, a famous war-time soldier, to outline the Party demands... In September 1946, Marshal Zhdanov censured two of the best living Russian writers -- Zoshchenko and Anna Akhmatova. He then attacked modern Russian film and drama and some months later criticised G. F. Alexandrov, whose *History of Western Philosophy* was much admired..." The figure of "Marshal Zhdanov" is imaginary. Matthew-Walker is confusing Marshal Georgiy Zhukov with Andrei Zhdanov -- rather like mixing up General MacArthur and Senator McCarthy. As for the "philosopher" G. F. Alexandrov, he was a notorious quasi-Nazi apparatchik who vied for power with Zhdanov during the 1940s; hence the attack on his book, which was much admired by no one but his own sordid clique of fellow anti-Semites.

Alexandrov is the sort of shady character familiar only to those who take an interest in the Soviet background. Andrei Zhdanov, on the other hand, is a central figure in the Shostakovich story. If David Gutman, like Robert Matthew-Walker, imagines that this political hatchet-man was "a famous war-time soldier", he should perhaps do some background reading before he next passes *ex cathedra* comment on matters relating to Shostakovich's life and work. Hyperion Records, too, might care to vet their sleeve notes more closely: Matthew-Walker's "serious-minded" booklet contains two more factual

inaccuracies and the barely believable claim that "From time to time during Shostakovich's life, the totalitarian Communist rule in Russia impinged directly upon his work..." Impinged?? From time to time?? Good grief.

--Ian MacDonald

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Irina on the Eleventh Symphony

Posted 14th March 2000

This will be my last post to DSCH-L until August and I will not, meanwhile, be reading posts made to the List. I'll answer posts addressed to me between now and then when I come back.

Before I depart, I would like to request anyone planning to congratulate Bernard Holland on [his opinions](#) to bring to his attention the following exchange between Irina Shostakovich and Margarita Mazo, a former professor of music history at St Petersburg Conservatory (recorded in DSCH Journal 12, p. 72):

MM: Is the Eleventh Symphony about the Hungarian Uprising?

IS: The symphony was written in 1957 at the time when these events occurred. What happened was viewed with great gravity by everyone. There are no direct references to the 1956 events in the symphony, but Shostakovich had them in mind.

MM: Those of us who were "in the know" were always searching for the second layer of meaning in his music.

IS: In the same manner, in the *Michelangelo Verses* there is a parallel between Dante's expulsion from Italy and Solzhenitsyn's exile from the Soviet Union.

This reminds me to point out that Irina Shostakovich, as Vice President of the [International Shostakovich Association \(Paris-Moscow\)](#), endorses the ISA's founding declaration:

The Russian composer Dmitri Shostakovich, whose music is known and played throughout the world, continues to acquire new and ever more fervent admirers. He epitomises the most noble traditions and values of our civilization. The personality of Shostakovich proved a powerful moral influence on his contemporaries. During the hard and cruel era of Stalinism, he had the courage to express in his music the misery of his people by means of an extraordinary dramatic feeling, and to denounce the hidden forces which were then eliminating millions of human lives. His music became a moral support for all who were persecuted. Belief in the final victory of justice, instilled through his works, transformed his music into a powerful stimulus to the spirit of resistance and freedom. The inner power of his music, always of great vividness, enriches the many thousands of new listeners who discover it with eagerness and pleasure. Thus, even after his death, Dmitri Shostakovich continues to lead the world towards light and reason. His

work, of universal value, is recognised by all.

Those on the List who seek a definition of revisionism will find its essential premises contained in this statement.

--Ian MacDonald

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Response to the criticisms of Frank Dudley Berry and Robert Parrish

Made in alt.fan.shostakovich
on June 26th, June 28th, and July 2nd 1995

by Ian MacDonald

It is sad to read the recent postings by these gentlemen. Not because they aren't entitled to voice whatever thoughts pop into their minds, but because their remarks show how, despite five years of confirmation from authoritative Russians of what I wrote in *The New Shostakovich*, they (like many other Western pundits) continue to cling to vague "hunches" about the composer with no more than a cursory regard for the facts - let alone the probabilities which flow from these.

Mr Parrish unwittingly puts his finger on it when he invokes Sidney Hook's remarks about academic over-specialisation. "There is a fallacy," he writes, "in uncritically believing someone's pronouncements in one field of knowledge based on their expertise in another." I presume Mr Parrish is a professor of music. Having read his letter, I must further presume that, because of this specialisation, he lacks the time to acquaint himself with the basics of Soviet history and culture, since what he has to say on these subjects is, regrettably, of no more substance than Einstein's views on Communism. If Einstein was "a total jackass" (sic) when pronouncing naively on Soviet politics, what does that make Mr Parrish when he engages in the same exercise?

Though under-informed - for which there is no intrinsic blame since nobody knows everything - Mr Parrish should have known enough to realise that he doesn't sufficiently understand the issues he raises to represent his views as anything other than prejudice. Why does he imagine that a faint outline knowledge of what happened in Stalin's USSR constitutes a qualification for dismissing a view of Shostakovich held not only by myself and other Westerner commentators but by the overwhelming majority of Russian witnesses to have testified on the subject since 1990?

Hopeful of keeping this exchange usefully clear, I will deal with Mr Parrish's contentions later in the following number-referenced discussion. First, though, I must turn to Mr Berry, whose confusion is more glaring because more willfully careless (not to mention trundled out twice).

My book - and the subsequent articles I've written in connection with it, some of which appear in this Website - depend not only on close study and argument but on close listening. Mr Berry (whose level of attention to detail is perhaps indicated by the fact that, despite claiming to have read *The New Shostakovich* and *Shostakovich: A Life Remembered*, he could neither remember my name nor be certain of Elizabeth Wilson's) evidently thinks and responds in what might charitably be called an airily generalised fashion. I will attempt to bring him gently down to earth, but do not, in all honesty, expect to succeed in doing so, however many facts and arguments I produce. He is, I suspect, not the sort to let awkward realities intrude on his sunny day.

(1) "It is impossible," contends Mr Berry, "to believe that the Seventh Symphony was not written in a patriotic fever of the type to which even an independent thinker could succumb under the circumstances." Impossible? This is surely pitching things too high - on logical grounds, if nothing else. For example, Lev Lebedinsky, who knew the composer very well, found no difficulty in believing this allegedly impossible thing, and nor does the conductor Semyon Bychkov, to name but two. Better still, what of Shostakovich's own opinion? This was noted in 1942 by Flora Litvinova and is reproduced not only by Elizabeth Wilson but also in a version edited by myself four years ago and newly published in *DSCH Journal No. 3*:

"Music, real music is never literally bound to one theme. Fascism is not just National Socialism; this music is about terror, slavery, moral decay." [Litvinova continues:] "Later Dmitri Dmitryevich confided to me quite frankly that his Seventh (as well as his Fifth) depicted not only fascism but also events in our own country, as well as tyranny and totalitarianism in general."

Unlike the as-yet-unverified claims of Lebedinsky (*Novy Mir*, 1990) and Rostislav Dubinsky (*Stormy Applause*, 1989) that the first movement of the Seventh Symphony was written before the Nazi invasion as a satire on the rise of Stalin, Litvinova's report is unequivocal. Still more persuasive, it was confided to a private journal - and by no less a disinterested party than the daughter of the Soviet Union's former foreign minister (then Soviet ambassador to the USA).

(2) Mr Berry continues: "While the finale of the Fifth can certainly be interpreted as an expression of enforced hysteria, it can also be taken the way it traditionally has been, as an explosion of triumphant will." It is unclear to whose "triumphant will" Mr Berry is here alluding. Stalin's? The NKVD's? Or Shostakovich's? The official Soviet view used to be that, in line with the symphony's alleged programme concerning "the making of a man", this peroration represented Shostakovich's psychological reconciliation with Soviet collectivism. Is this what Mr Berry is suggesting? If so, he must rebut Gerard McBurney's interpretation of the finale, based on his analysis of the part played in it by the song "Rebirth", quoted in the central section. The words of this song (by Pushkin) are:

A barbarian artist with a sleepy brush

Blackens over a picture of genius.
And his lawless drawing
Scribbles meaninglessly upon it.

But, with the years, the alien paints
Flake off like old scales;
The creation of genius appears before us
In its former beauty.

Thus do delusions fall away
From my worn-out soul
And there spring up within it
Visions of original, pure days.

The presence of this quotation, noted by Soviet musicologists at the time of the Fifth Symphony's first performances, was taken as a token of Shostakovich's definitive conversion to Communism from the "political error" of bourgeois individualism ("thus do delusions fall away"). In fact, what supplants the delusions are "visions of original, pure days", implying quite the opposite: that, if anything, Shostakovich was then waking up from the nightmare of Communism. While neither need be precisely the case, which is likelier to incline towards the truth, given the circumstances?

The Fifth Symphony was written in 1937, i.e., at the apex of the Great Terror - an almost unimaginable horror in which literally millions of Russians "disappeared" into NKVD execution cellars or were herded away in cattle trucks to slave-labour or slow death in the wastes of Siberia. During work on the Fifth Symphony, Shostakovich's sponsor and protector Marshal Mikhail Tukhachevsky was arrested and shot for allegedly plotting to assassinate Stalin. According to Veniamin Basner (quoted in *Shostakovich: A Life Remembered*), the composer was thereupon arrested by the NKVD and himself interrogated about the Tukhachevsky affair. In *The New Shostakovich*, I suggested that the symphony's slow movement was as much a lament for Tukhachevsky as for the millions, like him, who fell victim to Communism in 1937. Basner's contention adds weight to this - unless, of course, one is prepared to believe that Shostakovich (as a presumably orthodox Communist) betrayed his friend Tukhachevsky during his interrogation.

Of the several factors militating against this, the most difficult to refute is the nature of the Fifth Symphony itself, sufficiently antipathetic to the then-official symphonic standard that a special theory had to be invented to account for this once audiences had so warmly applauded the work that it was impossible to suppress it. That this stylistic contradiction was perceived in more than formal terms is confirmed by musicologists like Israel Nestyev (who saw the Fifth's slow movement as "a requiem for the millions of innocent victims of Stalin's regime") and Lev Mazel (for whom the work voices "grief for the fallen and agonizing pain, certainly not caused by the tragedy of war").

Recently Gerard McBurney - observing that the "barbarian artist" who blackens the picture of genius is analogous to Stalin as the personification of Socialist Realism - has pointed out that the first four notes of the song (accompanying the words "a barbarian artist") are also the first four notes of the Fifth's finale. Not knowing when he wrote the Fifth Symphony if he would live or die as a result of it, Shostakovich seems to have encoded into its finale a message that its meaning had been (as it were) "daubed over" by another hand, but that this false accretion would fade and his underlying intentions one day be seen. In the song's last line, the word *chisti* - meaning pure in the sense of having been cleaned and restored to its original state - is wistfully drawn out, confirming Pushkin's painting metaphor.

None of this can conceivably be said to accord with the idea that Shostakovich was an orthodox Communist who betrayed his patron. These are, on the contrary, the tactics and expressions of a beleaguered (and frightened) individual conscience. All in all - taking into account the general historical context of the Terror, Shostakovich's own personal trauma over the Tukhachevsky affair, the stylistic and expressive defiance of the symphony as a whole, and the code-structure of its finale - it is hard (though I will not say "impossible") to come to any conclusion other than that claiming the end of Shostakovich's Fifth Symphony to be "an explosion of triumphant will" is grievously to mishear it. The only triumph allowable here is, surely, the triumph of brute force over decency?

(3) On his way to concluding that "Ian Wilson's (sic) interpretation is a gross trivialization of Shostakovich's career", Mr Berry asserts that he prefers

"the more conventional biography described in Elizabeth Wilson (? - I loaned the book, and am no longer sure of the author's name; I mean the one that came out last winter) - the young Shostakovich as more or less a true believer (why not ? who knew then what lay ahead?)".

Leaving aside the fact that Elizabeth Wilson's linking text follows *The New Shostakovich* surprisingly closely, it is somewhat bewildering to have *Shostakovich: A Life Remembered* held up as representing a "more conventional" view of, among other things, Shostakovich's youth than the one I presented in 1989.

After writing *The New Shostakovich*, I was privileged to read the composer's letters to Tanya Glivenko in which it is clear that any allegiance he may have had to Communism lasted (if it, in fact, ever really began) for about nine months during 1923-4 and had completely vanished by 1926. (See "His Misty Youth", *melos* 4-5, summer 1993.) The remarkable thing about the testimonies about Shostakovich's youth presented in *Shostakovich: A Life Remembered* is that they not only confirm the freethinking references in the Glivenko letters but actually propose a more radical view of Shostakovich's youth than I had done hitherto. I quote the relevant section of my [review](#):

'Elizabeth Wilson presents more than enough material to prove - the spurious "Arnshtam"

article notwithstanding - that Shostakovich was not only never a Communist, but almost certainly not even a Narodnik. Speaking to EW some time between 1988 and 1990, his sister Zoya insists that the atmosphere in their house after the Revolution was "very free and liberal" with "no talk of politics". Boris Lossky, a pupil with Shostakovich at the Shidlovskaya School, opines, in an article written in 1989, that the *Funeral March in Memory of the Victims of the Revolution* was linked to the massacre of those protesting against Lenin's dissolution of the Constituent Assembly at the beginning of 1918: "During the spring of 1918, Mitya never so much as hinted at any kind of sympathy with the 'existing regime', and I can vouch that this was the case until 1922." The Glivenko letters of 1923 to early 1924 contain a number of pro-Lenin statements which the anti-revisionists will seize on with relief - but the probability (as with the composer's letters to Isaak Glikman) is that Shostakovich was writing against the chance that the secret police might open his mail, which, on the face of it, was highly likely. (He destroyed most of his letters to his mother shortly after her death in 1955. Zoya recalls him "coming into the room, a bundle of nerves, and burning them all in the stove". Presumably they contained compromising passages.)

'Apart from these almost certainly bogus references, the picture is one of an aesthetic, superhumanly gifted, and utterly apolitical boy for whom music (and literature) were the be-all-and-end-all. Writing to Boleslav Yavorsky in 1925, he confesses: "There are no other joys in life apart from music. For me, all of life is music." His fellow student Valerian Bogdanov-Berezovsky, writing under constraint in 1976, lets the cat out of the bag: "An outstanding feature of the young Shostakovich was his early independence of thought and behaviour." (This is reliable Aesopian for "He wasn't a Communist.") Mikhail Druskin effectively confirms this, while elsewhere we learn that Shostakovich was contemptuous not only of Bezymensky's Lenin-lionising verses for the Second Symphony but also of the propagandist plots of all three of his ballets...'

One might take issue with Mr Berry's bland assertion that there is "nothing discreditable with the notion of a young genius, circa 1925, at the dawn of his career, accepting the conventional wisdom of the day and the hope of the future". - Nothing discreditable about the Communist dissolution of the democratic Constituent Assembly? About the Red Terror? About Lenin's concentration camps, exemplary executions of innocents without trial, and deliberate whipping up of civil war? - Yet this is ultimately irrelevant since the immediate issue is perfectly simple: if Shostakovich wasn't a young Communist, no mitigating pleas need be made. Mr Berry is a long way wide of the point.

(4) As, too, is Robert Parrish: "It seems to me that the humanistic Shostakovich presented in *Testimony* could have easily supported Communism in the 1920's. Many others did so and continued to do so long afterward." One is forced to ask: What kind of critical writing is this, based, as it appears to be, on nothing but supposition and an oddly unacademic lack of awareness of what has been published on this area of Shostakovich's life in the last two years? He goes on:

"I suspect that the Communism that Shostakovich supported was the Left-wing variety that Lenin himself denounced as an 'infantile delusion'. This is just a hunch of course. I don't get the feeling that he was that politically oriented anyway."

The sort of "Communism" Lenin denounced in this way - between denouncing everyone who ever disagreed with anything he said - was basically that of the extremist Proletkult. Shostakovich is well known to have despised the Proletkult as a pack of cultureless numbskulls. Leaving aside the ludicrous idea that the composer could ever have sympathised with such a rabble, how does Mr Parrish propose to square this strange suggestion with his other "hunch" - that Shostakovich was "not that politically oriented anyway"? The two statements are flagrantly incompatible. Indeed, only someone who knew very little about Soviet political history would make such remarks. Suffice it to say that much the same goes for Mr Parrish's incautious and simplistic subsequent observations concerning Shostakovich's relationship with the Soviet regime. (I will expand on this if asked to.)

(5) Mr Berry perorates:

"I believe Shostakovich's political views were fully formed by the mid-30's, but for substantial personal reasons - most notably, his devotion to his children - he compromised them throughout the '40's and '50's. His self-condemnation for these compromises is unusually harsh."

Unfortunately he neglects to say what he thinks these political views were. One might assume that he here follows *The New Shostakovich* in dating the beginning of the composer's systematic dissidence to circa 1936 (with a great deal of discontent and individualist sarcasm during the preceding ten years). However Mr Berry's inclination to hear the finale of the Fifth as conformist scuppers this deduction. Perhaps he hasn't thought about any of this very seriously, done no research of his own, spoken to no Russians who might be able to help him out of his confusions?

(6) Mr Berry concedes that I am right to say that Shostakovich was "influenced by the political horrors he lived through". However, his assertion that the ideas proposed in 1989 in *The New Shostakovich* are "truistic" is curious. If he would care to say where, apart from in *Testimony* (then routinely dismissed by Western critics as "spurious"), he can discover anything else in this vein in the English Shostakovich literature before, say, 1993-4, I'd be interested to learn of it.

(7) Mr Parrish concludes: "Shostakovich's political views at any stage of his life may be interesting to

talk about, may even shed some light on why he wrote what he did. But it is fundamentally irrelevant, because music ought to stand alone as music, regardless of any public or secret programmatic themes." Mr Berry, too, pledges his allegiance to this view: "I think that, in interpreting Shostakovich's music predominantly as a political reaction to events, (MacDonald) does a disservice both to the man and the composer."

Instead of responding immediately to these (all too familiar) sentiments, I suggest that these gentlemen read my essay *[Universal Because Specific](#)*. There they will find a précis of my views on this subject. If they are still bemused by what I mean after they have read this, or wish to take issue with anything contained therein, I will presently reply to them at length on this page.

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Responses to recent postings

by Ian MacDonald

[THE NEW SHOSTAKOVICH](#) - I want my own copy!

July 28th 1995

Chris Confessore asks whether there are plans for another printing of *The New Shostakovich*. The answer is Yes - but not for two or three years. The original sold out (6,000 copies) several years ago, and the rights have reverted to me. When I've finished my current project, I intend to update the book for a second publication (probably in 1998 and probably with Jonathan Cape).

Op. 87 Recordings Compared

July 22nd 1995

Frank Dudley Berry refers to "Nikolayeva's version" (Hyperion). Other correspondents have mentioned her (superior) 1987 version on Melodiya. There is, in fact, an even better Nikolayeva recording made, also for Melodiya, in 1962. Shostakovich was present at the 1962 sessions and we can therefore be fairly certain that - regardless of whether any of her readings correspond to their metronome markings in the score - nothing Nikolayeva then did by way of tempo raised any basic questions so far as the composer was concerned. In fact, Nikolayeva's interpretation of Opus 87 was formed "at Shostakovich's elbow" as its individual numbers were composed, and her tempos for the cycle do not vary significantly among the three versions she recorded over thirty years. Her performance of Bach's 48 was the immediate inspiration for Opus 87 and each piece was 'played over' by her under the composer's supervision the day after it was finished. Shostakovich always regarded her reading as, if not canonical, then as one he approved and commended. So far as tempo goes, his own recordings coincide with Nikolayeva's rather than those of Keith Jarrett, who (the C major aside) sticks closely to the metronome markings, yet fails to get to the heart of the music.



Kondrashin's Shostakovich 8th on Praga

July 18th 1995

Mark Haxthausen asks whether this particular "take" of Kondrashin's interpretation is worth buying. A concert performance recorded in Prague a year after the 1968 Soviet invasion, it's angry (in solidarity with the audience) and very fast - 17 minutes shorter than Maxim Shostakovich's version on Collins Classics! Ensemble is a bit ragged and string tuning in the first movement is poor, but those who don't mind rough edges if the performance is emotionally convincing will probably be able to forgive this. The trumpet-led trio in the third movement is particularly good - frightening and funny at the same time. The sound is vivid and the dynamic is so lively that the engineers keep having to turn down the gain as the concert proceeds. Not a first choice but worth exploring if you want two or three versions of the symphony. Interesting notes by Pierre Barbier.

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Responses to recent postings (2)

by Ian MacDonald



Re: Light-hearted Ninth?

August 4th 1995

John-Michael Albert considered what we might call the "tone of voice" of the Ninth Symphony, often assumed in the West to be a predominantly breezy and depthless work. Describing the interpretation of a Soviet-educated protégé of Bernstein's, Mr Albert wrote: "I thought this would be a frothy lark, fun for the student musicians, fun for the audience. No way. He worked them again and again on the sarcasm, the truculence of the music. Their youthful inclination was to find the lyricism and beauty in their parts. The rehearsal was stopped many times to make a section less lyrical and more sarcastic - especially the woodwinds."

This conception would have been furthest from Bernstein's in the symphony's second movement. "Tone of voice" here depends largely on tempo: play the work too slowly and you have an interlude of sagging pathos (e.g., Bernstein and, by far the worst offender, Kurtz); play it, as marked, *Moderato* (e.g., Kondrashin, Järvi, Janssons) and you have a subtle satire on official mourning decreed by a government which killed more of its own citizens than Hitler.

That Shostakovich was touchy about tempo in this movement for such interpretative reasons is evident from his letters to Koussevitsky during 1946-7. Taking issue with Koussevitsky's sluggish tempo in the *Moderato* (recorded 4th November 1946 and sent to the composer for his comments), Shostakovich replied on 4th February 1947 that, while arguing over note-values was in itself unimportant, "what's crucial is that, in your interpretation, my symphony won't come across to listeners in precisely the way I want it to". Here we have a rare instance of the composer confirming on paper that there was a special way in which he wished his music to be performed - a way, we may assume, congruous with his general (i.e., not solely technical) intentions in composing it. These intentions were paramount to him. A letter to Koussevitsky sent a fortnight later shows Shostakovich greatly agitated by the conductor's refusal to grasp his meaning: "To me it is very insulting that you do not wish to admit my remarks worthy of attention on the occasion of your performance of my Ninth Symphony."

In papers published several years ago in *DSCH*, Richard Pleak and Derek Hulme pieced together the background to this altercation, revealing that, following an additional exchange of letters, Shostakovich

at last managed to persuade Koussevitsky that his half-speed reading of the *Moderato* was unacceptable. On 2nd April 1947, Koussevitsky hurriedly re-recorded the movement and patched it into his existing recording (issued in the USA as Victor 78 rpms 11 9634-6 and in the UK as RCA Victrola LVM2 7510C-D). Hulme notes that, properly played, the *Moderato* should last about six minutes. He further reveals that the conductor-composer Gavril Yudin (b. 1905) heard Alexander Gauk conduct the Ninth in Moscow in January 1946 and was "appalled" to hear the *Moderato* played well below Shostakovich's metronome marking of crotchet = 208. When Yudin shortly afterwards met Shostakovich and told him he was preparing a performance of the Ninth, the latter grinned and implored Yudin not to drag out the second movement as Gauk had.

John-Michael Albert is right to point to this symphony as highly significant in the continuing debate over Shostakovich's inner meaning. "Here [he writes] we have the axis on which the interpretation of Shostakovich will turn in the future. And it will turn. Here we have music that can be played fun, frothy, exuberant, and celebratory but whose origins and, indeed, whose first interpreters, including Kondrashin, who had Shostakovich sitting in the empty hall and commenting during their rehearsals, have created works of great grit, genuine angst, and acid sarcasm - from the same score." Fortunately in the case of the Ninth's second movement we can be confident in resolving the issue of which is the correct approach: not pseudo-tragedy but stealthy satire. Moreover, if satire is the "tone" here, it is surely so throughout this pointed and sarcastic work?

An illuminating parallel to the performance variations in the Ninth Symphony can be found in Rostislav Dubinsky's *Stormy Applause* (recommended to all readers of alt.fan.shostakovich). Four years before its official première by the Beethoven Quartet in 1953, the Borodins gave an audition of Shostakovich's new Fourth Quartet at the Ministry of Culture:

"We put our hearts and souls into that performance. We emphasised everything that socialist realism requires to be concealed. We spoke the truth! When we had finished, silence fell. Was it more eloquent than any praise? Or was it an ominous silence that could become a death sentence? We looked at each other, and I hastened to say, 'Will you permit us to play it once more?' We were given a nod of assent.

"This time we played it differently. The tempi were faster, the sound lighter. We removed all possible 'anti-Soviet' insinuations from the music. Even our faces tried to look optimistic. We lied! We presented the foreboding mood of the first movement as a hope for a brighter future; the plaintive lyricism of the second as a pleasant little waltz; the sinister muted scherzo became a cheerful dance; and the tragic Jewish themes of the finale took on traditional Oriental colouring. The tension eased. There were smiles. We were thanked, even praised. The music was still banned."



Re: Lady Macbeth

August 14th 1995

I can't agree with John-Michael Albert in his estimate of the Second and Third symphonies as unequivocally "in praise of the Leninist system". They seem to me far more ambiguous and individualistic than that - and, indeed, Shostakovich's attitude to his country's political system seems to have been sceptical from at least 1926 onwards. (My essay on this, "His Misty Youth", will appear in an anthology of material on Shostakovich later this year.) Part of Mr Albert's - or is it Maxim's? - misapprehension over the "tone" of these works seems to stem from a belief that the Twenties in Russia was a time of enormous artistic freedom in which the country was "flooded with the avant-garde" and that all of this later "came to a crashing halt with Stalin". In fact, the truth is far less clear-cut. Lenin was conservative in his artistic tastes and saw to it that the early radicalism of the *Proletkult* was curbed. Furthermore, the experimentalism of the early Twenties was politically loaded and to a great extent politically directed. To be avant-garde was to be anti-bourgeois and thus against the "old people" of the preceding, Tsarist, regime. Far from playful, much of the *épater le bourgeois* spirit in early Bolshevik art was vengeful and driven by ideological hatred.

When NEP was ordained, the authorities countered all genuinely liberal developments with subversive agit-prop cultural initiatives. (E.g., RAPM, the Russian Association of Proletarian Musicians, was launched under state sponsorship to challenge the ACM, or Association of Contemporary Musicians, whose interest in Western trends in music was deemed counter-revolutionary.) As Commissar for Enlightenment, Lunacharsky had a running battle with the repressive collectivism of the Left activists throughout the Twenties. Far from a halcyon interlude of unalloyed freedom, the years between Lenin's death and Stalin's accession were fraught with confrontation between rival artistic factions: liberals on the one hand, state-sponsored totalitarians on the other. (The poet Mayakovsky's career offers a microcosm of what was going on at this time.)

As for Shostakovich, his experimental period did not commence until after the First Symphony in 1926. His preceptors in "experiment" were not, however, Leninist but cynical conservative (and mainly literary) figures such as Bulgakov, Gogol, and Sollertinsky. In his contemporary letters to Tanya Glivenko, he makes sleighting references to "the Red Press" in connection with its reactions to his First Symphony, and confirms that he deplored Bezymensky's verses for his Second Symphony. There is no reason to assume that he had any serious political agenda (either way) in this work. Like the Third, it is a mixture of unease, slapstick, and scepticism. To have been more explicit in any of this at the time (supposing such a desire on his part existed) would have been very dangerous to Shostakovich, particularly in the case of the Third Symphony, written at the height of the Soviet Cultural Revolution.

Until we have a clearer picture of the cultural scene in the USSR during 1924-32, judging Shostakovich's state of mind in any of his music of the period must be a speculative business. Even so there is already sufficient evidence to suggest that his Second and Third symphonies are far more complex and ambivalent than has so far been generally assumed.



Re: Symphony No 11

October 6th 1995 et seq.

Correspondents disagreed over whether the Eleventh Symphony was about the 1905 Revolution or the Hungarian Uprising of 1956. M Panes wrote: "Given the use of prison songs, it's a rather seditious story! Some may say it sounds like 'movie music', but I think it's more accurate to say it sounds like a movie. It doesn't accompany images as much as embody them... Shostakovich was no snob - there aren't complex musical techniques to impress here, but something much more precious and rarer: something to say." Absolutely! Of the "story" itself, Bob Groves wrote: "Shostakovich was of the habit of masking his personal allusions behind public 'themes', and it would appear that 'The Year 1905' has as much to do with the events of '56 as the abortive Russian uprising of the turn of the century. Certainly the quotes of revolutionary songs have an ambiguity that could refer to more contemporary events."

Other contributors took issue with this, insisting that Shostakovich was merely commemorating a period of (pre-Bolshevik) revolutionary idealism of which he still approved in 1957. Rajesh Malik, for example, wrote: "I see no irony here as in other Shostakovich works. Nothing is hidden behind musical notes. Shostakovich, like many noncommunists, sympathized with the plight of the Russian masses before the 1917 revolution and Symphony 11 is DSCH's commemoration of those emotional moments." Rolf Strom-Olsen countered as follows: "I cannot agree with this. The Eleventh is not at all about the events of 1905. The subtitle is simply a jab (sic) to the Soviet authorities and musicologues. If anything, it is about Hungary in '56. Further, I don't see Shostakovich as having much that draws him to the plight of the masses. His is an intensely personal subjection and betrayal, and all of his symphonies testify to that theme. DSCH may have been interested in revolutionary ideas prior to the Fourth Symphony and *Lady Macbeth*, but after that, I think any connexion was lost."

In fact, the 1956 Hungarian link was made at once by many of the members of Shostakovich's liberal intellectual audience in Soviet Russia. Lev Lebedinsky, who was close to Shostakovich around the time of the symphony's composition, contended (*Novy Mir*, 1990) that the work was not about 1905 but about 1956: "The true - and highly contemporary - programme of the Eleventh Symphony was deliberately concealed by Shostakovich behind a kind of period 'costume'. It can justly be called a product of the anti-totalitarian liberation movement in the USSR." Later, in *Pravda*, the composer Yuri Levitin attacked Lebedinsky for presenting a "one-dimensional" picture of the Eleventh, claiming that his view of the work "vulgarised" it. The critic Lev Mazel (*Sovetskaya Muzika*, 1991) suggested a compromise. He had, he said, been aware of the Hungarian resonances of the Eleventh from the first moment he heard it; but to say that it was entirely concerned with 1956 and nothing to do with 1905 was to deprive it of its rich associations: "The programme of the work is openly historical; only the style is contemporary. Yet it was, at the same time, inspired by contemporary events - and it is arguably this inspiration which gives the symphony its true meaning and substance."

Recently an authoritative confirmation of the double-meaning of the Eleventh was published by Elizabeth Wilson in her [Shostakovich: A Life Remembered](#). Here, Zoya Tomashevskaya claims that the

choreographer Igor Belsky, who produced a ballet on the Eleventh Symphony at the Leningrad Malyi Theatre in 1966, told her that Shostakovich had said to him in passing: "Don't forget that I wrote that symphony in the aftermath of the Hungarian Uprising." At the very least, then, it seems that Mazel is right: the work has two levels: an allegory on the 1905 Revolution using old prison songs as symbols - and a "masked" reference to the Hungarian Uprising of 1956.

As for its 1905 symbolism, it is important to remember that 1956 was also the year of Khrushchev's denunciation of Stalin and the mass release of prisoners from the Gulag. (According to the composer's son Maxim, many *ex-zeks* stayed at the Shostakovich family apartment on their way back from the camps.) The symphony's collage of famous songs would have spoken vividly to Shostakovich's sympathetic audience inasmuch as their words were well-known to all Russians. Interviewed by [Irina Nikolska](#), the musicologist Marina Sabynina has observed of the Eleventh that its third movement "could be associated with the mass executions of the Soviet era and Stalin's reprisals, while the first part, with its melodies of pre-revolutionary songs of hard labour and exile, recalls the victims of the Gulag - the millions who perished in concentration camps and prisons". Much of the symbolic "dialectic" of the Eleventh Symphony is lost on a foreign audience, yet the work's ghostly gestures towards the future - not only to 1956 but, in the closing minutes of the finale, to October 1917 - are surely intelligible to anyone with sensitivity and a little knowledge of Russian history?

Hiroyuki Tanaka votes Kondrashin's recording of the Eleventh as the best. It's certainly in the top three, but I would suggest that Mravinsky had the edge over Kondrashin in this work. His 1960 studio version for Melodiya (presently unavailable on CD) is uniquely overwhelming and arguably the single most urgently required reissue in the Shostakovich discography. A live version of Mravinsky's interpretation made in Prague in 1967 is the second best choice at present (Praga PR 254018). I agree with Mr Tanaka that Haitink is "too cool" - but I would say that of his entire cycle, which was recorded before the post-*Testimony* revised view of Shostakovich.



Mahler and DSCH

September 12th 1995

John-Michael Albert writes: "I am unaware of a single instance in which DSCH ever quoted Mahler in his music... So, how did DSCH come to know Mahler so well, and then how did DSCH come to let him influence his own philosophy of what a symphony is?"

Shostakovich was introduced to Mahler in the late Twenties by Ivan Sollertinsky. The impact was huge - indeed, Shostakovich's passion for the composer was so great that his friends (and enemies) on the Soviet music scene in the early Thirties jokingly referred to his prolonged attack of "mahleria". The closest Shostakovich comes to quoting Mahler directly is in some of his film scores. There are, for example, fairly close allusions to Mahler's Third in the soundtracks to *Pirogov* and *The Young Guard*,

both written in 1947. The sequence "Dresden in Ruins" from the film *Five Days and Five Nights* (1960) likewise suggests that the trumpet fanfares in the opening movement of the Eleventh Symphony may derive, albeit distantly, from the fanfares in the opening movement of Mahler's First. On the other hand, the high Cs on flute and violins before the agitated final section seem to have come from the introduction to the finale of Berlioz's *Symphonie fantastique!* (Btw, those a.f.s.-ers who were recently counting Shostakovichian references to the *Dies irae* should listen closely hereabouts.)

There are lots of *Mahlerisch* bits in Shostakovich (I point out some of these in *The New Shostakovich*), but mainly, I think, the influence was one of personality and method. Mahler's symphonism, with its many solo passages, is essentially theatrical: his instruments are characters in an ongoing symphony-drama. Moreover, Mahler's drama anticipates Shostakovich's in its radical juxtaposition of irony and pathos, satire and tragedy. Another important ingredient of Mahler's music which Shostakovich must have seized on with gratitude was the former's incorporation into the symphonic language of banality, street music, and the "low" in life and art. *Des Knaben Wunderhorn* is a key work here, and one can hear echoes of it in Shostakovich's 1941 *King Lear* music, as well as (in more generalised form) in *From Jewish Folk Poetry*.

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rule: alt.fan.shostakovich

Reply to "redrick"



by Ian MacDonald



Posted 2nd March 1996 (and subsequently)

"Stalin was a jerk. K(h)rus(h)chev said so, so it must be true, right? (grin)"

This inane yawp emanates from someone calling himself "redrick" whose loud and ignorant assertions are currently threatening to turn a.f.s into a chimpanzee's tea-party. Happily I haven't time to enter into the prolonged shouting match he appears to enjoy, so the following response will have to do. (For work reasons, I must forego the distraction of a.f.s. for the next six months - a pleasant relief if "redrick" signals the level it's about to sink to.)

1) "redrick" wrote:

"Shostakovich's 'clashes' with the regime were few and mild compared to just about anyone else's you can name. He was a major soviet figure from the thirties through the sixties, without spending half the time picking potatoes in Siberia. Who else can you say that about?"

If this extraordinary statement is to be taken seriously, it appears to mean that all major Soviet figures from the Thirties to the Sixties - except Shostakovich - spent half their time "picking potatoes" in Siberia. As with almost everything else "redrick" says, this marks him out as someone who has never bothered to come to grips with the Soviet background. No Soviet composer was ever sent to the camps. Stalin kept them "in the world" to churn out film scores and occasional cantatas. Writers, on the other hand, were always dangerous and consequently went to the Gulag by the thousands. (I regret to disillusion "redrick" but no Gulag prisoners were ever set to do anything as innocuous as pick potatoes. Instead *zeks* suffered cold and exhaustion from 12-hour-days chopping trees and gouging out roads in the Arctic Circle, or broke their backs digging canals, or died slowly from radiation sickness in uranium mines. Perhaps it's time he stopped yelling and read *The Gulag Archipelago*...)

As for Shostakovich's clashes with the regime being "few and mild compared to just about anyone else's you can name", one wonders just exactly who "redrick" could name, if asked. "Mild"? One despairs at

his callous lack of imagination. DDS's son Maxim has described how, on many occasions, his father sat all night outside the family flat with a packed suitcase waiting for the NKVD to come for him. Around the time of the Fifth Symphony, two of Shostakovich's close relatives and a dozen colleagues in the intelligentsia were arrested, some later to be exiled, others tortured and shot. The pressure of fear on the composer must have been unbearable. Indeed if we take the trouble to read the major books on the Terror, we discover that almost the entire populace of the USSR was paralysed with fright. "Redrick" can be forgiven his ignorance, but not his selfish inability to put himself in someone else's place. Hardly surprising that he can't hear the music.

2. "redrick" wrote:

"A few facts in the face of much cold war thunder. Shostakovich was never 'unpersoned'... Shostakovich chose to remain in the Soviet Union..."

If "redrick" had been following this subject, he'd know that the charge that Shostakovich "chose" to remain in the Soviet Union has long been dismissed as of no ideological significance. Almost all of those who fled the revolution did so before or during the Civil War. Obtaining permission to leave the country after 1921 was almost impossible. After 1930, when Stalin sealed the borders, it was *totally* impossible unless special dispensation was granted (as when the dictator personally granted Zamyatin an exit visa in 1931). In 1930, Shostakovich was a mere 24. This was absolutely his last realistic chance of getting out of the country, even supposing that Stalin felt like letting him go. As it happens, Shostakovich didn't want to leave Russia because, like many Russian intellectuals, he feared deracination. But it was Russia he didn't want to leave, not the Soviet Union.

As for "unpersoning", there are two definitions of this: (i) being dehumanised, demonised, or placed beyond the pale (as, for example, when Bolsheviks referred to the peasants as "dark people", meaning folk different in kind from the enlightened standard-bearers of the socialist future - and, as such, dispensable); (ii) being deprived of the ability to earn a living from one's qualified occupation (as, for example, when philosophers in Czechoslovakia were allowed only to clean latrines). Each of these definitions fits Shostakovich during the aftermaths to the denunciations of 1936 and 1948. During these months, the newspapers were full of invective against Shostakovich and other "mercenary Formalists". (Cf. the Stalin Prize-winning [play](#) written by Sergei Mikhalkov in 1949.) The conductor Kurt Sanderling, who arrived in Moscow from Germany in 1936, recalls the atmosphere:

"All I can tell you is that I was shocked by the way they were treating a composer who had previously been held in high regard, by the charges directed against him, and, most important of all, by the manner in which it was being done. As a newcomer, I failed to understand how dangerous it all was, believing that it could affect only his work as a musician. Shostakovich found himself ostracised overnight even though Stalin, in characteristic ambivalence, kept the composer supplied with lucrative commissions for

film music to ensure his financial survival. The press was full of the most venomous invective at the time."

During times of sustained public vilification in the USSR, it was understood that the victims were to be "sent to Coventry" and that anyone who associated with them risked arrest. As such, these scapegoats became "fair game". In 1948, youths stood outside Shostakovich's *dacha*, jeering "Hey, Formalist, come out!" and throwing stones at his windows. Maxim Shostakovich has told how he sat in a tree with a catapult defending his father against them. Vishnevskaya has written of Shostakovich's persecution and penury around this time. Rostropovich recalls that, in 1948, "everyone in the arts and music was so *scared*. For instance, Shostakovich gave the manuscript of his First Violin Concerto to David Oistrakh and that concerto was not performed for three years because people were too scared. People tried to forget about those composers [Shostakovich and Prokofiev] - they were *almost naked and without friends*. In our system, only the state could commission work from a composer, so both Shostakovich and Prokofiev were very hard up - they were simply *hungry*. One morning, at a time when I was living in Prokofiev's house, he told me that he had no money to buy anything for breakfast. It was the worst day of my life."

To be "unpersoned" under Stalinism meant to be deprived of human status and turned into a civic whipping boy. In communist China, they made intellectuals wear dunces' caps in public. That didn't literally happen to Shostakovich; it *did* happen metaphorically.

3) "redrick" wrote:

"Volkov has been throughly discredited... At the time of the Wilson interviews, the Volkov fraud had not yet been exposed... Obviously these True Believers will continue to swallow the Wilson/Volkov/McDonald idiocy no matter how discredited it becomes... Wilson's book is altogether more responsible than the extreme fantasies of Ian McDonald, who imagines DS as some sort of secret counter-revolutionary reactionary. Nonetheless, one needs to carefully consider the time during which each of Wilson's sources made their comments..."

Solomon Volkov has never been discredited. On the contrary, he is supported by almost every significant figure in Shostakovich's milieu. (See [Testimony pro Testimony](#).) Richard Taruskin is, by comparison, insignificant, as well as widely disliked as a bully in American musicological circles. (Perhaps that's why he appeals to "redrick"? That and the fact that Taruskin confirms his obvious need to believe that Soviet Communism wasn't vile after all.) One presumes "redrick" will remain obdurately pro-Taruskin no matter how many people who once knew Shostakovich come forward to support Volkov. For instance - and quite contrary to "redrick" - the composer's son Maxim has endorsed *Testimony* and is on good terms with Volkov, whom he regards highly. Admittedly Shostakovich's other child, Galina, has so far said nothing on this subject. Suppose, though, she came out with a statement

praising Volkov and calling *Testimony* a "true reflection" of her father's political opinions? Would "redrick" recant? Probably not. But I'd advise him to keep watching this space.

It's odd how Elizabeth Wilson moves so quickly in the "redrick" universe from being part of "the Wilson/Volkov/MacDonald idiocy" to being "altogether more responsible than the extreme fantasies of Ian MacDonald". Clearly "redrick" hadn't read *Shostakovich: A Life Remembered* when he made his first inflammatory posts. Now that he has, he clings to EW's misleading disclaimer about "extremes" without recognising that her narrative of Shostakovich's life is far more "extreme" than mine. The fact that he knows little about this subject is clear from his laughable statement that EW gathered her interviews before *Testimony* was "exposed". For someone who claims to have seen through *The New Shostakovich*, he is strangely amnesiac. Surely he read my "Prelude" wherein I discussed the "exposure" of *Testimony* (which occurred in 1980) and quoted Maxim's approval of the book (which he mysteriously seems to have missed)? Or perhaps he's never actually read *The New Shostakovich* - just as, until a day or two ago, he'd never bothered to look at *Shostakovich: A Life Remembered*. One begins to wonder if he's even read *Testimony*.

As for needing to weigh the affidavits of those - like Elizabeth Wilson's witnesses - who have spoken about Shostakovich since the fall of Communism, that is certainly true. But what persuades a rank neophyte like "redrick" that he possesses the qualifications to do this? M. Panes asked him: "When would Russians be more free to speak their minds? During the height of Stalinist terror? Or when they are living in less fear for their safety?" "Redrick" replied: "What are you talking about? Stalin died in 1953. And the height of 'Stalinist terror' was over half a century ago." Apparently "redrick" is entirely unaware of how tightly the intelligentsia was policed even under Khrushchev; of the fact that one could be sacked or marginalised for stepping even slightly out of line (as happened to Shostakovich's supporters Lev Lebedinsky and Daniel Zhitomirsky); of the neo-Stalinist hysteria whipped up against Pasternak in 1958 or Josef Brodsky in 1964 or Daniel and Sinyavsky in 1966; of the use of straitjackets and hideous drugs to quell nonconformists in special "mental hospitals"; of how paranoiacally careful Solzhenitsyn had to be while he was still in the USSR and how a friend guarding a copy of *Gulag* was killed by the KGB during a raid; etc. Panes is absolutely right; "redrick" is ludicrously wrong. (Btw, "redrick" refers to "the post-1958 Communist Party", which implies that he thinks Khrushchev made his Secret Speech in 1958. Try 1956. Hugh Canfield has pointed out the "Yeltsev" gaff, farcically excused by "redrick" as a "typo". Such factual errors speak for themselves.)

"Redrick" claims I see Shostakovich as "some sort of counter-revolutionary reactionary". This statement is politically infantile. To disagree with Bolshevism was not necessarily to be a reactionary. The Russian political spectrum was far subtler than that. (See my remarks on Richard Taruskin's similar oversimplifications in my [review](#) of David Fanning's book.) The truth is that the testimony of Elizabeth Wilson's witnesses to the composer's youth suggests that Shostakovich was always apolitical, which far exceeds my deductions in *The New Shostakovich*. For the record, my position is that Shostakovich began composing from a dissident standpoint around 1936; that he became politically cynical in the late 1920s (a view shared by Professor Inna Barsova of the Moscow Conservatoire); and that, on the basis of his letters to Tanya Glivenko (which Taruskin and company haven't seen), he is extremely unlikely ever to have maintained a serious political position, other than the Orwellian belief that decency should prevail

over ideology in all competing circumstances.

Which brings me to my penultimate point:

4) "redrick" wrote:

"McDonald is a Cold Warrior... McDonald and his rightwing clique... etc"

I voted Labour in 1974 and 1979, Social Democrat in 1984 and 1987, Liberal Democrat in 1992. I'll vote for Tony Blair at the next election. During my days as a journalist, I wrote several anti-fascist pieces as well as articles against totalitarianism in general. I detest what Thatcherism has done to to Britain. Broadly speaking, that's my politics. Take it or leave it.

5) "redrick" wrote:

"Obviously these True Believers will continue to swallow the whole Wilson/Volkov/McDonald idiocy no matter how discredited it becomes. It's what they *want* to believe... It's never as simple as zealots would have it."

There's only one zealot around here. To borrow his own charming phrase, he is an "irresponsible flame-thrower" without humility, sympathy, or insight. The sad fact is that "redrick" believes what *he* wants to believe, regardless of what Shostakovich's former friends and colleagues witness to the contrary. I'm sorry for him, but since there's no way to parley with such prejudice, I must leave him to it. May the Bird of Paradise fly up his nose.

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Alfred Schnittke

by Alexander Ivashkin

Phaidon 20th Century Composers, 1996

Under the editorship of Norman Lebrecht, Phaidon's series of through-illustrated introductions to 20th century composers has proved visually elegant, refreshingly unstuffy, and useful in providing basic biographical material. This pioneering book-length study of Alfred Schnittke offers much factual background which will be new even to ardent Western enthusiasts of the composer. In doing so, it also tells a story of interest both to the converted and to those more sceptical of Schnittke's worth.

Alexander Ivashkin, a former cellist with the Bolshoi Soloists Ensemble, has been a friend of Schnittke for many years and presents his music from the point of view of one convinced that its composer is "a living classic" and the manifest successor of Shostakovich. While Schnittke has received his share of hostile reviews outside Russia, many foreign critics concur with the high estimates of Ivashkin and the new Russian musical establishment (although some of Schnittke's Western advocates of the 1980s have become more circumspect in the 1990s). If the mere existence of a book like this guarantees that Schnittke's music will be treated seriously in the immediate future, it arguably represents a rush to an applause judgement which posterity seems unlikely to endorse so readily. Once past the superficial interest of Schnittke's vaunted "polystylism", his frequent expressive blatancy, melodramatic gesturalism, and dense over-scoring are surely fundamental stumbling blocks for which apologists should be required to advance some persuasive explanation?

Ivashkin acknowledges the negative responses Schnittke's music has evoked in the West, but treats them as the self-evidently unenlightened grumbling of reactionaries soon to be left behind by history. Indeed, so sure is he of his hero's Christ-like irreproachability that detractors appear in these pages in an almost demonic light:

"At the New York première of the Sixth Symphony in Carnegie Hall on 6 February 1994,

almost half the audience left during the performance. Those who stayed acclaimed the composer with a standing ovation. There was a strange but definite feeling, put into words by violinist Oleh Krysa, that Schnittke had somehow purified the hall with his music and driven away all the evil forces and everyone who was in some way connected with them..."

There is a lack of irony in this passage - a cultish earnestness - which not only sits uneasily alongside references to Shostakovich but fails to square with the apparent irony of much of Schnittke's work in the 1970s (before his health began to fail and his outlook apparently became shadowed by an obsessive awareness of mortality). The misapprehension that everything in art is normal and nature is still producing its usual supply of geniuses is not exclusive to Russia, of course - but the passionate Russian need for something to believe in often overrides the cynical Russian gift for perceiving that the emperor has no clothes, and such is arguably happening here.

Aside from his unquestioning acceptance of Schnittke's genius, Ivashkin is an able and informed guide to the composer's life and times. Although there is no room in 60,000 words to go into much depth about the music (of which there is a vast quantity, easily surpassing Shostakovich in opus numbers, were Schnittke to use these), the author gives a succinct overview supplemented by a classified catalogue and a basic compact discography along with some general observations about Schnittke's creative intentions and ways of working which will be new to Western enthusiasts.

For example, Ivashkin shows that Schnittke's enormous output of film music during the 1960s and 1970s (around sixty scores), far from peripheral to his style, as in the case of Shostakovich, was the most important factor in its genesis, accounting for its non-developmental discontinuities, its ironic-subversive juxtapositions, and its "polystylistic" multiplicity of idioms. (Something similar is true of the music of [Giya Kancheli](#), although its consequences, in terms of his symphonies, are subtler than in Schnittke's.) Moreover, Ivashkin informs us, many of Schnittke's pieces greeted by Western critics as "absolute" actually derive very directly from these cinema scores: music for films quickly turned into symphonies, concertos, and chamber pieces.

Most fascinating for Shostakovich devotees, though, are several passages in which Ivashkin alludes to the Russian intelligentsia's "resistance" to Communism. (Cf. Igor Shafarevich's as yet untranslated study *Shostakovich and the Russian Resistance to Communism*.) In a lecture delivered in Duisburg in October 1996, Schnittke himself traces this intellectual "resistance" to the early 1950s:

"The only way to survive was to overcome the real tragedy of the situation by appealing to different things which have their own established form, shape, style and ideas. Of course, the real resistance at that time had no perspective. However, as ever in history, it was possible to make a definite choice between two decisions. Little by little, this resistance was strengthening and growing, transforming into the powerful stream which finally led to the fateful turn in the history of a great century."

That Schnittke imagines the liberal intelligentsia's resistance to have lacked "perspective" in the heyday of Prokofiev and Shostakovich testifies to the fundamental difference between the older generation's experience of Communism and the way it was perceived by those - Denisov (b. 1929), Gubaidulina (b. 1931), Shchedrin (b. 1932), Schnittke (b. 1934) - too young to have felt, let alone understood, the effects of Stalin's Terror at its peak during the 1930s. Given the dearth of published historical materials in the former USSR, it was inevitable that those truly lacking perspective in this matter should have been Schnittke and his contemporaries, who had almost no documentary evidence at hand from which to form an adequate picture of the pre-1956 Soviet past. (It is significant that Schnittke was belatedly shocked by Solzhenitsyn's *The Gulag Archipelago*, which, banned in the USSR, eventually became available in Russia more than a decade after it was published in the West.)

>From the generation after Schnittke's, Ivashkin perforce shares his imprecise conception of Stalinist reality. Referring to the composer's assertion that the première of Prokofiev's Symphony-Concerto in Moscow on 18 February 1952 had been "the supreme experience of [his] life", Ivashkin writes thus of Prokofiev's funeral a year later:

"He died on 5 March 1953, the same day as Stalin. Schnittke did not attend Prokofiev's funeral - it was almost impossible to go, given that crowds of people were flocking to Stalin's funeral (indeed, many were killed in the crush). Only about thirty people accompanied Prokofiev's coffin, as it was slowly carried along an almost empty street in the opposite direction to the thronging crowds. It seemed to symbolize a movement against the Stalin procession. Among those mourning Prokofiev were some very important figures in the history of Russian music: Dmitry Shostakovich, Gennady Rozhdestvensky, Edison Denisov and Andrey Volkonsky. They stood at the beginning of a new cultural resistance to Communist ideology."

In fact Prokofiev's funeral took place while Stalin's body was still lying in state, although Ivashkin's poetic licence is legitimate. Less acceptable is his suggestion that the small number of mourners for Prokofiev indicates that intellectual resistance to Communism was only then beginning to stir (having presumably never occurred to anyone beforehand) - or perhaps he imagines that, however surreptitious, such resistance prior to Stalin's death was out of the question on practical grounds? Yet these assumptions, like Schnittke's ideas before reading *The Gulag Archipelago*, are no more than false artifacts of the lack of published information in the USSR. In truth, the Russian intelligentsia's resistance to Communism began in 1918 and did not cease between then and 1991, albeit that it was necessarily masked and oblique.

This generational gap in comprehension accounts for much in Soviet history, not least the way Shostakovich was (mis)understood by the young composers whose careers commenced after the second "thaw" in 1956. Whether they knew it or not, the post-1956 generation had a far less serious situation to deal with than that facing Shostakovich and his colleagues during Stalin's reign. At worst, they were

stultified, bored, inconvenienced, restricted, coerced, and blackmailed by their Communist proprietors. Though privately outraged by this, they were never tortured, exiled, sent to the Gulag or an asylum, or shot. None of them was warped by years of fear.

In Schnittke's case, this gap in generational experience comes out most crucially in his personal conception of music and of what it can do. In discussing this, Ivashkin is careful to insist that there is no such thing as art-for-art's-sake in Russian music; that it always carries hidden symbolic content expressed in a code of motifs. He amplifies these assertions in a passage on Shostakovich's legacy to Schnittke:

"Two events which made the greatest of impressions on Schnittke were the first performances of Shostakovich's Tenth Symphony in 1953 and of his First Violin Concerto in 1955. He remembers the official discussion after the Tenth Symphony, when everybody (except the composer Andrey Volkonsky, a student at that time) criticized Shostakovich. The Violin Concerto made a great impact on Schnittke's music. He has admitted that all his own violin concertos have been written under its influence. There is the same feeling of drama, the same sharp, even exaggerated, contrasts between the movements, and the same freedom and space for the cadenza, a monologue of the soloist 'hero'. For many years the concerto concept, inherited from Shostakovich, was most important in Schnittke's music. His numerous concertos and concerti grossi represent symbolically the typical Schnittkean idea of conflict between the individual (the soloist) and the collective (the orchestra). This type of drama is hidden in Shostakovich's music, which in many respects reflects the drama of Soviet life under the harsh political pressure of the Soviet regime. In Schnittke's music, too, there is always something extra-musical which needs to be deciphered, explained or resolved. Although his music is much more varied and wider in scope, in terms of its historical and multi-cultural orientation, it still refers, more or less, to the same type of direct relationship between art and reality, between the individual's mental organization, personal spirituality, and social entropy. Shostakovich, under the burden of Stalin's dictatorship, was much more cautious, preferring to speak indirectly and symbolically. Schnittke's generation grew up in a different situation and wanted to speak more openly and more directly - especially in the late 1950s and early 60s, the time of Khrushchev's 'thaw' - but it was still Shostakovich who made that kind of musical expression feasible."

In a subsequent passage, Ivashkin further elucidates this idea of symbolic individual resistance to the Communist collective in the Soviet concerto as used by Schnittke:

"The concerto is Schnittke's favourite type of composition not only because he had been constantly asked to write concertos for his friends, famous Russian soloists, but because the musical language of all his concertos is indissolubly connected with the personalized and profoundly individual statement of the soloist, who stands in opposition to a featureless and satanic social situation. This undoubtedly reflects the highly paradoxical role of personality and its connections with the social situation in the era of the

Communist dictatorship. It is no secret that it was the personal, the individual, the unique, which formed the core of the extremely intensive development of Russian culture under the oppression of Communist ideology."

This, though, is true, too, of Shostakovich's concertos, as well as of Prokofiev's "Soviet" concertos and of the concertos of (for example) Myaskovsky, Vainberg, and Boris Tchaikovsky. Indeed there is no obvious difference in directness here between Shostakovich and Schnittke, Shostakovich being every bit as explicit in using the concerto in this way. Where Schnittke differs most from Shostakovich, according to Ivashkin, is in his non-concerto music - his symphonies, operas, and chamber music. In these, it seems, relatively direct resistance was replaced by something more oblique: a focus on the irrational as opposed to the rational order of Communist dictatorship. Yet, as a post-modernist, Schnittke inevitably felt compelled to intellectualise his historical position, consciously striving to "universalise" his attraction to the irrational into something between a pass-key to Western culture and a kind of personal religious philosophy. Hereabouts, amid vague references to the Qabalah and the *I Ching*, some readers will feel that things get every bit as silly as they did among the Western intellectual avant-garde during the 1960s and 1970s. (Naturally all lasting art will contain elements beyond objective analysis, but to assume that these must therefore be "irrational", and hence intrinsically chaotic or mysterious or even diabolical, is to overlook the fact that huge areas of intellectual and emotional activity remain sufficiently shared and recognisable to be conveyable to others with force and precision, despite being, in a strict sense, irreducibly subjective. That there is more order than disorder in inner experience is not only the basis of human communication but also the assumption behind any art capable of transcending its time.)

Interacting, however partially and inaccurately, with their Western contemporaries (in a way impossible for the internationally isolated Russian *intelligenty* under Stalin), Schnittke's generation and their successors have grown up in the current global post-modernist atmosphere of half-baked posturing about the impossibility of stability or certainty in art, ethics, philosophy, identity, or communication. Like Valentin Silvestrov, Schnittke is drawn to the sort of theorising about "the end of music" which results in pieces composed in a condition of perpetual slow coda and collapse. Such self-important pseudo-creativity is far removed from the incisive ironic realism of Shostakovich, who would have detested it. (Conceivably this is why, despite the efforts of mutual friends to bring the two composers into a suitable "father-son" relationship, he kept his distance.) The truth is that, without Stalin to deal with, the post-1956 generation had room to indulge their egos and thus drifted into vain pretension. Introversion replaced subversion, vagueness supplanted sharpness, theory ousted experience. Indeed, Ivashkin's peroration inadvertently suggests as much:

"Schnittke's music absorbs and augments historical meanings. In it we can sense the spiritual efforts of many generations without the experience of these generations being directly referred to or recreated... Shostakovich gave unique expression to the thoughts and feelings of those generations of Russian people whose fate it was to live under the yoke of totalitarian power. Schnittke, the most important composer to arise in Russia after Shostakovich, is often called the 'man in between'. A very strong pulse of latent energy is

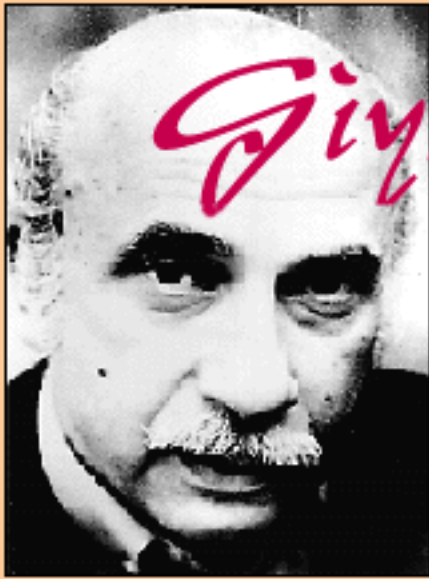
undoubtedly inherent in the music of both composers and common to both is extreme pessimism: many works by Shostakovich and especially Schnittke are 'dying', dissolving in the world, fading into the distance of time..."

While something akin to this temporal dissolution is present in the codas to certain works of Shostakovich, his expression, if sometimes hallucinatory, is almost always grounded in the concrete reality of shared human experience: the non-"dissolving" mundane world. - Hence its electric vitality, to which Schnittke's music can only respond with agitation, and its tragic feeling, which Schnittke too often matches with mere hysteria. (Or so it seems to this reviewer, who would gladly swap the trenchant vigour of Gavriil Popov's Sixth Symphony, a piece in the true Shostakovichian tradition, for the whole of Schnittke's garrulously amorphous oeuvre put together.)

If Schnittke's merit is to be contended over and not, as here, accepted as a foregone conclusion, Ivashkin is nonetheless to be applauded for expertly presenting us with the raw material for the debate. Despite writing (or overseeing a translation) in a foreign language, he is rarely other than lucid and his insights, if provisional, are often penetrating. As the first study of its kind to have reached the West from the former Soviet music community, *Alfred Schnittke* is worth reading on this score alone.

This review originally appeared in *DSCH Journal* No. 7 (Summer 1997).

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Giya Kancheli

THE MUSIC OF A GEORGIAN DUALIST

Click the hammer-and-sickle...



Transcendent brightness... Darkness visible...

Part 1/The background and some suggestions for listening



A critical selection

Part 2/What's on compact disc?



Compact discography



Chronology of Kancheli's life and works



Schnittke on Kancheli

One former Soviet composer responds to another

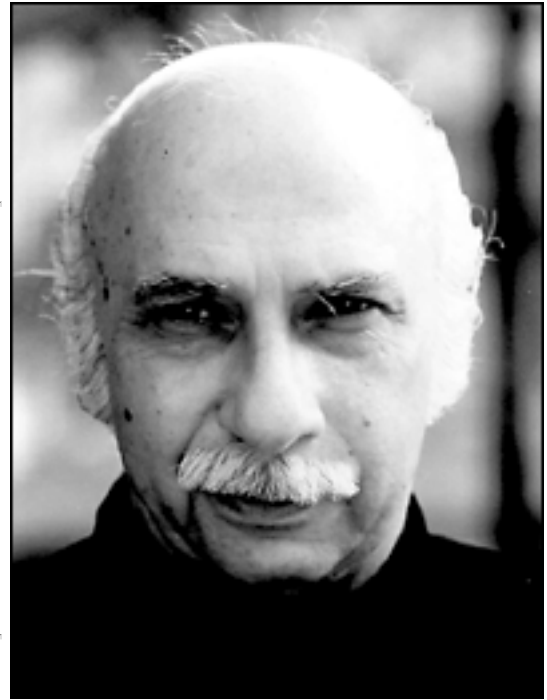
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GIYA KANCHELI

**Transcendent
brightness...**

Darkness visible...

The music of a Georgian dualist



During the late 1980s, *glasnost* began to reveal a secret tradition of hidden meanings in Soviet music. Mysterious concepts such as "shadow writing", "writing between the lines", "giving voice", and so on, became known, if not exactly familiar, outside the USSR. Western musicologists who had spent the Eighties languidly pooh-poohing the "new" Shostakovich disclosed by Solomon Volkov in *Testimony* suddenly found themselves puzzling over the music of composers like Alfred Schnittke, wondering, as if perfectly used to doing so, what it all "meant". In Gerard McBurney and Barrie Gavin's BBC2 TV documentary series on modern Soviet music *Think Today, Speak Tomorrow* (May 1990), a leading representative of the Moscow music scene, Alexander Ivashkin, put it this way:

"For many years we weren't allowed to speak or show what we thought. Consequently a strange thing happened. When something came out into the open, part of it stayed hidden - like an iceberg with only a small part above the water. So symbolism became very characteristic of Russian music - symbolism of the simplest kind. An interval, sound or rhythm became a symbol which the listener could identify. Music became the bridge to a thought or philosophical concept rather than an end in itself. It was never a mere sound construction."

What, though, were these symbols intended to express? The answer is bound up with secrecy itself. In one way or another, all nonconformist Soviet music was in effect a protest against the stifling of spiritual and intellectual freedom under the Soviet system - a repression at once so petty and so total as to be almost unimaginable to Westerners. Since, until around 1986, such protest could lead to anything from loss of income to being locked up in a mental ward, it had to be discreet: hence the need for symbols.

Of course, symbolism has long been a staple of all religious music and it is no surprise to find it playing a part in the work of believers like Vyacheslav Artiomov, Arvo Pärt, and Sofia Gubaidulina. In the same

way, a purely mathematical symbolism is often used for its own sake by modern serialists, and Westerners will readily see how it might concern post-Webernians like Edison Denisov, Dmitri Smirnov, and Elena Firsova. Merely spotting a symbol, however, doesn't get us very far. To grasp the *meaning* of a symbol and a composer's *intention* in using it requires understanding the feelings, experiences, thoughts, events - sometimes even the actual people - for which the symbol stands. Without such understanding, Soviet music - some would say all music - is reduced to little more than an interesting, and occasionally obscurely moving, arrangement of noises.

Consider the contemporary Georgian composer Giya Kancheli. While favourably disposed, Western reviewers of his first compact disc release in 1990 (Third and Sixth symphonies, Olympia OCD 401) made no attempt to put any interpretation on it, instead sticking to purely technical descriptions leavened with the customary references to the mysterious Russian steppes. So concerned were they to avoid any "extra-musical" speculation that their accounts entirely failed to report that the Third Symphony's first ten minutes consist of a ploddingly sinister (and musically barbarically stupid) military march. Their problem was understandable. After all, to address this would have entailed such awkward wider questions as: "Who is marching?" and: "Is the stupidity the composer's or is Kancheli pointing at someone else?" Isolated from history and the other arts in the technical over-specialisation of modern musicology, they possessed answers to neither question. In the same fashion, a technical article in a learned contemporary music journal observed, almost shrewdly, that, in Kancheli's Sixth Symphony, "silence is clearly both the origin and destination of the music" - though the question of why this should be so was (correctly) deemed to be beyond the purview of strictly formal analysis.

The fact is that it takes far more than even the shrewdest formal analysis to understand a work of art; specifically, it takes sympathetic intuition guided by an acquaintance with that work's historical and cultural context. The historical and cultural context of Giya Kancheli's music until around 1990 was the enslavement of the independent nation of Georgia by totalitarian Stalinism. The stupid, strutting slow march of the Third Symphony can thus be seen - even if only in the most immediate sense - as symbolising the brutal forces then chaining Georgia's outer freedom and distorting its inner integrity. Beyond any doubt, it also means a great deal more than this. But it signifies this *to begin with*.

An era of whispers

In general Giya Kancheli's music dwells obsessively on a complex of interrelated themes - grief, fear, solitude, vigil, memory, nostalgia, innocence, intolerance, protest - each new piece approaching this nexus from a different angle, as if determined to perfect a coded way of talking about something either unmentionable or otherwise difficult to express.

Spiritually akin to the *Largo* of Shostakovich's Sixth Symphony (1939), the concern of Kancheli's Sixth

(1981) with "silence" is as removed from merely formal interest as the tense, drained stillness of the earlier work. To understand Shostakovich's *Largo*, one must know the atmosphere of late Thirties Russia, described by many who knew it as an era of whispers - the whispers of women queuing outside prisons for news of arrested relatives, as portrayed in Anna Akhmatova's *Requiem*; of Akhmatova in her apartment, whispering the poem to her friend Lydia Chukovskaya, afraid of hidden microphones; of the hushed, crushed tone of Chukovskaya's evocation of the period, *Sofia Petrovna*; of the "genre of silence" adopted by the ironist Isaac Babel at a time when it had become suicidal to write truthfully. In this sense and in this instance, Kancheli's "silence" is both the personal one imposed on him by the system and the general silence of Georgian culture under Stalinism. Yet this is only one aspect of what has developed over the last twenty years into the unifying concept - and guiding ideal - behind all of his music.

The composer has recently said that "the mysterious silence that precedes the emergence of a tone" fascinates him most. Yet to suggest that the silence in his Sixth Symphony is, in essence, as much mundane as transcendently "mysterious" in no way depletes the richness of the music's nexus of meaning. Still less does it travesty it (as technical critics often complain) by imposing politico-cultural "limits" on its resonances. Rather, it brings focus to it through an *appropriate* general description, guiding the newcomer to apply the right adjectives and similes (whatever they may be for him or her) in the right places. In general, individual symbols can be left to individual interpretation. All that's important is not to mistake such works, as they often are in the West, for harmless landscape pieces - or rather to picture the *right sort* of landscape: a wasteland sparsely populated with broken, threadbare figures distantly menaced by vast impersonal forces - something not dissimilar to Tarkovsky's perplexing "post-disaster" film allegory *Stalker* (1979).

Having said all this, it is crucial to understand that the local Russo-Georgian symbolism inherent in Kancheli's work is simultaneously globally universal. Though his violently eruptive Fifth Symphony is seemingly very personal on the immediate and local level, it can, in essence, be easily grasped by anyone who has seen Saddam Hussein's Victory Monument in Baghdad. Like Shostakovich's Fourth, this is music for those who exist in the spirit-sapping shadow of oppressive megalomania. Similarly, if one wishes to know what *Bright Sorrow* is about (beyond its inscription to the memory of children killed during the Second World War), it is legitimate to think of the millions of innocents dying of hunger, war, and neglect around the world today. This is protest music - the protest of the soul against soullessness, of the poor and defenceless against unfeeling intolerance. Forged, like Shostakovich's work, in the brutal crucible of Stalinism, it addresses the whole planet, pleading for the sympathy of those lucky enough to be free and well fed.

Even here, though, we must beware of taking mundane specifics, however well-founded, as defining this composer's scope. In the widest and deepest perspective, Kancheli's silence is, as he says, "mysterious": the final ground of being - the eternal spiritual dimension above and beyond the transient noise and contingent evil of the world. It is in this focus on the transcendental that Kancheli departs most radically from the generation of Shostakovich, and finds most in common with his post-Soviet contemporaries.

A communicating voice

Born in Tiflis on 10th August 1935, Kancheli worked almost exclusively in his native Georgia until moving to Berlin in 1992. His music first stirred interest in the West when his USSR State Prize-winning Fourth Symphony was played there by the Philadelphia Orchestra in 1978. Thereafter, the New York publisher Schirmer commissioned his Fifth Symphony and the Leipzig Gewandhaus his Sixth, but the difficulties of traveling abroad under the Communist system prevented the composer from capitalising on this success.

Devoting the early Eighties to the composition of an opera, *Music for the Living*, he finally regained foreign attention when his quasi-cantata *Bright Sorrow* was performed at the Third International Festival of Contemporary Music in Leningrad in 1988. In 1990, *Bright Sorrow*, and his Third, Fourth, Fifth, and Sixth symphonies were issued on CD and it became apparent that here was something rare: a contemporary composer of stature writing moving and imaginative music in directly communicative tonal style.

"Music," wrote Ilya Ehrenburg when considering the work of Shostakovich, "has one great advantage: without saying anything it can express everything." It is in this sense, rather than any fundamental similarity of approach, that Kancheli may be said to be an heir of Shostakovich. Kancheli has never denied an early influence from Shostakovich and it is not hard to imagine the aspects of the older composer which impressed him: the Sixth Symphony's funereal *Largo*, the desolate *passacaglia* of the Eighth Symphony, the megalomaniac noise-blasts of the Fourth and (again) the Eighth, the pathetic "broken" endings of the Second Piano Trio and Third Quartet. Yet, while his symphonies, like Shostakovich's, evoke and explore the experiences of defencelessness and self-denial under tyranny, they do so in a very different musical language. Kancheli may share Shostakovich's sense of the poignancy of childlike simplicity and vulnerability, but his expressive means are based on other sources entirely, and only in the final section of his Second Symphony do we hear anything remotely resembling Shostakovich's voice.

While some commentators have claimed to hear echoes of Bartok in Kancheli's music, there are only two clear "classical" influences in his work. First: his chaste predilection for Schnittke-like "polystylisms", such as the pseudo-baroque harpsichord in the Fifth Symphony, and what appear to be deformed fragments of the first movement of Vivaldi's *Winter* concerto (RV297) in many of his more recent *fff* outbursts. Second: the early scores of Stravinsky. For example, a passage reminiscent of the finale of *Petrushka* crops up in the central *Allegro* of Kancheli's Second Symphony (13:43 in Jurowski's version on CPO), while an almost direct quotation from *Le Sacre du Printemps* ("Danse sacrale") occurs during the "scherzo" of the Third Symphony (21:53 in Kakhidze's Olympia recording). Likewise, a passage immediately after the latter suggests that the march from the symphony's first section is formally derived from Stravinsky's "Augures printaniers".

However, both the deepest and most ubiquitous of Kancheli's Stravinsky "influences" is the slow, seesawing three-note melody of the E flat processional at the end of the *Symphony of Psalms*.

Transposed to C major, this appears in the second movement of Kancheli's First Symphony (3:15 on Glushchenko's disc) and completely dominates the Second Symphony (e.g., in D flat at 8:06 in Jurowski's version). Indeed this passage, with its measured minim tread, pedal tonality, and pale flute voicing would seem to be the ultimate model for the whole of Kancheli's mature "slow" style. (The final five minutes of his Third Symphony offers more evidence for this - although this very Stravinskyian passage also features a few bars anomalously harmonised in Messiaen style at 25:42.)

If Stravinsky is the most obvious of Kancheli's "classical" influences, his work is even more profoundly shaped by non-classical idioms, among these being Georgian folk forms, the American cool jazz style of the late Fifties and Sixties, and film music (such as Michel Legrand's score for Losey's *The Go-Between* and Nino Rota's soundtracks for Fellini).

From Georgian folk music, Kancheli derives some of his most characteristic traits: modal tunes, bass drones, wide dynamic extremes, antiphonal groupings within a larger whole, and passages in which polyphonic lines rise into sonorous convergence on unisons. Folk instrumentation likewise shows in lute-like pizzicati, bagpipe effects, and his use of flute and harp. (For an illustration of these traits, consult the Rustavi Choir's recital *Georgian Voices* on Elektra Nonesuch, 979224-2.) In the same way, some of the cyclical stillness and slowness evoked by Kancheli's compositional method (see below: "Dynamic stasis") is probably due to the general influence of the Georgian folk tradition which, apart from offering typical "music of process", functionally linked to working, ploughing, and eating, is unusually intense in its obdurate sense of deep-rootedness. Here, the Caucasian Mountains enter Kancheli's music as a psychological foundation and framing horizon.

Expressive timbre, too, is a focus of Georgian music and it is this aspect of his American sources that interests Kancheli as an orchestrator. From his Second Symphony onwards, he has added an extra flute to the usual complement of three: the alto - an instrument favoured by the late jazz arranger Gil Evans, whose delicate pastel textures Kancheli much admires. (See Evans' collaborations with Miles Davis - for example, *At Carnegie Hall*, Giants of Jazz GOJCD 53023. Note, too, the trumpet *gliss* at 7:39 in Jurowski's recording of the Second Symphony.) Assuming a prominent role in the Fifth Symphony and dialoguing with one of the solo violas in the Sixth, the alto lends a melancholy tone to Kancheli's flute quartet, which often plays like a small independent choir within his orchestra. (There are no solos for brass in Kancheli's music.) The alto flute and the viola, occupying similar tessituras, are often treated as close relations in the composer's music, presumably for their tonal resemblance to certain traditional Georgian folk instruments.

Another American influence is the texturally innovative work of George Crumb, an appropriate example of which can be heard in *A Haunted Landscape* (1984, New World NW326-2). In parts of Kancheli's Third Symphony, for instance, his wind players are asked to breath through their instruments without producing a specific pitch, while in the Sixth the piano's strings are plucked and, in a very loud passage towards the end of the score, electronically amplified. (*Music for the Living*, written 1982-4, introduced electric bass-guitar and this instrument has been a staple of Kancheli's orchestra ever since.)

"Dynamic stasis"

Just as Kancheli's explorations in sound depend on the ideas or emotions he wishes to convey, so his harmonic and dynamic designs reflect his paradoxical vision of intense feeling behind a frozen and fearful facade. Thus, tempos are mostly so slow as to give the impression of motionlessness, an effect sustained, even when short note-values are in play, by the use of small and very simple circular progressions, tense pedal-points, and agonised suspensions. This brooding process - in which natural modulations are frustrated, thrust back on themselves, or cramped within the narrow confines of adjacent keys and the interval of the second - has been characterised as one of "dynamic stasis". (Luigi Nono: "slow motion of musical material with sudden dynamic explosions".)

Related to the cyclical folk idioms integral to it, Kancheli's method also suggests parallels with the film-editing techniques familiar to him from his work in the cinema. In place of orthodox modulation, the composer *cuts* abruptly between keys or slowly *dissolves* one chord into another by accumulating their pitches into blurred clusters. Since the tonic at any given point in a Kancheli score is a disputed issue (often brusquely dictated by the interrupting full orchestra), these arpeggio-clusters - which have their precedents in the Hollywood melodrama genre - also amount to significant polytonal ambiguities in themselves. In Kancheli's music, tonality, with its (politically sensitive) connotations of change, exists at an extreme margin in which it is capable of manifesting only as hesitant suggestion or wistful hope. (In no other composer's works do the solo instruments speak so quietly, or venture even the most modest of pitch excursions so diffidently.)

At the level of general design, Kancheli works mainly with extreme contrasts between moments of hesitant delicacy and cataclysmic avalanches of sound. Piano, harpsichord, spinet, harp, flute, viola, and voice converse gingerly beneath the overvaulting precipice of the full orchestra, aware that at any moment it might descend on them. Between these extremes, time hangs still for long minutes while, at the grave pace of a Tarkovsky film, the music mixes cinematically from key to key, as if gradually shifting its viewpoint. Kancheli's cellular orchestration is intrinsic to these gradual transitions, tone-colour superseding tonality in what amounts to a quasi-cinematographic conception of orchestral timbre as light. In these moments, his chords hang in space, lit by the tonal qualities of the participating instruments in a manner suggesting the static painterly compositions of the Soviet director Vsevolod Pudovkin. Kancheli's cinematographic sense of orchestral colour as light - best exemplified in his warmest and most immediate work, the Fourth Symphony - again brings to mind Andrei Tarkovsky and his lighting cameraman Vadim Yusov (although the composer himself has spoken rather of the *film noir* idiom and such Hollywood products as *The Maltese Falcon* and *Casablanca*).

The Sixth Symphony

Typically, in most of Kancheli's later symphonies, a small, fragile sound is symbolically confronted by the full orchestra. In his masterpiece the Sixth Symphony, for example, this role is taken by a pair of solo violas, which the composer asks to be concealed, behind screens, on either side of the rear of the orchestra. One viola plays melody, the other an accompanying drone - an imitation of an ancient Georgian two-stringed instrument called the *chianuri*. This disembodied sound, seemingly sourceless, becomes an eerie symbol of the Georgian national spirit, so long suppressed by Communism. At the same time, it signifies something deeper: the hidden, all-too-tenuous presence of a higher dimension: the neglected realm of the spirit, of mysterious tradition, and ancestral voices.

Kancheli's Sixth provides a classic illustration of his style. Like most of his other symphonies, it is in one movement comprised of four distinct sections. Beginning on a G pedal, the work announces its sparse complement of motifs, virtually all of which derive from a gradual tentative expansion away from the major third, as if nervously testing how far it is free to go. An imperious downward rush by the full orchestra onto G soon puts a stop to this, and the rest of the work grows out of the resulting chord of E minor (with a characteristic tragically yearning movement to the major dominant seventh and back). The stages of this prelude are formally delineated by a dry, time-marking B major scale on the harp, the eternal sadness of the two violas meanwhile persisting in the distance.

Thereafter, the symphony segues to its "second movement": a slow Tarkovskyan ascent to a dolorous D minor climax, relapsing on a unison G: the work's halfway point. This passage conveys a near-unbearable burden of grief, outrage, and repressed expression. (Those familiar with Tarkovsky's *Nostalgia* may be reminded of the agonising scene of the crossing of the fountain-pool.) Only Shostakovich - and arguably Allan Pettersson in his Seventh Symphony - has composed music of such explosively overwhelming tragic feeling. Certainly only the 20th century has provoked art of such catastrophic intensity.

Two further D minor crescendos, funereally paced by a tolling bell, raise the anguish of the symphony's "second movement" to an almost intolerable pitch - whereupon a memory of the work's tentative first steps ignites a hammering totalitarian scherzo of crushing power. Out of the debris emerges a quietly exhausted recapitulatory epilogue. After half an hour, the symphony has succeeded only in moving the elements of its opening section up a semitone, producing the effect of an unanswered question.

A vision of light over darkness

Although it should be clear by now that his music has a very definite point of view, it is not possible to say, in so many words, what Kancheli's Sixth "means". An antagonism to insensitive power and domination by concerted cruelty and blundering dogma - that much is obvious. But where this vision of "darkness visible" ends is unclear. Evidently Kancheli here contemplates not merely the immediate evils of the Soviet world but those of the human condition as a whole. Yet, although it has become routine to

state, rather vaguely, that his music is "spiritual" in aim and inspiration, no commentator has so far ventured an opinion on the nature of this spirituality and its relationship to the forces of violent disruption which play such a disturbing antagonistic role in the composer's work.

In fact, Kancheli has supplied ample explanation of what this aspect of his music consists of and how it relates to the anger and brutality which stand opposed to it throughout his *oeuvre*. For example, in *Bright Sorrow* - and, later, in both *Morning Prayers* and *Night Prayers* from "Life Without Christmas" - he introduces boys' voices "to remind us of the voices of angels we have never heard". Like Britten (most schematically in the *War Requiem*), Kancheli sees the material world as a realm of lost innocence convulsed by a perpetual Manichæan struggle in which (in his words) "a force of invincible beauty towers above, and conquers, the forces of ignorance, bigotry, violence, and evil".

This force is spiritual and Kancheli's ultimate references - like those of Pärt, Gubaidulina, and Gorecki - are transcendental (although not, in his case, conventionally religious). Kancheli evidently sees the violent, materialistic modern world as *exiled* from a deeper continuity - "a high dream of the past, present, and future" which he calls "romanticism" and which amounts to the inner spiritual tradition from which flow love, charity, and all pro-social values. To Kancheli, our machine-driven, dogma-ridden culture is a perilously deluded nightmare: a "life without Christmas". Indeed, in the composer's blackest pages (e.g., *Night Prayers*), the world itself becomes positively demonic - an irredeemably benighted place ruled by dark forces. All of Kancheli's music springs from this dualistic vision of light over darkness - and, at its freshest, its expression is powerful indeed.

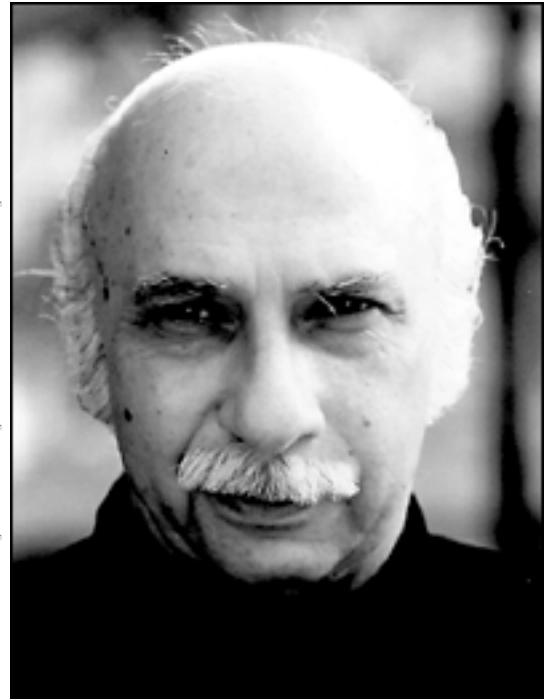
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GIYA KANCHELI

A critical selection

[Compact Discography](#)



The best music of Giya Kancheli will doubtless survive our times and become part of the standard repertoire for future generations - which is a great deal more than can be confidently predicted of anything composed by his contemporaries in East or West during the last twenty years. That said, it must be conceded that he ploughs a narrow and repetitious furrow, and that only a little of what he has written is likely to attract posterity's attention. One of these works will certainly be his magnificent Sixth Symphony (discussed in [Part 1](#)). Another will very likely be his less evenly conceived but no less powerful and imaginative Fifth. Beyond these two, it is harder to speculate. His recent, Berlin-period work - composed with a new freedom and in far greater quantity than anything he managed to write in Georgia - is also palpably lower in energy, concentration, and inspiration. Kancheli is now repeating himself, and doing so tediously. Whether this decline is permanent, only time will tell.

The First Three Symphonies

Kancheli's refusal to espouse local Georgian music with a folk-nationalistic style and literal quotations made his early career in Georgia something of an uphill struggle. He received a state stipend in recognition of his studies at the Tbilisi Conservatory and, in 1962, won a prize at the All-Union Young Composers Competition. Yet his supposedly "cosmopolitan" musical interests (in particular his fondness for jazz) made enemies, and, shortly after the Competition, his *Concerto for Orchestra* was savagely censured in a leading music magazine. Biographical details remain in short supply, but the fact that it wasn't until the age of 32 that he produced his first "official" opus, the First Symphony (1967), may not have been entirely due to his scrupulously slow compositional method.

As noted in [Part 1](#), the **First Symphony**, like the Second, shows the formative influence of the final minutes of Stravinsky's *Symphony of Psalms*. The only one of his symphonies to be divided into two movements, it is nevertheless played continuously like the others. The work's least characteristic section is its opening *Allegro*. Its second movement, however, displays the familiar Kancheli "*Largo*" style already formed in most of its elements: the chordal thinking, the slow minim melodies, the abrupt modulations and arpeggio-clusters, the voice-like flute chorales and unharmonised high register violins.

As such, the First makes an effective prelude to the cycle without being very striking or inventive in itself. (Of the two versions currently recorded, Glushchenko's is preferable.)

The coda from the *Symphony of Psalms* also permeates the **Second Symphony** (1970), whose title - "Songs" - refers to the impact made on its composer by the publication, in 1968, of *Church Songs*, the composer-folklorist Kachi Rosebaschvili's scholarly edition of traditional Georgian polyphonic pieces. Not that Kancheli quotes any of these pieces directly. ("What fascinates me in the polyphonic songs of Georgia," he once admitted, "is that secret spirit inherent in them, which I am not in a position to grasp.") Instead, the symphony is built on song-like thematic fragments of Kancheli's own devising, deployed and contrasted with unusually colourful orchestration. Aside from this, the Second Symphony is a further logical step in his stylistic development. Although not as concentrated or convincing as his later symphonies, it is very lively and will certainly interest those familiar with the latter. (There is only one recording, by Mikhail Jurovsky.)

Though well on the way to formation in his first two symphonies, Kancheli's symphonic style lacked a final constituent: a voice in the foreground which could serve as a focus against which the background could be contrasted. In his **Third Symphony** (1973), Kancheli takes this "voice" concept literally, employing the sweet, ethereal tenor of the Georgian folk singer Gamlet Gonashvili. (In his later symphonies, the "voices" are purely instrumental, but the principle is the same.) Here, the composer makes explicit his theme of a confrontation between spirituality, symbolised by Gonashvili's sorrowful phrases, and brutal worldly might, embodied in the tramp of the marching orchestra. It is as if a Soviet parade passes through a sullen town beyond which ancient mountains rise in mute token of something truer and less crudely tangible. With its radically simplified musical means and clearer design, Kancheli's Third is a perceptible advance over its predecessor. At the same time, its material is uncompulsive next to that of its successor, the Fourth, while its dependence on Gonashvili's inimitably tremulous tone may prove to be a limiting factor on future performances. So far there has only been one recording (conducted by Kancheli's longtime Georgian collaborator Dzansug Kakhidze), and this has the curious drawback of having been transferred to disc a whole tone sharp.

The Fourth Symphony

Few Kancheli scores lack a piano, the instrument usually being employed for bell-like sonorities. The composer's **Fourth Symphony** (1975) replaces the piano with actual bells - those of an imagined many-churched Renaissance city. Dedicated to the memory of Michelangelo, Kancheli's Fourth, like Shostakovich's *Suite on Verses of Michelangelo*, was written in honour of the quincentary of the artist-poet's birth. It is worth comparing Kancheli's creative intentions in this work with those of Shostakovich in his *Suite*.

Shostakovich's work is one of his bitterest, taking every opportunity to use the fury and anguished longing in Michelangelo's verses to point up parallels with his own situation and that of all liberal

intellectuals under totalitarianism. As the earliest example of the modern self-determining artist, Michelangelo experienced incessant clashes with the authorities and regularly provoked the betrayal of jealous rivals. Like Shostakovich, he spent much of his time evading the demands and petty vengeance of his employers. Like Shostakovich, he would pretend to be working on one project whilst secretly finishing another. Like Shostakovich (*vis-à-vis* opera), he felt that he had been diverted from his true destiny (as a sculptor) into areas of secondary interest to him (painting and architecture). Like Shostakovich, he was held under financial and moral blackmail, cheated, and informed on. Like Shostakovich, he was bitter and pessimistic in old age.

Though the parallels between Michelangelo's career and Shostakovich's are abundant, the composer did not see the artist's life solely in terms of his own. According to Volkov, Shostakovich used Michelangelo's lines about Dante's exile from Florence in 1301 to refer to Solzhenitsyn's expulsion from the USSR in 1974. Indeed, few liberal artists working under the Soviet dispensation could have failed to spot the struggles and trials of Michelangelo as an anticipation of their own. Since Kancheli was no different from his colleagues in this respect, we can fairly confidently assume that his symphony contains resonances akin to those of Shostakovich's similarly dedicated work. These, though, are by no means immediately apparent from the music itself. The symphony's scurrying central scherzo (in which one may easily picture an agitated pursuit through the glaring sunshine and sudden shadows of a medieval Italian city) may conceivably be associated with Michelangelo's flight from the wrath of Julius II in 1505. The rest is less concrete and, once again, can only be understood through an examination of its creative context.

While Kancheli's symphonies typically occupied him for two or three years each, this slowness was not entirely due to a patient ambition to solve his formal problems in every tiny detail. Like most Soviet composers, he also regularly wrote for the cinema (around thirty soundtracks in all). More significantly so far as the Fourth Symphony is concerned, he became, in 1971, the musical director of Tbilisi's Rustaveli Theatre, collaborating on many productions with the theatre's director, Robert Sturua (who later wrote the libretto for *Music For The Living*). During this residency, Kancheli seems also to have worked with musicians from the traditional Georgian folk culture, which may account for his choice of Gamlet Gonashvili for the Third Symphony. It would certainly explain the Fourth Symphony's anticipation of the Sixth's symbolic pair of folk-ancestral violas - in this case employing two gravely sawing violins and (later) a group of three violas. These instruments anachronistically frame the more Italianate episodes in the Fourth, as if placing a suggestive Georgian proscenium around events peculiar to "another time".

There is, moreover, something theatrical about the symphony's comparably anomalous nursery-rhyme theme (a "musical box" simulated by two harps and a celesta). This motif, implying a child's-eye-view, has been interpreted as representing Michelangelo himself; however, it is more sensible and fruitful to compare it with subsequent similar symbolisms, such as the harpsichord in the Fifth Symphony and the boys' voices in *Bright Sorrow*. We know from Kancheli's own remarks that, for him, the Child symbolises innocence, and the presence, within the world of force and matter, of a higher, spiritual dimension. How, though, can this be reconciled with a symphony dedicated to the adult Michelangelo? In *Testimony*, Shostakovich speaks as follows of his opera *Lady Macbeth of Mtsensk*:

'It's about how love could have been if the world weren't full of vile things. It's the vileness that ruins love. And the laws and proprieties and financial worries, and the police state. If conditions had been different, love would have been different too.'

If Shostakovich often harks back to childhood in his music, it is less for the sake of indulging a sentimental nostalgia than for its personal memories of a more decent and sensitive world - the world of liberal Russia before Lenin destroyed it. (In his sorrowful Sixth Symphony, Prokofiev similarly looks back on a better time, as, arguably, does Myaskovsky in most of his music.) If Michelangelo's struggles with papal and princely power foreshadow the struggles of liberal Soviet artists against the Communist state, it becomes less surprising that Kancheli should follow his musical forerunners in adding to his Michelangelo symphony an element of childhood symbolism. In Kancheli's music, as in Shostakovich's, love is confronted by power as childhood is confronted by adulthood. Perhaps the boy Michelangelo also dreamt of a life in which he would be free to express himself - only to have his dream dashed by the realities of adult existence. At any rate, these are the juxtapositions Kancheli appears to be making in his striking, memorable, yet problematical Fourth Symphony. (Kakhidze's is the better of the two extant recordings.)

The Last Three Symphonies

The symbolic theme of childhood confronted by an adult world of peremptory power carries over into Kancheli's **Fifth Symphony** (1977), dedicated to the memory of the composer's parents. Here, the background influence is no longer the Georgian folk tradition audible in the Third and Fourth, but instead the music - and dramatic structures - of the modern cinema. Both the most violent and most melodic of Kancheli's symphonies, the Fifth, with its sharply contrasted groupings and "movements", suggests a wordless screenplay, complete with flashbacks and dream-sequences. Indeed the modulations of the symphony's quiet second section evoke an imagined revisitation of the past in conventional cinematic terms, the music turning slowly through its changes as if through the leaves of a photograph album. (The desolate waltz here might have been penned by Nino Rota and would not seem out of place in the soundtrack to *The Godfather*.)

Our lack of detailed acquaintance with the composer's life prevent us from guessing how close to home are the experiences evoked in this transfixingly unhappy work. Whatever the true story behind the Fifth Symphony, it's clear that his contemporary work in film and theatre here confer on his music both a new dramatic vividness and a more certain sense of form. The once mysterious modulations now feel right; not a note seems wasted. Only the "last movement" (21:05 et seq. in Kakhidze's 1981 recording on Olympia) fails to convince as a natural musical development of the violent "scherzo" which precedes it, appearing instead as if transplanted from another score (possibly the *Andantino* from Schubert's Piano Sonata in A, D.959). Not that this is anything but a fleeting handicap, since this section is immensely powerful in its expression of tragic grief, forecasting the catastrophic catharsis of the Sixth Symphony.

So far the dark horse among Kancheli's mature symphonies, the Fifth, despite its palpably cinematic inspiration, is a work of enormous impact. (Once again, Kakhidze's version is preferable to its rival by DePreist.)

Kancheli's symphonic cycle reaches its peak of formal and expressive perfection in the tragic **Sixth Symphony** (1980), discussed in [Part 1](#). (Both of the available recordings are conducted by Djansug Kakhidze. His second, made for Sony, employs an uncomfortably exaggerated acoustic and drags the work out to 35 minutes, pulling its structure apart. The Olympia version is the one to go for.) If the Sixth is the work Kancheli's style was designed to conceive, and which his whole career might therefore be said to have been aiming at, what of the music he has composed since? Nothing is so far known in the West of the two-act opera, *Music For The Living*, which occupied him for four years after completing the Sixth Symphony, but the **Seventh Symphony** (1986), which followed his next work, *Bright Sorrow* (1985), offers depressing evidence that, having peaked with the Sixth, decline was all that was left to him. None of the myriad themes with which this work brims is of any distinction, the structure is chaotic, and the general tone is no more elevated than that of poor film music. The abiding sense is of a limited formula sadly played out. Once poignant devices (such as the i-V-V7-i sequence, not only overdone here, but trotted out in every Kancheli score during the last twenty years) have lost their force - as, indeed, has the composer's once-virile and engaged creative vision as a whole.

In the case of the Seventh Symphony, one might suggest that this has something to do with its lack of a focusing "voice" along the lines of its four immediate predecessors. But such an excuse would not account for the similarly lacklustre *Vom Winde beweint* - nor, come to that, everything so far recorded from his comparatively prolific Berlin period. The last Kancheli score to be animated with any real conviction is *Bright Sorrow* - and even this lacks the vital spark of positivity (or, in the last resort, of anger).

While Kancheli's life in Georgia during the Eighties seems to have been grim, this alone can't explain the extent to which he has gone off the boil since his Sixth Symphony. At heart, as he himself would be the first to insist, the issue is a spiritual one. Simple and stylised, his music has always depended on his strength of feeling. Under the foreign domination of Communism, this was understandably high, although melancholy seems to have preponderated over courage during the Eighties. Very probably the ease of life in Germany, together with a deepening of his pessimism in the face of the gloomy fate of post-Soviet Georgia, have fatally taken the edge off Kancheli's gift. An overschematic shuffling of exhausted devices is now all that is left of a once blazing, if minor, talent.

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GIYA ALEXANDROVICH KANCHELI

Compact discography

Symphony No. 1 (1967) // **Symphony No. 4** (1975) // **Symphony No. 5** (1977) Helsinki Philharmonic Orchestra/James DePreist [*Ondine ODE829-2*] *

Symphony No. 1 (1967) // **Symphony No. 7, "Epilogue"** (1986) // **Liturg**y for **Viola and Orchestra, "Vom Winde beweint"** (1986) Svyatoslav Belonogov (viola); Moscow State Symphony Orchestra/Fedor Glushchenko [*Olympia OCD 424*] **

Symphony No. 2, "Songs" (1970) // **Symphony No. 7, "Epilogue"** (1986) Berlin Radio Symphony Orchestra/Michail Jurowski [*CPO 999263-2*] **

Symphony No. 3 (1973) // **Symphony No. 6** (1979-80) Gamlet Gonashvili (tenor); State Symphony Orchestra of Georgia/Jansug Kakhidze [*Olympia OCD 401*] ***

Symphony No. 4 (1975) // **Symphony No. 5** (1977) State Symphony Orchestra of Georgia/Jansug Kakhidze [*Olympia OCD 403*] ***

Symphony No. 6 (1979-80) // **Symphony No. 7, "Epilogue"** (1986) Tbilisi Symphony Orchestra/Jansug Kakhidze [*Sony St Petersburg Classics*] *

Bright Sorrow (1985) // **Symphony No. 5** (1977) State Symphony Orchestra of Georgia and Chorus; Georgian Radio Orchestra/Jansug Kakhidze [*Mobile Fidelity MFCD 896, deleted*] **

Liturgy for **Viola and Orchestra, "Vom Winde beweint"** (1986) // *coupled with:* **ALFRED SCHNITTKE Viola Concerto** (1985) Kim Kashkashian (viola); Beethoven Hall Orchestra, Bonn; Saarbrücken Radio Symphony Orchestra/Dennis Russell Davies [*ECM 437199-2*] *(*)

Morning Prayers (1990) // **Abii ne viderum** (1992) // **Evening Prayers** (1991) Kim Kashkashian (viola); Vasiko Tevdorashvili (voice); Natalia Pschenitschnikova (alto flute); David James (countertenor); Rogers Covey-Crump (tenor); John Potter (tenor); Gordon Jones (baritone); Stuttgart Chamber Orchestra/Dennis Russell Davies [*ECM 445941-2*] *(*)

Night Prayers (1992) // *coupled with:* **SOFIA GUBAIDULINA String Quartet No. 4** (1993) // **FRANGHIZ ALI-ZADEH Mugham Sayagi** (1993) // **DMITRI YANOV-YANOVSKY, TIGRAN TAMIZYAN, OSVALDO GOLIJOV various short pieces** Kronos Quartet [*Elektra Nonesuch 7559-79346-2*] *

Film music (excerpts) Georgia State Symphony Orchestra; USSR Cinematography Symphony Orchestra/Jansug Kakhidze [*Olympia OCD 608*] *

*** = worth buying ** = worth trying * = completists only

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GIYA ALEXANDROVICH KANCHELI

Chronology

1935	Born 10 August in Tbilisi
1959	Enters Tbilisi Conservatory
1961	Wind Quintet
1962	Concerto for Orchestra
1963	Graduates from Tbilisi Conservatory
	Largo and Allegro for strings, piano, and timpani
1967	First Symphony
1970	Joins the faculty of the Tbilisi Conservatory
	Second Symphony, "Songs"
1971	Becomes musical director of the Rustaveli Theatre, Tbilisi
1973	Third Symphony
	<i>The Pranks of Hanuman</i> , musical
1975	Fourth Symphony, "In Memoriam Michelangelo"
	<i>The Caucasian Chalk Circle</i> , musical
1976	State Prize for the Fourth Symphony
1977	Fifth Symphony
1978	American premiere of the Fourth Symphony
1979-80	Sixth Symphony
1982-84	<i>Music for the Living</i> , two-act opera
1985	<i>Bright Sorrow</i> for two choirboys, chorus, and orchestra
1986	Seventh Symphony, "Epilogue"

1989	<i>Liturgy ("Mourned By The Wind")</i> for viola and orchestra (version for cello, 1997)
1990	<i>Life Without Christmas, I: Morning Prayers</i>
1991	Moves to Berlin
	<i>Life Without Christmas, II: Daytime Prayers</i>
	<i>Life Without Christmas, III: Evening Prayers</i>
1992	<i>Life Without Christmas, IV: Night Prayers</i>
	<i>Abii ne Viderem</i> for string orchestra and tape
	<i>Another Step</i> for orchestra and tape
1993	<i>My Psalm</i> for soprano, alto flute, viola, cello, bass, synth
	<i>Wingless</i> for orchestra
	<i>Violin Concerto, "Lamentation"</i>
1994	<i>Magnum Ignotum</i> for alto flute, chamber orchestra, and tape
	<i>Nach dem Weinen</i> for solo cello
	<i>Trauerfarbenes Land</i> for large orchestra
	<i>Caris Mere</i> for soprano and viola
1995	<i>...à La Duduki</i> for brass quintet and orchestra
	<i>Lament (Music in Mourning of Luigi Nono)</i> for violin, soprano and orchestra
	<i>Simi ("Joyless Thoughts")</i> for cello and orchestra
	<i>Rag-Gidon-Time</i> for violin and piano
	<i>V & V</i> for violin, tape and strings
1996	<i>Valse Boston</i> for piano and string orchestra
	<i>Instead of a Tango</i> for violin, bandoneon, piano, and doublebass
1997	<i>Diplipito</i> for cello, countertenor and orchestra

Time and Again for violin and piano

1998

Childhood Revisited for oboe, piano, bass guitar and strings

Piano Quartet in L'istesso Tempo

Sio for strings, piano and percussion

1999

And Farewell Goes Out Sighing... for violin, countertenor and orchestra

Rokwa for large orchestra

Styx for viola, large chorus and orchestra

[Kancheli: background \(Part 1\)](#). [A critical selection \(Part 2\)](#).

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Schnittke on Kancheli

(Translated by Ian MacDonald)

Today, in this time of struggle over new forms and meanings, many traditional aspects of symphonic organisation appear staid and redundant (the dramatic connotations of sonata form, contrast between different types of movement, composition by detailed thematic relationship, and so on). A symphony is primarily the free and unrestrained expression of a musical thought and only secondarily a linear form (although without any form at all a symphony cannot exist as such). Nowadays, a genuine symphony has no choice but to shape itself in an unpredictable, open-ended way - as, for example, do Shostakovich's Thirteenth and Fourteenth, Lutoslawski's Second, Berio's *Sinfonia*, and the symphonies of Rodion Shchedrin, Boris Tishchenko, and Avet Terterian.

So it is with Kancheli's symphonies, which are at once interrelated and completely different in form. Calmly self-sufficient, Kancheli has avoided both experimentalism and orthodoxy in forging his inimitably individual style. His most striking quality, however, is the rare gift of being able to suspend all sense of time. From the very first note we are released from our ordinary, everyday time-sense to float, cloud-like, in eternity. Composers with this rare gift tend towards a dissolution of "normal" time-proportions - either condensing our awareness around every second (Chopin, Scriabin, Webern) or stretching our attention-span to contemplative lengths by de-emphasising sequentiality (Schubert, Bruckner, Stockhausen). In Kancheli's symphonies, we find a union of both characteristics. In the relatively short period of 20-30 minutes of slow music, we experience a whole lifetime, an entire history; at the same time, the drag of time is absent - we glide high over centuries as if in an aircraft, with no sensation of speed.

This is particularly true of Kancheli's [Sixth](#). The piece is permeated and bound together by the refrain of two solo violas, simultaneously a symbol of permanence and the recurrent link in a sequence of contrasting episodes: the wavering rhythm of the breath; a moment of deep meditation; a sudden convulsion; the tramp of an approaching cortège; the onslaught of a nameless force of evil; a whispered intimation; a terrifying eruption of blind power; the proud stoicism of resignation. All this appears before our ears in succession and (in some higher-dimensional counterpoint) at the same time. We know neither when nor whence it arose nor what it signifies (for it has been imparted to us with the mysterious incompleteness of life itself). Nevertheless, it is impossible to deny the innate truthfulness of this strangely beautiful, slow-flowing music, and inevitably we return to it to grasp what we failed to grasp the first time, to hear what we failed to hear the first time...

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REVIEW



SCHNITTKE

***Concerto Grosso No. 6 (1993)**

Symphony No. 8 (1994)

***Sasha Rozhdestvensky, violin**

***Victoria Postnikova, piano**

Royal Stockholm Philharmonic Orchestra

cond. Gennady Rozhdestvensky

Chandos CHAN 9359 [53:24/DDD]

Alfred Schnittke's work came into Western fashion by virtue of modernist enthusiasm for his "polystylism", an attribute holding obvious appeal for a culture which stresses surface/structural elements. What was unusual about the modernist West's enthusiasm for Schnittke was that neither craft nor complexity are central to his music - indeed, his scores are often rather baldly, not to say crudely, simple, with orchestration sufficiently indifferent to balance that many loud passages degenerate into indeterminate maelstroms of noise. It was Schnittke's "game-like" juxtapositions that appealed to Western modernists - or, rather, what Western modernists *took* to be "game-like" juxtapositions. For in Russia, where music is heard in the context of a local culture imbued with symbolism and "intonational" codes, such juxtapositions are seen as anything but "game-like". Gidon Kremer, for instance, rejects the idea that Schnittke is "playing" at anything:

"It's not just a gimmick or a question of parody; it's more a case of provoking something in us, challenging us to look at things differently. Even the 'pleasing' quotations in Schnittke's music could be interpreted as a sort of alarm, warning us of all the nonsense going on around us. Schnittke isn't

suggesting that his 'backward glances' recall Good Music and that all the rest is bullshit. He's reminding us that when these older styles existed, we dealt with different values - and that, nowadays, we're in a big mess."

That Schnittke is a predominantly serious artist became apparent as more of his music appeared on disc. Indeed, more than merely serious, it began to seem that he was a self-melodramatist harbouring few Western qualms about taste or proportion. After a while, his proclivity for going wildly over the top in every other work started to wear thin with some of his erstwhile Western apologists, and although, at the time of writing (March 1996) nothing as concerted as a Schnittke backlash has emerged, it will surely not be long in arriving. Yet some claim to look deeper. Ronald Weitzmann, for example, who writes the notes to this new Chandos release and who has contributed several pieces on Schnittke to Britain's music magazines, argues that Russians hear this music as primarily religious in inspiration and intention. This, in turn, implies that to reject it for any of the external reasons given above would be to miss its message completely.

If any Schnittke issue can be said to conform to this religious criterion, it is Rozhdestvensky's recording of his two latest instrumental works, the Sixth Concerto Grosso and the Eighth Symphony. Both are clearly symbolic, not to say programmatic, pieces - although the precise nature of what is symbolised here is unspecified. Schnittke's health has been poor for many years and after finishing this symphony, he suffered a stroke (his third) and fell into a coma for three months. He has since recovered and resumed work on his opera *Gesualdo* (an unfinished version of which was conducted by Rostropovich in Vienna on 26th May 1995). In other words, as was true of the late Allan Pettersson, Schnittke's life is dominated by the pressing issue of mortality. Presumably, then, a central element in the religious symbolism of his current work is the mystery of death.

This would certainly seem to be true of the 18-minute slow movement at the centre of Schnittke's Eighth Symphony. Here, a wistful string cadence recurs in a stark, dark music of ebb and flow, the design and mood of which recalls the late styles of Bruckner, Mahler, and Liszt. The fact that this cadence and a brief chorale for brass (and later for woodwind) are the only fully harmonised tonal elements in an otherwise sparsely atonal design may be symbolic in itself. What this will probably indicate to those unpersuaded of Schnittke's genius is that, ill-equipped to write a real Late Romantic *adagio*, he can only "suggest" the presence of one by offering a polystylistic postmodern sketch of the real thing. It would be fair to add that Schnittke is at least genuinely in touch with the depth of thought and

feeling of his late 19th century models. Indeed, his "suggestion" is forceful enough to show that, given the sensibility *and the need*, a sufficiently gifted contemporary symphonist might easily compose in something like the style of late Bruckner or Mahler without irony and without sounding anachronistic - on the face of it, a rather damning judgement on the actual symphonism produced by the composers of the 1980s and 1990s.

These works share a skeletal texture and an uncharacteristic refusal to rise very much in volume. Presumably influenced by Schnittke's recent operatic work (*Life With An Idiot; Historia von D. Johann Fausten; Gesualdo*), their utterances are cryptic and often, apparently, quasi-vocal. Whether those who find the craze for Schnittke a baffling mystery will deem the musical means employed here of any real distinction is doubtful. Collectors who simply enjoy the composer's polystylism in the modernist "game-like" manner will probably be better off with a disc like the New Stockholm Chamber Orchestra's concerto recital [BIS-CD-377]. However, genuine Schnittke devotees may rest assured that this new Chandos release, finely performed and recorded, will provide them with a new, deeper appreciation of this enigmatic composer's mind.

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ALFRED GARRIYEVICH SCHNITTKE

Chronology

1934	Born 24 November in Engels, Saratov district
1946	Schnittke family moves to Vienna; Alfred begins to study piano
1948	Enrols as choral major at October Revolution Music School, Moscow
1953-8	Studies at Moscow Conservatoire with Golubev, Rakov , and Gershkovich
1957	First Violin Concerto
1958	<i>Nagasaki</i> oratorio
1968-61	Post-graduate studies at Moscow Conservatoire
1959	<i>Songs of War and Peace</i> cantata
1960	Piano Concerto
1961	<i>Poem about Cosmos</i> for orchestra
1961-72	Teaches at Moscow Conservatoire
1962	<i>The Eleventh Commandment</i> , 2-act opera
	<i>Children's Suite</i> for small orchestra
1963	First Violin Sonata
	Prelude and Fugue for piano
1964	Music for fortepiano and chamber orchestra
1965	Dialogues for cello and seven instrumentalists
	Improvisation and Fugue for piano
	Variations on One Chord for piano
	<i>3 Verses of Marina Tsvetayeva</i> for mezzo and piano
1966	First String Quartet

	Second Violin Concerto
1968	Second Violin Sonata,
	<i>Quasi una sonata</i> (see also 1987)
	<i>Pianissimo</i> for large symphony orchestra
	Sonata for violin and chamber orchestra (arr. First Violin Sonata, 1963)
	<i>Serenada</i> for violin, clarinet, double-bass, piano and percussion
1969	<i>Stream</i> , electronic composition
1969-72	First Symphony
1971	Concerto for oboe, harp and string orchestra
	<i>Labyrinths</i> , ballet
	Canon in memoriam Igor Stravinsky for string quartet
	Four Pieces for piano
1972	<i>Voices of Nature</i> for ten female voices and vibraphone
	<i>Suite in Old Style</i> for violin and piano (or harpsichord)
1972-	Teaches at Tchaikovsky Conservatory, Moscow
1972-76	Piano Quintet
1972-8	<i>In Memoriam</i> for orchestra (arr. Piano Quintet)
1974	Hymns I-III for cello and chamber combinations
1974-9	Hymn IV
1975	Preludium in Memoriam D Shostakovich for two violins
	<i>Cantus Perpetuus</i> for keyboard instrument and percussion
	<i>Requiem</i> (after Schiller), for soloists, mixed chorus and ensemble
1976	<i>Song of Francis of Assisi</i> for two mixed choruses and 6 instrumentalists

	<i>Moz-Art</i> for two violins
1977	First Concerto Grosso
	<i>Moz-Art à la Haydn</i> for two violins and eleven strings
1978	Third Violin Concerto
	Cello Sonata
	<i>Silent Night</i> for violin and piano
1979	Second Symphony, "St Florian"
	Concerto for piano and string orchestra
	<i>Stille Musik</i> for violin and cello
1979-80	<i>Passacaglia</i> for large symphony orchestra
1980	Second String Quartet
	<i>Three Madrigals</i>
	Two Short Pieces for organ
1980-1	<i>Minnesang</i> for 52 voices
1981	Third Symphony
1981-2	Septet
	Second Concerto Grosso
1982	<i>A Paganini</i> for violin solo
1983	<i>Seid Nachtern und Wachet</i> , cantata
	Third String Quartet
	<i>Schall und Hall</i> for trombone and organ
1984	Fourth Symphony
	Fourth Violin Concerto

1984-5	<i>Ritual</i> for large symphony orchestra
	Concerto for soprano and mixed chorus
1985	Third Concerto Grosso
	<i>(K)ein Sommernachtstraum</i> for symphony orchestra
	Viola Concerto
	String Trio (arr. for chamber orchestra as Trio Sonata , 1987)
	<i>Music to an Imagined Play</i>
	<i>Othello</i> , ballet
1985-6	First Cello Concerto
1986	<i>Peer Gynt</i> , ballet
1987	<i>Quasi una sonata</i> for violin and chamber orchestra
1987-8	First Piano Sonata
1988	Fifth Symphony/Fourth Concerto Grosso
	Concerto for piano four hands and chamber orchestra
	Piano Quartet in A minor (after Mahler)
	<i>3 Verses of Viktor Schnittke</i> for voice and piano
	<i>4 Aphorisms</i> for chamber orchestra
1988-1993	<i>Historia von D Johann Fausten</i> , opera
1989	<i>Monologue</i> for viola and chamber orchestra
	Fourth String Quartet
	<i>3 x 7</i> for seven instruments
1990	Second Cello Concerto
	<i>3 Fragments</i> for harpsichord

	<i>Moz-Art à la Mozart</i> for harp and eight flutes
	Second Piano Sonata
	<i>5 Aphorisms</i> for piano
	Madrigal in Memoriam Oleg Kagan for violin solo
1991	Fifth Concerto Grosso
	<i>Festive Cantus</i> for the 60th Birthday of G Rozhdestvensky
1990-1	<i>Life with an Idiot</i> , opera
1992	<i>Agnus Dei</i> for two sop, female ch, and chamber orchestra
	Piano Trio
	<i>Nostalgia</i> for cello and piano
1993	Sixth Symphony
	Seventh Symphony
	Sixth Concerto Grosso
	Third Piano Sonata
	Improvisation for solo cello
	<i>Hommage to Dr Zhivago</i>
	<i>Hommage to Grieg</i> for orchestra
1993-95	<i>Gesualdo</i> , opera in seven acts
1994	Eighth Symphony
	Triple Concerto for violin, viola, cello and string orchestra
	Symphonic Prelude <i>For Liverpool</i> for orchestra
	Second Cello Sonata
	Third Violin Sonata

Percussion Quartet

5 Fragments to Pictures of Hieronymus Bosch Menuet for violin, viola and cello

1998

Dies 3 August in Hamburg

[NB This list omits 61 film scores]

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REVIEW



SHEBALIN

Symphony No. 1 in F minor, Opus 6 (1925)

***Symphony No. 3 in C major, Opus 17 (1934-5)**

USSR Radio Symphony Orchestra

cond. Mark Ermler; *cond. Valery Gergiev

Olympia OCD577 [78:01/ADD]

SHEBALIN Violin Concerto, Opus 6 (1940)

RAKOV Violin Concerto No. 1 (1944)

KABALEVSKY Violin Concerto No. 1 in C major, Opus 48 (1948)

Andrew Harvey, violin

Symphony Orchestra of Russia cond. Veronika Dudarova

Olympia OCD573 [79:56/DDD]

A pupil of Myaskovsky in Moscow during the early 1920s (see [Chronology](#)), Vissarion Shebalin was temperamentally similar to his teacher: reserved, incorruptibly honest, and unashamedly conservative in spirit and style. Known in Russia chiefly for his opera *The Taming of the Shrew* and his Stalin Prize-winning Fifth Quartet, he refused to be browbeaten into condemning his friend Shostakovich in 1936 or 1948, and, having stood up to Zhdanov during the second of these debacles, was discharged from the directorship of the Moscow Conservatoire and "unpersoned" (portrayed as a social undesirable and deprived of anything but a hand-to-mouth living).

Composed about the same time as Shostakovich's First Symphony, Shebalin's First is an

accomplished graduation piece in the mould of his teacher. Dark colours are relieved by occasional patches of airy sunshine, themes are fugal in character (and often in usage) with recurring interludes of folksy nostalgia. Imaginatively orchestrated within its conservative limits, this is a worthy Russian genre composition - fatefully moody but rather too formulaic, and lacking in distinct personality. Performance and recording are acceptable and, if early-to-mid period Myaskovsky is your speed, you may enjoy this.

By contrast, the Third has the wryness and faster event-horizon of Shostakovich, to whom it is dedicated. Beginning with what appears to be an unconscious recollection of the first measures of Prokofiev's *Scythian Suite*, its opening Allegro is propulsively agitated. Although its language is still predominantly contrapuntal/imitative and rhythmically regular, it gives the impression of a composing mind that has been shaken up by outside events - presumably those of the Cultural Revolution of 1929-32. (It is worth comparing this music with that of Myaskovsky's Eleventh Symphony [Olympia OCD 133], composed under similar stimulus a year earlier.) A subtle symbolism can be inferred from this work. Thus, when the symphony's main subject is rhapsodically revisited in the second movement, a menacing counter-theme intervenes, producing a stormy climax, after which the music declines into pensive lyricism. The tense twilight hush in which this Andante concludes is dispersed by a pell-mell quasi-Shostakovichian scherzo. Beginning on a grave passacaglia, the finale returns to Myaskovsky territory with a fugal treatment of earlier material, progressing, via a contrasting idyllic interlude, to a mandatory "positive" conclusion in which these ideas somewhat effortfully fuse.

On the basis of his Third Symphony, Shebalin stands to Shostakovich as Bliss does to Britten. Yet one need only compare his fugal finale with the similar finale of Bliss's *A Colour Symphony* to see that Shebalin lacks the faint touch of madness that turns a craftsman into an artist. His Violin Concerto (1940) is deeper and darker than the symphonies with many coded signals of dissent, yet its conservative idiom forestalls anything that really surprises. This is a respectable work (the most mature and rewarding of the three discussed here) and, as such, would make a natural disc coupling with Myaskovsky's own Violin Concerto of 1938. It will also interest Shostakovich students in that its outer movements feature a climactic figure (I, 5:36; III, 7.20) which appears to be the inspiration for the almost identical, if enormously more overwhelming, climaxes in the outer movements of Shostakovich's Eighth Symphony. (Shebalin accompanied Shostakovich to war-time evacuation in Kuibyshev, where he presumably showed him the score of his Violin Concerto.)

Andrew Hardy's performance with Dudarova's orchestra is convincing and well recorded in a resonant acoustic suiting its large ensemble. The smaller lay-outs of the concertos by Rakov and Kabalevsky are recorded more closely (in the case of the former, a little too much so, since some of the woodwind lines threaten occasionally to entangle themselves with the soloist). Hardy is rewarding in the extrovert "gipsy" idiom of Kabalevsky's pocket concerto, but falls prey to intonational ugliness amid the angular double-stopping of the Rakov piece. Nikolai Petrovich Rakov (1908-1990) was a pupil of Glier at the Moscow Conservatoire where he subsequently taught a small galaxy of pupils, including Boris Tchaikovsky, Edison Denisov, Andrei Eshpay, Karen Khachaturian, and Gennadi Rozhdestvensky. His concerto is romantic and ripely lyrical in a style which occasionally veers towards Korngold's, although its folkloric ingredients soon steer it away into something less personal. An irritating burlesque rondo-finale detracts from its modestly winning effects.

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CHRONOLOGIES



Nikolai Myaskovsky

1881-1950



Vladimir Shcherbachov

1889-1952



Sergei Prokofiev

1891-1953



Alexander Mosolov

1900-1973



Vissarion Shebalin

1902-1963



Aram Khachaturian

1903-1978



Gavriil Popov

1904-1972



Dmitri Shostakovich

1906-1975



Georgiy Sviridov

1915-1998



Moishei Vainberg

1919-1996



Galina Ustvolskaya

1919-



Alexander Lokshin

1920-1987



Mikhail Nosyrev

1924-1981



Edison Denisov

1929-



Boris Tchaikovsky

1925-1996



Sofiya Gubaidulina

1931-



Alfred Schnittke

1934-1998



Giya Kancheli

1935-



Valentin Sil'vestrov

1937-



Boris Tishchenko

1939-

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The BBC's *People's Century*

Outdated views and misleading half-truths

Historical footage and ordinary people recalling their experiences - a nice idea. Unfortunately the third episode of *People's Century* exposed the flaw. There's no substitute for the *non-ordinary* role of the over-viewing narrator, and in "Red Flag" (27 September 1995) this supposedly deeper perspective was alarmingly shallow.

Stalin was obviously a monster. But so was Lenin. Here, his dissolution of the democratic Constituent Assembly in 1918 went unmentioned, as did his Red Terror and all but a few seconds on the Civil War which most modern historians agree he provoked (total casualties 23 million, according to Richard Pipes). Instead, because it makes good television, we got Eisenstein's tired old romantic fake of the "storming of the Winter Palace".

Later, the usual inaccuracies about artistic freedom in the 1920s were trundled out, along with a selection of mostly still-foolish old Communists, reliving their delusions for the camera 70 years on. Why no non-Party point of view, no one to remind us of Lenin's concentration camp on the Solovetsky Islands, nobody to speak for the White Russian emigration? (Presumably there was no surviving historical footage...)

At best, this was a colour supplement travesty. Unfortunately millions today will take it as History.

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PRONUNCIATIONS

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Afanasiev AfanASyiff

Amirov AmEERuhff

Apostolov AhPOSTuhluhff

Artyomov ArtYOMuhff

Asafiev AhSAFyiff

Babadjanian BuhbuhdzhanYAN

Balanchivadze BuhluhncheevADzi

Basner BASSnir

Belyi ByELy

Berezovsky BiriZOFFsky

Berman ByERMuhn

Bitov BEEtuhff

Brusilovsky BruseelOFFsky

Bunin BUNeen

Cherkass(k)y ChirkKASSky

Chulaki ChulAHkee

Davidenko DuhveedYENkuh

Denisov DinEESuhff

Deshevov DishivOFF

Dunayevsky DunayEFFsky

Dzerzhinsky DzirzhINsky

Dzhabayev DzhabAYiff

Eshpay EshpIGH

Feinberg FAYNbirk

Firsova FEERsuhvuh

Fried Freed

Gadzhiyev GadZHEEyiff

Ganelin GanYELeen

Gauk Gauk

Glier GleeYER

Gnesin GnYESSeen

Goldenweiser GuhldinVAYzir

Goldstein GaltshtAYN

Grabovsky GrabOFFsky

Grechaninov GrichanEENuhff

Gubaidulina GubighDULeenuh

Ippolitov-Ivanov EepalEETuhff-EevANuhff

Kabalevsky KuhbalYEFFsky

Kalinnikov KaleENeekuhff

Kancheli KanchELee

Karamanov KuhraMANuhff

Karayev KarAYiff

Karetnikov KarYETneekuhff

Kastalsky KasTALsky

Khachaturian HuhchaturYAN

Khrennikov HrYENnikuhff

Knipper KnEEppir

Kondrashin KandrASHin

Koussevitzky KusivEEtsky

Koval KavAL

Krein Krayn

Lazarev LAZuhriff

Lebedinsky LyEBideensky

Levitin LivEEteen

Lokshin LakSHIN

Lyatoshinsky LitashINsky

Mansuryan MuhnsurYAN

Markevich MarkYEVeech

Mirzoyan MeerzaYAN

Mosolov MuhsalOFF

Mravinsky MravEENsky

Muradeli MuradYELee

Myaskovsky MiskOFFsky

Nikolayeva NeekalAYivuh

Oborin AbOREen

Oistrakh OYstruhkh

Olkhovsky AlkhOVsky

Ovchinnikov AffCHEEneekuhff

Pärt Payrt

Peiko PayKO

Petrov PitrOFF

Polovinkin PuhlavEENkeen

Popov PapOFF

Prokofiev PrakOFFyiff

Rakov RAKuhff

Roslavets RasLA Vits

Rostropovich RuhstraPOVeech

Rozhdestvensky RazhdYESTvinsky

Sabaneyev SuhbanYEYiff

Sabynina SabEEneenuh

Salmanov SuhlmanOFF

Shaporin ShapOREen

Shchedrin Sh-chidrEEN

Shcherbachov Sh-chirbachYOFF

Shebalin ShibaleEEN

Shekhter ShEKHtir

Shirinsky ShirEENsky

Schnittke ShnEETke

Shostakovich ShuhstakOVEech

Steinberg ShtAYNberg

Silvestrov SeelvyESTruff

Slonimsky SlanEEMsky

Smirnov SmeerNOFF

Solovyov-Sedoi SuhlavYOFF-SidOY

Stravinsky StravEENsky

Suslin SUSleen

Svetlanov SvitLANoff

Sviridov SveerEEDuhff

Taktakishvili TuhktuhkeeshVEElee

Tchaikovsky ChighKOFFsky

Tcherepnin ChiripNEEN

Terteryan TirtirYAN

Tischchenko TEEshchinkuh

Ustvolskaya UstVOLskuhyuh

Vainberg VIGHNbirk

Vishnevskaya VeeshnYEVskaya

Volkonsky ValKONsky

Volkov VOLkuhff

Yavorsky YivORSky

Zakharov ZakhARuhff

Zhdanov ZhDANuff

Zhilyaev ZhilYAyiff

Zhitomirsky ZhitOMeersky

Zhivotov ZHIVuhtuhff

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NIKOLAI YAKOVLEVICH MYASKOVSKY

Chronology

1881	Born 8/20 April in Novogeorgiyevsk
1889	Family moves to Kazan; aunt Yelikonida gives him piano lessons
1893	Enrols in Nizhny-Novgorod Cadet Corps
1895-9	Student at St Petersburg Cadet College
1899-1902	Attends St Petersburg Military Engineering School
1901	Prelude in C sharp minor for piano
1903	Studies with Glier in Moscow
	Fantasy in F minor for piano
	2 Romances for voice and piano
1903-6	<i>From Youth</i> , Opus 2, 12 romances for voice and piano
1903-7	Serves as military officer in St Petersburg
1904	Idyll for piano
	2 Fantasies for piano
	<i>Silence</i> for voice and piano
1904-8	<i>On the Threshold</i> , Opus 4, 18 romances for voice and piano
1905	Piano Sonata [unpublished]
	Scherzando for piano
	2 Romances for voice and piano
1905-8	<i>Songs on Poems by Zinaida Gippius</i> , Opus 5, for voice and piano
1906-11	Studies at the St Petersburg Conservatory under Rimsky-Korsakov and Liadov; befriends Prokofiev

1907	<i>Meditations</i> , Opus 1, 7 poems for voice and piano
	begins Fifth Piano Sonata (1944)
1907-9	First Piano Sonata in D minor, Opus 6
1908	First Symphony in C minor, Opus 3 (rev. 1921)
	3 Sketches , Opus 8, for voice and piano
	Zvenya , suite (rev. 1945)
	Begins Sixth String Quartet (1944)
1908-9	<i>Madrigal</i> , Opus 7, suite for voice and piano
1909	Overture for orchestra (rev. 1949)
	Begins Fourth String Quartet (1937)
1909-10	<i>Silence</i> , Opus 9, symphonic poem
1910	Begins Third String Quartet (1930)
	Begins Tenth String Quartet (1945)
1910-11	Sinfonietta , Opus 10, for small orchestra
	Second Symphony in C sharp minor, Opus 11
1911	Graduates from St Petersburg Conservatory
	First Cello Sonata in D major, Opus 12 (rev. 1930)
1912	Second Piano Sonata in F sharp minor, Opus 13
1912-13	<i>Alastor</i> , Opus 14, symphonic poem
1913-14	<i>Premonitions</i> , Opus 16, 6 sketches for voice and piano
1914	Third Symphony in A minor, Opus 15
	Recalled to military service
1917	Transferred to Revel, suffering from shell-shock

	19 Pieces , Opus 16a, for piano
1917-19	Following the October Revolution, he is assigned to the Naval General Staff
1917-18	Fourth Symphony in E minor, Opus 17
1917-22	<i>Whimsies</i> , Opus 25, 6 sketches for piano
1918	Fifth Symphony in D major, Opus 18
1920	Third Piano Sonata in C minor, Opus 19
1921	Demobilised; becomes Professor of Composition at Moscow Conservatory
	6 Blok Poems , Opus 20, for voice and piano
1921-3	Sixth Symphony in E flat minor, Opus 23, for orchestra and chorus ad libitum
1922	<i>At Close of Day</i> , Opus 21, 3 sketches for voice and piano
	Seventh Symphony in B minor, Opus 24
1924-5	Eighth Symphony in A major, Opus 26
	Fourth Piano Sonata in C minor, Opus 27
1925	8 Delvig Songs , Opus 22, for voice and piano
1926-7	Ninth Symphony in E minor, Opus 28
	Tenth Symphony in F minor, Opus 30
1927	<i>Reminiscences</i> , Opus 29, six pieces for piano
1928	<i>Yellowed Leaves</i> , Opus 31, seven pieces for piano
1928-32	Period of Soviet Cultural Revolution; Leftist groups ascendant; symphonic music of Myaskovsky, Shebalin, Shcherbachov frowned upon
1929	Serenade in E flat minor, Opus 32/1, for small orchestra
	First Sinfonietta in B minor, Opus 32/2, for string orchestra
1929	Lyric Concertino in G major, Opus 32/3, for flute, clarinet, horn, bassoon, harp and string orchestra

1930	First String Quartet in A minor, Opus 33/1
	Second String Quartet in C minor, Opus 33/2
	Third String Quartet in D minor, Opus 33/3
1930	2 Marches , Opus 31b, for wind orchestra
1931	3 Marching Songs , Opus 31c, for chorus and piano
1931-2	Eleventh Symphony in B flat minor, Opus 34
	Twelfth Symphony in G minor, Opus 35, " Collective Farm "
1932	Song on Lenin for chorus and piano
	Song on Karl Marx for chorus and piano
1933	Thirteenth Symphony in B flat minor, Opus 36
	Fourteenth Symphony in C major, Opus 37
1933-4	Fifteenth Symphony in D minor, Opus 38
1934	<i>Komsomol-Songs</i> for chorus and piano
	Sixteenth Symphony in F major, Opus 39, " Aviation "
	<i>Honour the Soviet Pilots</i> for chorus acapella
1935-39	Stalin's Great Terror; many Soviet artists repressed
1935-6	12 Lermontov Songs , Opus 40, for voice and piano
1936	<i>Life Has Become More Joyful</i> , Opus 40c, song for voice and piano
	<i>Through Many Years</i> , Opus 87, for voice and piano (begun 1910)
1936-7	Seventeenth Symphony in G sharp minor, Opus 41
1937	Eighteenth Symphony in C major, Opus 42
	rev. Fourth String Quartet in F minor, Opus 33/4 (begun 1909)
1938	<i>Children's Pieces</i> , Opus 43, for piano (begun 1907)

	Violin Concerto in D minor, Opus 44
1938-9	Fifth String Quartet in E minor, Opus 47
	3 Sketches , Opus 45, for voice and piano
1939	Nineteenth Symphony in E flat major, Opus 46, for wind orchestra
	2 Pieces , Opus 46a, for string orchestra
	Salutation Overture in D major, Opus 48
1939-40	Sixth String Quartet in G minor, Opus 49
1940	Twentieth Symphony in E flat major, Opus 50
	Twenty-first Symphony in F sharp minor, Opus 51, " Symphony-Fantasy "
1941	Evacuated to Tbilisi
	2 Marches , Opus 53, for wind band
	Stchipachov Lyrics , Opus 52, 10 romances for voice and piano
	Twenty-second Symphony in B minor, Opus 54, " Symphony-Ballade "
	Seventh String Quartet in F major, Opus 55
	Twenty-third Symphony in A minor, Opus 56
1942	Sonatina in E minor, Opus 57, for piano
	Song and Rhapsody in B flat major, Opus 58, for piano
	Eighth String Quartet in F sharp minor, Opus 59
	Dramatic Overture in G minor, Opus 60, for wind band
1942-3	Kirov Is With Us! , Opus 61, cantata for mezzo-soprano, baritone, chorus and orchestra
1943	Returns to Moscow
	Ninth String Quartet in D minor, Opus 62
	Twenty-fourth Symphony in F minor, Opus 63

	rev. Sinfonietta (1910)
1944	Fifth Piano Sonata in B major, Opus 64/1 (begun 1907)
	Sixth Piano Sonata in A flat major, Opus 64/2 (begun 1908)
1945	Zvenya , Opus 65, 6 sketches for symphony orchestra (from 1908)
	Cello Concerto in C minor, Opus 66 (begun 1944)
	Tenth String Quartet in F major, Opus 67/1 (begun 1907)
	Eleventh String Quartet in E flat major, Opus 67/2
1945-6	Second Sinfonietta in A minor, Opus 68
1946	Twenty-fifth Symphony in D flat major, Opus 69
	Slavonic Rhapsody in D minor, Opus 71, for symphony orchestra
	Lyric Book , Opus 72, 6 romances for soprano and piano
	Compositions , Opus 73, 9 pieces for piano
1946/1947	Violin Sonata in F major, Opus 70
1946-8	Polyphonic Sketches , Opus 78, for piano
1947	From the Past , Opus 74, 6 improvisations for piano
	The Kremlin By Night , Opus 75, cantata for tenor or soprano, chorus and orchestra
	Pathetic Overture , Opus 76
	Twelfth String Quartet in G major, Opus 77
1948	Myaskovsky is one of half a dozen leading Soviet composers condemned for "formalism"
	Twenty-sixth Symphony in C major, Opus 79, " On Russian Themes "
	Divertimento in E flat major, Opus 80, for symphony orchestra
1948-9	Second Cello Sonata in A minor, Opus 81 (also in version for viola)

1949

Seventh Piano Sonata in C major, Opus 82

Eighth Piano Sonata in D minor, Opus 83

Ninth Piano Sonata in F major, Opus 84

Twenty-seventh Symphony in C minor, Opus 85

Thirteenth String Quartet in A minor, Opus 86

1950

From Many Years, Opus 87, 15 songs (revisions 1901-36)

Dies 8 August in Moscow

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VLADIMIR VLADIMIROVICH SHCHERBACHOV

Chronology

1889	Born 13/25 January in Warsaw
1906-10	Studies law and histology at St Petersburg University
1910-14	Studies at St Petersburg Conservatoire
1911	First Piano Sonata
1912	<i>A Tale</i> for orchestra
1912-13	Suite for piano
1913	First Symphony
1914	Second Piano Sonata
1917	Nonet for violin, flute, harp, piano, quartet, dancer
1921	Inventions for piano
1922-26	Second Symphony, "Blok"
1923-31	Teaches at Petrograd/Leningrad Conservatoire
1926-31	Third Symphony
1931	Ousted from Leningrad Conservatoire by Leftist agitators
1931-32	Teaches at Tbilisi Conservatoire
1932-35	Fourth Symphony, "Izhorsk"
1939	<i>Anna Kolosova</i> opera
	<i>Peter I</i> film score
1942-48	Fifth Symphony
1943	String Quartet
1944-48	Teaches at Leningrad Conservatoire

1950

rev. **Fifth Symphony**

1952

Dies 5 March in Leningrad

[N.B. This list excludes some stage and cinema works.]

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SERGEY SERGEYEVICH PROKOFIEV

Opus List

Part 1: 1907-1932

OPUS	WORK	WRITTEN	AGE
1.	Piano Sonata No. 1 in F minor	1907 rev. 1909	16
2.	Four Etudes for piano	1909	18
3.	Four Pieces for piano	1907-8	c16-17
4.	Four Pieces for piano	1908 rev. 1910-12	17-21
5.	Sinfonietta in A	1909 rev. 1914-15	
6.	Symphonic Tableau: Dreams	1910	19
7.	Two Poems of Balmont for female chorus and orchestra	1909-10	18-19
8.	Symphonic Sketch: Autumn	1910 rev. 1915, 1934	
9.	Two Poems for voice and piano	1910-11	19-20
10.	Piano Concerto No.1 in D flat	1911-12	20-21
11.	Tocatta in D minor for piano	1912	21
12.	Ten Pieces for piano	1906-13	15-22
12b.	Humorous Scherzo for 4 bassoons	1915	24
13.	Opera: Maddalena	1911-13	20-22
14.	Piano Sonata No.2 in D minor	1912	21
15.	Ballade for cello and piano	1912	21
16.	Piano Concerto No. 2 in G minor	1913 rev. 1923	
17.	Sarcasms (5 pieces for piano)	1916	25

18.	The Ugly Duckling for voice and piano	1914	23
19.	Violin Concerto No. 1 in D	1916-17	25-26
20.	Scythian Suite (Ala and Lolly)	1914-15	23-24
21.	Ballet: The Buffoon (Chout)	1915 rev. 1920	
21b.	Suite: The Buffoon (Chout)	1922	31
22.	Visions Fugitives (20 pieces for piano)	1915-17	24-26
23.	Five Poems for voice and piano	1915	24
24.	Opera: The Gambler	1915-17	24-26
25.	Symphony No. 1 In D (Classical)	1916-17	25-26
26.	Piano Concerto No. 3 in C	1917-21	26-30
27.	Five Poems of Anna Akhmatova for voice and piano	1916	25
28.	Piano Sonata No. 3 in A minor (From Old Notebooks)	1907 rev. 1917	
29.	Piano Sonata No. 4 in C minor (From Old Notebooks)	1908 rev. 1917	
29b.	Andante from Piano Sonata No.4 (orch.)	1934	43
30.	Cantata: Seven, They Are Seven	1917-18	26-27
31.	Tales of an Old Grandmother (4 pieces for piano)	1918	27
32.	Four Pieces for piano	1918	27
-	Schubert Waltzes (arr. two pianos)	1918-20	27-29
-	Buxtehude Prelude and Fugue (arr. piano)	1918-20	27-29
33.	Opera: The Love for Three Oranges	1919	28
33b.	Suite: The Love for Three Oranges	1924	33
33c.	March and Scherzo from The Love for Three Oranges, for piano	1922	31
34.	Overture on Hebrew Themes (chamber version)	1919	28

34b.	Overture on Hebrew Themes (orch.)	1934	43
35.	Five Songs Without Words for voice and piano	1920	29
35b.	5 Melodies for violin and piano	1925	34
36.	Five Poems of Balmont for voice and piano	1921	30
37.	Opera: The Flaming Angel	1919-27	28-36
38.	Piano Sonata No. 5 in C	1923	32
-	Ballet: Trapeze	1924	33
39.	Quintet (using score for Trapeze)	1924	33
40.	Symphony No. 2 in D minor	1924-5	33-34
41.	Ballet: Le Pas d'Acier	1925-6	34-35
41b.	Suite: Le Pas d'Acier	1928	37
42.	American Overture	1928	37
43.	Divertissement for orchestra	1925-29	34-38
43b.	Divertissement (arr. piano)	1938	47
44.	Symphony No. 3 in C minor	1928	37
45.	Choses en Soi (two pieces for piano)	1928	37
46.	Ballet: The Prodigal Son	1928-9	37-38
46b.	Suite: The Prodigal Son	1931	40
47.	Symphony No.4 in C	1930	39
48.	Sinfonietta in A	1915 rev. 1929	
49.	Four Portraits from The Gambler	1932	41
50.	String Quartet No. 1 in B minor	1930	39
50b.	Andante from String Quartet No. I (orch.)	1930	39

51.	Ballet: Sur le Borysthene (On the Dnieper)	1930-31	39-40
51b.	Suite: Sur le Borysthene	1933	42
52.	Six Pieces for piano	1930-31	39-40
53.	Piano Concerto No. 4 in B flat (for the left hand)	1931	40
54.	Two Sonatinos for piano: No. I in E minor, No.2 in G	1931-2	40-41
55.	Piano Concerto No.5 in G	1932	41
56.	Sonata for Two Violins	1932	41

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SERGEY SERGEYEVICH PROKOFIEV

Opus List

Part 2: 1933-1952

OPUS	WORK	WRITTEN	AGE
57.	Symphonic Song for orchestra	1933	42
58.	Cello Concerto in E minor	1933-38	42-51
59.	Three Pieces for piano	1933-34	42-43
-	Film: Lieutenant Kije	1933	42
60.	Suite: Lieutenant Kije	1934	43
60b.	Two Songs from Lieutenant Kije for voice and piano	1934	43
-	Incidental music: Egyptian Nights	1933-4	42-43
61.	Suite: Egyptian Nights	1934	43
62.	Thoughts (3 pieces for piano)	1933-34	43
63.	Violin Concerto No.2 in G minor	1935	44
64.	Ballet: Romeo and Juliet	1935-6	44-45
64b.	Suite No. 1 from Romeo and Juliet	1936	45
64c.	Suite No.2 from Romeo and Juliet	1936	45
65.	Music for Children (12 easy pieces for piano)	1935	44
65b.	Suite: A Summer Day	1941	50
66.	Six Songs for voice and piano	1935	44
67.	Symphonic Fairytale: Peter and the Wolf	1936	45
68.	Three Children's Songs for voice and piano	1936-9	45-48

69.	Four Marches for brass band	1935-7	44-46
70.	Film: Queen of Spades	1936	45
70b.	Incidental music: Boris Godunov	1936	45
71.	Incidental music: Eugene Onegin	1936	45
72.	Russian Overture	1936-7	45-46
73.	Three Pushkin Romances for voice and piano	1936	45
74.	Cantata for the 20th Anniversary of October	1936-7	45-46
75.	Ten Pieces from Romeo and Juliet for piano	1937	46
76.	Suite: Songs of Our Days for chorus and orchestra	1937	46
77.	Incidental music: Hamlet	1937-8	46-47
77b.	Gavotte from Hamlet (for piano)	1938	47
-	Film: Alexander Nevsky	1938	47
78.	Cantata: Alexander Nevsky	1939	48
78b.	Three Songs from Alexander Nevsky	1939	48
79.	Seven Songs for voice and piano	1939	48
80.	Violin Sonata No. 1 in F minor	1938-46	48-54
81.	Opera: Semyon Kotko	1939	48
81b.	Suite: Semyon Kotko	1941	50
82.	Piano Sonata No. 6 in A	1939-40	48-49
83.	Piano Sonata No. 7 in B flat	1939-42	48-51
84.	Piano Sonata No. 8 in B flat	1939-44	48-53
85.	Cantata: Hail to Stalin (Zdravitsa)	1939	48
86	Opera: Betrothal in a Monastery	1940-41	49-50

87.	Ballet: Cinderella	1940-44	49-53
88	Symphonic March for orchestra	1941	50
89.	Seven Mass Songs for voice and piano	1941-2	50-51
90.	Suite: The Year 1941	1941	50
-	Film: Lermontov	1941-2	50-51
91.	Opera: War And Peace	1941-52	50-61
92.	String Quartet No.2 in F (On Kabardinian Themes)	1941	50
-	Film: Tonya	1942	51
-	Film: Kotovsky	1942	51
-	Film: Partisans In the Ukrainian Steppe	1942	51
93.	Cantata: Ballad of An Unknown Boy	1942-3.	51-52
94.	Flute Sonata in D	1943	52
94b.	Violin Sonata No. 2 in D (arr.)	1944	53
95.	Three Pieces from Cinderella (for piano)	1942	51
96.	Three Pieces for piano	1941-2	50-51
97.	Ten Pieces from Cinderella (for piano)	1943	52
97b.	Adagio from Cinderella for cello and piano	1944	53
96.	Sketch for Soviet national anthem	1943	52
99.	March for band	1943-4	52-53
100.	Symphony No. 5 in B flat	1944	53
101.	Suite No.3 from Romeo and Juliet	1946	55
102.	Six Pieces from Cinderella (for piano)	1944	53
103.	Piano Sonata No. 9 in C	1947	56

104.	Russian Folk Songs (arr.)	1944	53
105.	Ode to the End of the War	1945	54
106.	Two Duets for tenor, bass and piano	1945	54
107.	Suite No. I from Cinderella	1946	55
108.	Suite No.2 from Cinderella	1946	55
109.	Suite No.3 from Cinderella	1946	55
110.	Waltz Suite	1946	55
111.	Symphony No. 6 in E flat minor	1945-7	54-56
112.	Symphony No.4 in C	1930 rev. 1947	
113.	Festive Poem (Thirty Years) for orchestra	1947	56
114.	Cantata: Flourish, Mighty Land	1947	56
115.	Sonata in D for Solo Violin	1947	56
116.	Film: Ivan the Terrible	1942-6	51-55
117.	Opera: The Story of A Real Man	1947-8	56-57
118.	Ballet: The Stone Flower	1948-53	57-62
119.	Cello Sonata in C	1949	58
120.	Pushkin Waltzes for orchestra	1949	58
121.	Soldiers' Marching Song for choir	1950	59
122.	Suite: Winter Bonfire for chorus and orchestra	1949-50	58-59
123.	Summer Night (suite from Betrothal in a Monastery)	1950	59
124.	Oratorio: On Guard for Peace	1950	59
125.	Sinfonia Concertante in E minor	1950-52	59-61
126.	Wedding Suite from The Stone Flower	1951	60

127.	Gipsy Fantasy from The Stone Flower	1951	60
128.	Ural Rhapsody from The Stone Flower	1951	60
130.	The Volga Meets the Don, for orchestra	1951	60
131.	Symphony No.7 in C sharp minor	1951-2	60-61
132.	Cello Concertino in G minor	1952	61
133.	Concerto for 2 pianos and string orchestra [unfinished]	1953	61
134.	Sonata for unaccompanied cello in C sharp minor [unfinished]	1953	61
135.	Piano Sonata No.5 in C sharp minor (1923, rev.)	1953	61
136.	Symphony No.2 in D minor (1924-5, rev.) [unrealised]	1953	61
137.	Piano Sonata No.10 in C minor [unfinished]	1953	61
138.	Piano Sonata No.11 [unrealised]	1953	61

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ALEXANDER VASIL'YEVICH MOSOLOV

Chronology

Opus Nos. given where known

1900	Born 29 July/11 August in Kiev
1904	Family moves to Moscow
1918-20	Fights in Civil War; wounded twice; Order of the Red Banner
1921	Private lessons with Glier Enters Moscow Conservatoire
1921-5	Studies under Glier and Myaskovsky
1923	First Piano Sonata Opus 3
1923-4	Second Piano Sonata Opus 4
1924	Third Piano Sonata Opus 6 (lost)
	Legend for cello and piano
1925	<i>Sphinx</i> cantata (lost)
	Fourth Piano Sonata Opus 11
	Fifth Piano Sonata Opus 12
1926	Clarinet Trio
	First String Quartet
	2 Nocturnes for piano
	3 Children's Scenes Opus 18, for soprano and piano
	4 Newspaper Advertisements Opus 21, for soprano and piano
1926-8	<i>Steel</i> ballet (includes <i>Zavod/The Iron Foundry</i>)
1927	Russian secr of International Society for Contemporary Music

	<i>The Hero</i> opera
	First Piano Concerto
1928	Symphony (without number) , Opus 20 (lost)
	Viola Sonata (lost)
	Dance Suite for piano trio (lost)
1929	Turkmenian Nights for piano
	Declared an enemy of the People; all works banned
1930	<i>The Dam</i> opera
1932	Second Piano Concerto
1936	Expelled from Composers' Union
	Turkmen Suite for orchestra
	Uzbek Suite for orchestra
1937	Leaves Moscow; travels in Central Asia, studying folk music
1939	Harp Concerto
1940	<i>M I Kalinin</i> oratorio
1940-2	<i>Masquerade</i> opera
1941	<i>The Signal</i> opera (lost)
1942	Second String Quartet
1943	<i>The Ukraine</i> vocal-orchestral poem
1944	Symphony (without number) in E major
1946	Second Symphony in C major
	Cello Concerto
	Cello Sonatina

1947	<i>Glory to the Red Army</i> oratorio
1948	Criticised by Khrennikov
1949-50	Song-Symphony in B major, <i>Symphonic Pictures from the Life of the Kuban Cossack Collective Farmers</i>
1956	Russian Overture for orchestra
1958-9	Symphony (without number) in C major
	Third Symphony in A minor, <i>Four Poems about Virgin Lands</i>
1960	<i>Hello, New Harvest</i> cantata
1960	Fifth Symphony in E minor
1967	<i>Glory to Moscow</i> oratorio
1970	<i>People's Oratorio about Kotovsky</i>
1973	Dies 11 July in Moscow

[NB This list omits a number of songs for chorus and folk instrumental ensembles]

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VISSARION YAKOVLEVICH SHEBALIN

Chronology

1902	Born 29 May/11 June in Omsk
1921-28	Studies with Myaskovsky at Moscow Conservatoire
1923	First String Quartet in A minor, Opus 2
1925	First Symphony in F minor, Opus 6
1927	Piano Sonata [rev 1963]
1929	Second Symphony in C sharp minor, Opus 11 [fp 1959 in a second edition]
	3 Sonatinas
1929-30	Horn Concertino , Opus 14/2
1931	<i>Lenin</i> , dramatic symphony
1931-3	Completes Mussorgsky's <i>Sorotchinsky Fair</i>
1932	Violin Concertino , Opus 14/1
1934	Third Symphony in C major, Opus 17
	Second String Quartet in B flat major, Opus 19
1935	Becomes a professor at the Moscow Conservatoire
	Fourth Symphony in B flat major, Opus 24, " The Heroes of Perekop " [rev 1961] 1936
	Overture on Mari Folk Themes
1937	Completes Glinka's Symphony on Two Russian Themes
1938	Third String Quartet in E minor, Opus 28
1939-59	<i>Sun Over the Steppe</i> , opera
1940	Violin Concerto , Opus 21

	Fourth String Quartet in G minor, Opus 29
	Trio
1941	Russian Overture in E minor, Opus 31
	Variations on a Russian Folk Song
1942	<i>The Embassy Bridegroom</i> , musical comedy
	Fifth String Quartet in F minor, Opus 33, "Slavonic"
1943	Sixth String Quartet
1944	<i>The Lark</i> , ballet
1946-7	Piano Trio
1946-56	<i>The Taming of the Shrew</i> , opera
1948	Condemned as a formalist. Sacked from directorship of Moscow Conservatoire
	Seventh String Quartet
1951	Sinfonietta on Russian Themes , Opus 43
1954	Viola Sonata
1958	Violin Sonata
1960	Cello Sonata
	Eighth String Quartet
1962	Fifth Symphony , Opus 56
1963	Ninth String Quartet in B minor, Opus 58
	Dies 28 May in Moscow

[NB This list excludes many songs, and stage, radio, and cinema works]

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GAVRIIL NIKOLAYEVICH POPOV

Chronology

1904	Born 30 August/12th September in Novocherkassk
1922-30	Studies with Nikolayev, Shcherbachov, and Steinberg at Leningrad Conservatoire
1925	Images for piano
1927	Chamber Symphony (Septet) in C
	Song for violin and piano
1928	Large Suite for piano
1928-34	First Symphony
1933	Symphonic Suite No. 1
1937	Concerto-Poem for violin and orchestra
1941	Alexander Nevsky (uncompleted opera)
	Melody for cello and piano
1943	Second Symphony, "Motherland"
1944	2 Mazurka-Caprices for piano
1946	Third Symphony for strings
	Symphonic Aria in Memory of A.N. Tolstoy for cello and strings
1947	2 Pieces for piano
1948	Condemned as a formalist
	2 Skazki for piano
1949	Fourth Symphony
1950	Epic Tale About Lenin , vocal-orchestral poem
1951	String Quartet

1953	3 Lyric Poems for piano
1956	Fifth Symphony
1970	Sixth Symphony, "Festive"
	Organ Concerto
1972	Dies 17 January at Repino

[NB This list omits 40 choral works and 39 film scores]

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REVIEW



POPOV

Symphony No. 1, Opus 7 (1928-34)

***Symphony No. 2, Opus 39, "Motherland" (1943)**

Moscow State Symphony Orchestra

***USSR Radio & TV Symphony Orchestra**

cond. Gennady Provatorov

Olympia OCD576 [78:05/DDD]

Symphony No. 6, "Festive", Opus 99 (1970)

***Chamber Symphony (Septet) in C major, Opus 2 (1927)**

USSR Radio Symphony Orchestra cond. Edvard Chivzhel

***Moscow Chamber Ensemble cond. Alexander Korneyev**

Olympia OCD588 [69:52/ADD]

Gavriil Popov (1904-72) was a student along with Shostakovich at the Leningrad Conservatoire in the early 1920s and, like him, performed as a concert pianist during this period (see [Chronology](#)). Within more or less orthodox tonal terms, he was an individual composer with a penetrating style: sardonic and caricatural at one extreme, sensitive and deeply felt at the other. His Chamber Symphony of 1927 (like Mosolov's *Iron Foundry*) became a minor *cause célèbre* in European musical circles during the early 1930s, provoking a short-lived international recognition of his talent. Shostakovich, too, thought highly of Popov's early work, confessing himself "a great and ardent admirer" of his First Symphony. So what became of him?

Like many other Soviet artists, Popov was badly hit by the switch to Socialist Realist orthodoxy during the mid-1930s. Having endured a protracted peer review of his First Symphony in which he waited a year for a verdict and spent a further year making alterations to it, he eventually saw the work premièred in 1935, three years after originally finishing it. Almost immediately the symphony was attacked by the head of the Leningrad Bureau for Control of Cultural Events and Repertoire as "reflecting the ideology of classes hostile to us". The Leningrad Composers' Union - at that time still a place where rival views could, to some extent, be genuinely debated - witnessed a succession of heated arguments about the political correctness (or not) of Popov's First. The final outcome was a grudging rehabilitation that did not extend to any further performances. After the Terror of 1936-9, Popov appears to have decided to behave as a conformist. His Second Symphony of 1943, composed from one of the patriotic cinema scores he wrote at the time, is orthodox Socialist Realism, unusual only in the strength of feeling in its elegiac slow music. In 1948, despite his efforts to appear palatable, he was branded a formalist. Isolated, he took to drink, churning out official choral works and film soundtracks when required to. Even the Stalin Prize-winning Second Symphony was banned from performance. (An attempt to revive it in 1958 was prevented when the concert was mysteriously cancelled.) Popov managed four more symphonies, two of these in a burst of activity within three years of his death. He was working on a Seventh when he died in 1972.

Popov's First is a striking work in the idiom one might call expressionistic catastrophism, sharing a mood of doom and near-hysteria with Myaskovsky's symphonies 6-12 and Prokofiev's Third. A decade or so ago, Western critics might have sought a parallel between Popov's First and, say, Prokofiev's opera *The Fiery Angel* - or ventured that this symphony, like Walton's First, Vaughan Williams' Fourth, and Weill's Second, perhaps evoked rising Fascism in Europe. These days, we are used to looking closer to home and it would seem more plausible to see the sinister upheavals of Stalin's First Five-Year Plan (the era of the Soviet Cultural Revolution) as a likely stimulus. However, Per Skans' useful sleevenote to Olympia's new issue casts doubt on this, quoting excerpts from Popov's diary which seem to show him engaged in something not quite congruous with Myaskovskyian catastrophism. Such was the paranoia of this period that Popov's diary comments might reasonably be taken at less than face-value, were it not for his reference to "the mighty, joyous songfulness of the subsidiary theme" of the symphony's first movement. Either this is a masked statement or he meant it seriously - in which case the would-be interpreter is at a loss, since there is nothing in the movement in question (or in all but the final minute of the symphony) which the average listener would instinctively

identify as "joyous".

By any normal affective interpretation, Popov's wild and dissonant First Symphony seems profoundly alienated. Its historical background would certainly account for this. Yet all we can say at this stage of knowledge is that, if Popov did not, in fact, have a catastrophic mood in mind when he composed this work, we stand little chance of identifying his intentions in anything else he wrote. Piling crescendo on agonised crescendo, the first movement overwhelms in the manner of Petterssen's Seventh (although without Petterssen's control). Yet the real model for Popov's multiclimate structure is Mahler - especially the finale of Mahler's Sixth (almost quoted at 15:45). There are traces, too, of the Berg of *Wozzeck* and the Violin Concerto in Popov's Largo, not to mention a snatch of *The Rite of Spring* (at 10:20) - yet Mahler's is the presiding spirit here and it's no wonder that Shostakovich, a Mahler buff, was fascinated by this score. So fascinated, in fact, that he seems to have used it as a springboard for his own Fourth Symphony, to which Popov's First bears more than a few similarities. (E.g., the codas of the first and the second [12:27 et seq.] of Popov's movements - not to mention bars 11-12 of the theme of Popov's Largo [0:26-0:33] - are pure "Shostakovich Four".)

While we don't know what Popov had to alter in order to get his symphony performed, its literally last-minute swing into a "positive" C major not only reminds us of the "forced rejoicing" of the D major coda of Shostakovich's Fifth but also of the penchant of Stalin's arts watchdogs for counting the number of bars in minor keys, on the lookout for anti-Soviet subversion. In fact, Inna Barsova of the Moscow Conservatory has pinpointed the effective suppression of Popov's First Symphony as the point at which the Terror first began to make itself felt in the Soviet musical world:

"Composers ceased writing serious music and turned to film music, theatre music, and folklore... The musical creativity of Shostakovich nevertheless remained free until 1936, both in his choice of concepts and in his musical technique. In 1935, Gavriil Popov, dreaming of tearing asunder the 'banality of social taste' in his Second Symphony and making a 'leap into the future' wrote, not without admiration, in his diary about Shostakovich's music: 'October 31st, Detskoye Selo. Shostakovich's Fourth Symphony (I heard the first movement on the piano up to the reprise and read the score for half of the first movement) is very caustic, strong, and noble.'"

Madame Barsova quotes also from Liubov' Vasilievna Shaporiny's diary for 21st

November 1937:

"The Leningrad Philharmonic premiered Shostakovich's Fifth Symphony. The audience was beside itself and gave a frenzied ovation - a deliberate protest against the persecution to which poor Mitya has been subjected. Everyone repeated one and the same phrase: 'He answered and he answered well.' D.D. came out pale, biting his lip. I think he could have broken into tears. Shebalin, Alexandrov, Gauk came from Moscow - only Shaporin wasn't there... I met Popov: 'You know, I've become a coward. I'm afraid of everything. I even burned your letter.'"

Like Shostakovich, Popov began to drink heavily around this time. Unlike Shostakovich, however, he failed to muster sufficient courage to carry on composing in his own voice. In this perspective, the conventionality of his Second Symphony, premiered eight years later, comes as less of a surprise. Compared to the First, this is far less personal music, though by no means as dull as the sort of Socialist Realism that works wholly on bogus sentiment; at least *some* of the feeling here is real. In terms of performance and recording, both First and Second are more than acceptable and anyone building a library of significant "Soviet" music will certainly want this disc.

Until more Popov is recorded, our view of him will naturally be exceedingly partial. What is clear is that his flight to the refuge of Socialist Realism in his Second Symphony was far from the closing page in an otherwise promising career.

Entitled the "Festive" (or "Holiday-like"), Popov's outrageously original Sixth Symphony is a 36-minute one-movement piece divided into three main sections. If the First is a work of "expressionistic catastrophism", the Sixth can be called a "delirium symphony" - a tumultuous, often garish orchestral hallucination in the vein of Scriabin's *Poem of Ecstasy* and Vyacheslav Artyomov's *Way To Olympus* (1978-84). In this case, however, the delirium is of the "tremens" variety rather than the mystical sort - for, by this time, Popov was an alcoholic. Despite this, his artistic control remained intact, while his vision had become uniquely personal. Using an idiom perhaps suggested by its composer's extensive work in the cinema, the Sixth veers in the unlikely direction of the MGM musical, its thematic material often suggesting Copland or Bernstein, or even the slaphappy, semi-drunken dance of Gene Kelly in *Singing In The Rain*. This image is blurred by an overlay of louche cinema Orientalism in often bitonal harmony and orchestration halo'ed with

tuned percussion.

A further reference-point is Stravinsky: the *Petrushka*-like second section of the "finale", and a passage in the "slow movement" (recurring in the "finale") which recalls the coda of the *Symphony of Psalms*. There is even a broad hint of Mahler (Third Symphony) in the stentorian unison fanfare for massed horns that launches the work - but this soon evokes more suggestive echoes of Shostakovich: the first themes of the Fourth and Seventh symphonies, and the song-like melody which concludes the first section of the finale of the Fifth - in other words, the idiom of the totalitarian chorale. Although Per Skans is unconvinced by the possibility, the fact that Popov's "Festive" symphony was composed from 1969 into 1970 suggests that it was somehow connected with the latter year's centenary celebration of Lenin's birth (for which Shostakovich donated the choral cycle *Loyalty*, Opus 136). Skans observes that Popov's work "might not have been (considered) solemn enough". Certainly there is not the slightest hint of civic sobriety in this mad symphony; indeed, its "festivities" are wild to the point of Bacchanalian frenzy. (Perhaps a more accurate subtitle might have been - to paraphrase Hugh MacDiarmid - "A drunk man looks at a Soviet jubilee".)

There can be no doubt that Popov's Sixth has a subversive programme. His thwarted dream of tearing asunder "the banality of (Soviet) social taste" in his Second Symphony is here fulfilled in an astonishingly inventive score which ironically exalts cinema cliché (e. g., the big blowsy string theme in the "slow movement") whilst reflecting the public face of Soviet society in the distorting mirrors of a funfair arcade. Thus, the ludicrous unison fanfare which opens the symphony *fortissimo* - this is, par excellence, a *fortissimo* symphony - is soon reduced to a crazy caricature by the woodwind. The first movement is regularly marked by similar unisons (symbolising, no doubt, such enforced social unanimity as the prearranged "spontaneous demonstrations" which Soviet citizens were often hauled out of bed before breakfast to practise). Returning in the huge coda of the "finale", the fanfare theme looms over the whirling festivities like a monstrous storm-cloud. The sense of megalomaniac menace here is extraordinary (and probably intelligible only to someone who has witnessed the sheer browbeating scale of a totalitarian civic celebration). Elsewhere sardonic grotesquerie alternates with inebriated dishevelment, most obviously in the drunken glissandi and mock sentimentality of the "slow movement". (Popov was far from alone in hitting the bottle to blot out the awfulness of Soviet life. Alcoholism was, and is, rife in Russia - and more so than average among Russian artists.)

Recorded in Moscow in 1984, the USSR Radio Symphony Orchestra under Edvard

Chivzel play this riotously discontinuous (yet thematically tightly designed) score for all they're worth. Sometimes ensemble is defeated by Popov's densely-layered effects, but generally the orchestra more than manages to hang together and the final result, allowing for the usual super-reverberant sound and solo spotlighting, is both exhilarating and exhausting. This highly original and very intense work verges on burlesque vulgarity throughout - but deliberately so. There is nothing else like it.

It is good to have Popov's 1927 Chamber Symphony back in the catalogue. First made available by Olympia in 1988 as part of an anthology entitled "Music of the First October Years" (OCD 170), it is a striking work which won plaudits abroad and created great interest in Popov in Germany during the late 1920s. In the composer's words, this Septet is a "scenic-musical" composition in which the instruments are often used theatrically in satirical style; yet it also incorporates an undertow of tragedy which comes to the surface in its 10-minute Largo. (The key element here is the fragile "old world" theme introduced in the Scherzo and cruelly parodied in the Finale - a design suggesting that, in this work, Popov was observing, from an apolitically detached point of view, the often callous confrontations between revolutionary and bourgeois class-culture during the 1920s.)

This new version of the Chamber Symphony by the Moscow Chamber Ensemble is, in fact, older (1971) than the earlier one by the Bolshoi Theatre Soloists under Alexander Lazarev (1986). While perfectly adequate, it is inferior in performance and recording to Lazarev's version (now deleted).

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D. Shostakovich

BEING REVISED

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GEORGY VASIL'YEVICH SVIRIDOV

Chronology

1915	Born 16 December in Fatezh, near Kursk
1929-32	Studies music in Kursk
1932-36	Studies with Mikhail Yudin at Central Music Technicum, Leningrad
1935	6 Pushkin Songs
1937-41	Studies with Shostakovich at the Leningrad Conservatoire
1938	7 Lermontov Songs
1936-9	First Piano Concerto
1937	First Symphony
1938-58	<i>Rural Lyricism</i> , 7 songs
1940	Symphony for String Orchestra
1941	Graduates from Leningrad Conservatoire
	3 Blok Songs
1942	Second Piano Concerto
	<i>Othello</i> , incidental music
1944	Piano Sonata
	<i>Shakespeare Suite</i> (songs)
	2 Songs of Iago
1945	Piano Trio [rev 1955]
1945-6	First String Quartet
1946-60	Partitas for piano

1947	Second String Quartet
1948-57	<i>Children's Pieces</i> for piano
1949	Second Symphony (unfinished)
1950	<i>Land of My Fathers</i> for tenor, bass, and piano
1951	<i>Bright Lights (Sparks)</i> , operetta
1952	<i>Ruy Blas</i> , serenade
1953	Marries Elza Gustavovna Klazer
1955	<i>Burns Songs</i> for bass and piano
	<i>The Decembrists</i> , oratorio
1955-6	<i>Poem in Memory of Sergey Yesenin</i> , oratorio
1956	<i>My Father Is A Peasant</i> , for tenor, bass, and piano
1957	8 Songs
1958	5 Choruses to Words by Russian Poets
1959	Pathetic Oratorio
1960	Poem About Lenin , cantata
1961-3	St Petersburg Songs for voices and piano trio
1963	People's Artist of the RSFSR
	<i>A Voice from the Chorus</i> , song
1964	<i>Kursk Songs</i>
	<i>Russia the Wooden</i> , miniature cantata
	Miniature Triptych for orchestra
	Music for Chamber Orchestra
	<i>The Snowstorm</i> , film music

1965	<i>Snow Is Falling</i> , miniature cantata
1966	<i>Time, Forward!</i> , film music
1967	2 Yesenin Choruses
1969-72	<i>Tsar Fyodor Ioannovich</i> , incidental music
1970	People's Artist of the USSR
1971-76	<i>The Radiant Guest</i> , cantata
1972	3 Blok Songs
1972-5	3 Miniatures for chorus
1973	<i>Concerto In Memory of Alexander Yurlov</i> for chorus
1974	Spring Cantata
1975	Hero of Soviet Labour
	3 Pieces from Children's Albums for chorus
1977	<i>Russia Off Her Moorings</i> , song
1978	<i>Hymns to the Motherland</i> for chorus
1978-80	Concerto for Chorus: Pushkin's Garland
1979	<i>The Night Clouds</i> for chorus
1998	Dies 5 January in Moscow

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REVIEW



SVIRIDOV

Piano Trio (1945)

***St Petersburg Songs (1961-3)**

****Music for Chamber Orchestra (1964)**

Olga Kolgatina, violin; Alexander Rudin, cello; Marina Butir, piano

***Natalia Gerasimova, soprano; Tatiana Vinogradova, mezzo;**

Alexander Vasiliev, baritone; Alexander Vedernikov, bass;

Alexander Mayorov, violin; Alexei Makarov, cello; Marina Butir, piano

****Musica Viva Chamber Orchestra cond. Alexander Rudin**

Olympia OCD 540 [74:54/DDD]

SVIRIDOV

3 Choruses from music to *Tsar Feodor Ioannovich* (1969-72)

***Pushkin's Garland*, Concerto for Chorus (1980)**

***Songs of Troubled Times*, 4 Choruses (1980)**

***Night Clouds*, Choral Cantata (1979)**

Moscow New Choir cond. Elena Rastvorova

Olympia OCD 541 [67:40/DDD]

Georgy Sviridov (b. 1915) is a singular figure in 20th century Russian music. A pupil of Shostakovich, he was sufficiently nonconformist to have stood out almost alone among the intelligentsia in 1980 when pressure was on to join the chorus of orchestrated condemnation of *Testimony*. At the same time, he was a genuinely conservative artist appreciated even by the Soviet hierarchy (notably by the late Yuri Andropov, ex-head of

the KGB and leader of the USSR from 1982 to 1984). To say that Sviridov is a genuine conservative is not to call him what Soviet critics once referred to as an "epigone" (meaning a pale imitator of past greatness). Instead he is both utterly authentic - one feels instantly upon hearing his music that here is a "real" composer - and deeply committed to his personal vision of truth, which for Sviridov means his native cultural tradition as it existed before the disaster of Communism.

To Sviridov, the heart of the Russian tradition is poetic song. Thus the lion's share of his output is vocal music framed in traditional terms and with a strong current of specifically Russian allusion. Indeed, it used to be said that he was "too Soviet" for Western ears. (This meant "too Russian", but the distinction lapsed under the Soviet dictatorship.) When Olympia issued its first Sviridov disc in 1993 (OCD 520), it overlooked the fact that Western listeners need a translation of the texts the composer uses, if only in order to orientate themselves to his initially disconcertingly unostentatious musical language. These two new discs come complete with English versions of the poems by Pushkin and Blok which Sviridov here sets, and anyone wishing to penetrate his art must have the patience to allow themselves to sink into the timeless imaginative world they evoke. If they do, the rewards of this music, with its engaging variety of mood and colour, will soon become apparent.

The best of the vocal works on offer here is *Pushkin's Garland*, a choral cycle of thirteen numbers composed in 1980. Anyone who allows the magic of this cycle to work on them will see that it is a small masterpiece; what is harder to assimilate is that, while composed only sixteen years ago, it seems divorced from historical time. The only thing which really identifies the score as recent is the small ensemble, including a vibraphone, which joins in halfway through (annoyingly causing the Russian engineers to alter the acoustic to accommodate them). Apart from that - and some dissonant touches in its harmony - the music floats free of chronology without any sense of contrived archaism. Thoroughly Russian as it is, there is no reason why Western choral societies should not take this work into their repertoire.

Almost as good are the *St Petersburg Songs* to poems by Blok for a quartet of solo singers and piano trio. Again the variety of mood - from dreamy romance ("Lullaby"), via ironic Shostakovichian juxtaposition ("Easter Time"), to anguished, vodka-sodden tragedy ("In the Attic") - is continuously gripping. Anyone who loves Russian literature will find many treasurably familiar atmospheres evoked here. As with all Russian recordings, one must tolerate some eccentricities (a piano image which moves around the stereo spectrum, a

primitive edit at 2:28 in track 6). Alexander Vedernikov's performance of "In the Attic" likewise treads a perilous path between real pathos and missed pitches. Yet pleasure vastly outweighs such drawbacks.

Probably the disc to go for first is the one containing the instrumental pieces. The Piano Trio in particular is a marvellous work close in character to Shostakovich, while the Music for Chamber Orchestra, though somewhat roughly recorded by an ensemble whose attack is not always intense enough and whose tuning is sometimes not of the best, nevertheless strikes the ear with an extraordinary immediacy that leaves one trying to rationalise the sensation that, without ever having heard it before, one has always known it. There are echoes of Brahms in the theme of the muscular Presto, and unmistakable traces of Shostakovich in the stern closing Largo - yet the passion and lyrical naturalness are entirely convincing in their own terms. (Chamber orchestras seeking a suitable recording companion for Martinu's Double Concerto should certainly look at this comparably moving work.)

Except for the aforementioned ambience-shift in *Pushkin's Garland*, the Moscow New Choir's disc is recorded with a natural reverberance that lends great presence to the Three Choruses from *Tsar Feodor Ioannovich*. This is a much richer sound than that given to the Yurlov State Choir in the same pieces on OCD 520, although the Yurlov's rawer passion at the climaxes makes up for this. Indeed, if Sviridov's music were blander, this disc might have been a candidate for Classic FM/New Age popular success. As it is, its subtly varied themes and textures make for engrossing listening.

Both of these discs come recommended to anyone with a serious habit for Russian music. Anyone who enjoys them will probably also want to try the earlier Olympia issue, which, apart from its rival version of the *Tsar Feodor Ioannovich* choruses, also features the Miniature Triptych (written in the same year - 1964 - as the Music for Chamber Orchestra), the cantata *Snow is Falling*, and Sviridov's music to a film of Pushkin's *The Snowstorm*. Perhaps, too, we can one day hope for a recording of the *Pathetic Oratorio* with its sombre climactic "Conversation with Lenin"?

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MIECZYSLAW SAMUILOVICH VAINBERG

(composer's own spelling: Weinberg)

Chronology

Keys and Opus Numbers given where known

1919	Born 8 December in Warsaw
1933	Two Pieces for piano
1934	Three Pieces for violin and piano
1935	Lullaby for piano, Opus 1
1937	First String Quartet , Opus 2
1939	Graduates from Warsaw Conservatoire; flees to Minsk
1940	Second String Quartet , Opus 3
	<i>Acacias</i> , 6 songs, Opus 4
	First Piano Sonata , Opus 5
1941	Flees Minsk to Tashkent
	Symphonic Poem , Opus 6
	Three Romances for voice and piano, Opus 7
1942	Aria for string quartet, Opus 9
	<i>Comrades In Arms</i> , operetta
	<i>Clarette's Career</i> , operetta
	<i>The Sword of Uzbekistan</i> , opera (with T. Dzhalilov, A. Klumov, and T. Sadykov)
	<i>Battle for the Fatherland</i> , ballet
	First Symphony in G minor, Opus 10

1943	Moves to Moscow at Shostakovich's behest
	Second Piano Sonata , Opus 8
	First Violin Sonata , Opus 12
	<i>Children's Songs</i> , Opus 13
1944	Third String Quartet , Opus 14
	Second Violin Sonata , Opus 15
	<i>Children's Notebook Vol. 1</i> for piano, Opus 16
	<i>Jewish Songs</i> , Opus 17
	Piano Quintet , Opus 18
	<i>Children's Notebook Vol. 2</i> for piano, Opus 19
1945	Fourth String Quartet , Opus 20
	First Cello Sonata in C major, Opus 21
	Three Romances for voice and piano, Opus 22
	<i>Children's Notebook Vol. 3</i> for piano, Opus 23
	Piano Trio , Opus 24
	Six Romances for voice and piano, Opus 25
	Suite for small orchestra, Opus 26
	Fantasy on themes from Adolphe Adam's opera <i>Le Chalet</i> for orchestra
	Fifth String Quartet , Opus 27
	Clarinet Sonata in D major, Opus 28
	Twelve Miniatures for flute and piano, Opus 29
	Second Symphony in G major, Opus 30
1946	Third Piano Sonata , Opus 31

	Elegy for baritone and piano, Opus 32
	Six Sonnets for bass and piano, Opus 33
	Seventeen Easy Pieces for piano, Opus 34
	Sixth String Quartet , Opus 35
	Suite for solo instruments
1947	<i>From Childhood</i> (adaption for orchestra from <i>Children's Notebooks</i> [1944-5])
	<i>Festive Tableaux</i> for orchestra, Opus 36
	Third Violin Sonata in A minor, Opus 37
	Four Romances for voice and piano, Opus 38
	Ballet Suites Nos. 1 and 2
	Fourth Violin Sonata in F major, Opus 39
	Two Songs Without Words for violin and piano
	Six Children's Songs for voice and piano
1948	First Sinfonietta in D minor, Opus 41
	Violin Concertino , Opus 42
	Cello Concerto in C minor, Opus 43
	Concert Overture in C minor
	Two Choruses for male choir a capella
1949	<i>Salutation Overture</i> , Opus 44
	Third Symphony , Opus 45
	Violin Sonatina , Opus 46
	Rhapsody on Moldavian Themes for orchestra, Opus 47/1
	Moldavian Rhapsody for violin and orchestra, Opus 47/3

1950	<i>Polish Tunes</i> for orchestra, Opus 47/2
	String Trio , Opus 48
	Improvisation for string quartet
	<i>Portraits of Friends</i> for piano (Shostakovich, Prokofiev, Myaskovsky, Shebalin, Khachaturian)
	Rhapsody on Slavonic Themes for orchestra
	Suite for orchestra (not numbered)
	Suite for orchestra (not numbered; unpublished)
1951	Sonatina for piano, Opus 49
	<i>From Days of the Past</i> , song-cycle, Opus 50
	Suite for orchestra (not numbered and unpublished)
	<i>Symphonic Songs</i> for orchestra, Opus 68
1952	Moldavian Rhapsody for violin and piano, Opus 47/3 (1949)
	<i>Serenade</i> for orchestra, Opus 47/4
	<i>My Native Land</i> , cantata, Opus 51
	March for orchestra
	<i>Kujawiak and Oberek (Two Polish Folk Dances)</i> for 2 xylophones and orchestra
1953	January: arrested during Stalin's anti-Jewish campaign
	March: released from prison
	Fantasy for cello and orchestra, Opus 52
	Fifth Violin Sonata , Opus 53
	Overture for orchestra
1954	Partita for piano, Opus 54
1955	<i>The Golden Key</i> , Opus 55, ballet

	Fourth Piano Sonata in B minor, Opus 56
1955-6	<i>The Cranes Are Flying</i> , film score
1956	<i>The Gypsy Bible</i> , seven songs, Opus 57
	Fifth Piano Sonata in A minor, Opus 58
1957	Seventh String Quartet in C major, Opus 59
	<i>The Dawn</i> , symphonic poem, Opus 60
	Fourth Symphony in A minor, Opus 61
1958	<i>Reminiscences</i> , songs for voice and piano, Opus 62
	<i>The White Chrysanthemum</i> , ballet
	<i>In The Mountains of Armenia</i> , song-cycle, Opus 65
1959	Second Cello Sonata in G minor, Opus 63
	Eighth String Quartet , Opus 66
	Sonata for Two Violins , Opus 69
	Suite from the film <i>Twelve Months</i>
1960	Violin Concerto in G minor, Opus 67
	Seven Romances for tenor and piano, Opus 70
	Seven Romances on texts by various authors, Opus 71
	First Solo Cello Sonata , Opus 72
	Sixth Piano Sonata in D minor, Opus 73
	Second Sinfonietta , Opus 74
1961	Flute Concerto in D minor, Opus 75
	rev. Fourth Symphony (1957)
	rev. <i>The Golden Key</i> (1955)

1962	Fifth Symphony in F minor, Opus 76
	<i>Old Letters</i> , song-cycle
1963	Three Romances for bass and piano, Opus 78
	Sixth Symphony in A minor, Opus 79, for boys choir and orchestra
	Ninth String Quartet in F sharp minor, Opus 80
1964	Suites Nos. 1-4 from <i>The Golden Key</i> (1955), Opus 55a/b/c/d
	Seventh Symphony in C major, Opus 81, for strings and harpsichord
	First Solo Violin Sonata , Opus 82
	Eighth Symphony, <i>The Flowers of Poland</i> , in G major, Opus 83, for tenor, mixed choir, and orchestra
	<i>Oh, Grey Mist</i> , song for baritone and piano, Opus 84
	Tenth String Quartet in A minor, Opus 85
1965	Second Solo Cello Sonata , Opus 86
	<i>Diary of Love</i> , cantata, Opus 87
	<i>The Profile</i> , song-cycle for bass and piano, Opus 88
	<i>Written in Blood</i> , song-cycle for tenor and piano, Opus 90
	<i>Pyotr Plaksin</i> , cantata, Opus 91
1965-6	Eleventh String Quartet in F major, Opus 89
1966	<i>Hiroshima Stanzas</i> , cantata, Opus 92
1967	Ninth Symphony, <i>Lines That Escaped Destruction</i> , Opus 93, for narrator, mixed choir, and orchestra
	Trumpet Concerto in B flat major, Opus 94
	Second Solo Violin Sonata , Opus 95
	Requiem , Opus 96

1967-8	<i>The Lady Passenger</i> , opera, Opus 97
1968	Tenth Symphony in A minor, Opus 98
	Triptych for bass and orchestra, Opus 99
	24 Preludes for solo cello, Opus 100
1969	Eleventh Symphony, Solemn Symphony , Opus 101, for mixed choir and orchestra
1969-70	Twelfth String Quartet , Opus 103
1970	Clarinet Concerto , Opus 104
	<i>The Madonna and the Soldier</i> , opera, Opus 105
1971	Third Solo Cello Sonata , Opus 106
	First Solo Viola Sonata , Opus 107
	Sonata for Solo Doublebass , Opus 108
1972	<i>The Love of D'Artagnan</i> , opera, Opus 109
1973	<i>Singing the Baby to Sleep</i> , song-cycle for soprano and piano, Opus 110
1975	<i>Congratulations!</i> , opera, Opus 111
	<i>Lady Magnesia</i> , opera, Opus 112
	Six Ballet Scenes , Opus 113
1976	Twelfth Symphony, In Memoriam D. Shostakovich , Opus 114
	Thirteenth Symphony , Opus 115
	<i>From Verses by Vasily Zhukovsky</i> , song-cycle for bass and piano, Opus 116
1977	Fourteenth Symphony , Opus 117
	Thirteenth String Quartet , Opus 118
	Fifteenth Symphony, "I believe in this Earth" , Opus 119, for soprano, baritone, female choir, and orchestra

	<i>Three Palm-trees</i> for soprano and string quartet, Opus 120
1978	Fourteenth String Quartet , Opus 122
	Second Solo Viola Sonata , Opus 123
1979	<i>From Verses by Yevgeny Baratynsky</i> , song-cycle for bass and piano, Opus 125
	Third Solo Violin Sonata , Opus 126
1980	Fifteenth String Quartet , Opus 124
	<i>The Portrait</i> , opera, Opus 128
	<i>The Golden Dress</i> , operetta, Opus 129
1981	Sixteenth String Quartet , Opus 130
	Sixteenth Symphony , Opus 131
	<i>The Relic</i> , recitative for bass and piano, Opus 132
	Sonata for Solo Bassoon , Opus 133
	<i>From Verses by Afanasy Fet</i> , song-cycle for bass and piano, Opus 134
1982	Third Solo Viola Sonata , Opus 135
1983	Fourth Solo Violin Sonata , Opus 136
1984	Seventeenth Symphony, <i>Memory</i> , Opus 137 (<i>On the Threshold of War I</i>)
	Eighteenth Symphony, <i>War - There Is No Word More Cruel</i> , Opus 138, for mixed choir and orchestra (<i>On the Threshold of War II</i>)
1977-84	<i>Six Children's Songs</i> for voice and piano, Opus 139
1985	Fourth Solo Cello Sonata , Opus 140
	First String Quartet [second edition], Opus 141
	Nineteenth Symphony, <i>The Bright May</i> , Opus 142 (<i>On the Threshold of War III</i>)
	<i>The Banners of Peace</i> , symphonic poem, Opus 143

1986	<i>The Idiot</i> , opera, Opus 144
	First Chamber Symphony in G major, Opus 145
1987	Seventeenth String Quartet , Opus 146
	Second Chamber Symphony , Opus 147
1991	Third Chamber Symphony , Opus 151
1992	Fourth Chamber Symphony , Opus 153
1996	Dies 26 February in Moscow

During the last years of his life, the composer also wrote, among other things, the Twentieth, Twenty-first, and Twenty-second symphonies (the last unfinished). This Chronology -- for many details of which [Music Under Soviet Rule](#) is indebted to Vainberg's in-progress biographer [Per Skans](#) -- will be regularly updated as further information becomes available. As it stands, it omits more than sixty film scores and numerous vocal and instrumental scores for theatre, circus, and radio productions.

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MIECZYSLAW VAINBERG

Some reissues on compact disc



Writing in *Pravda* in 1965, the composer Yuri Levitin (b. 1912) drew attention to a neglected "middle group" of composers stranded between the generation of Shostakovich, Prokofiev, Khachaturian, and Shebalin, and the young avant-garde (Denisov, Gubaidulina, Schnittke, Tishchenko, Eshpai, et al). Among those he listed, omitting himself, were Boris Tchaikovsky (b.1925) and Mieczyslaw (Moishei) Vainberg. He might have added Gavril Popov (b.1904), Alexander Lokshin (b.1920), and Galina Ustvolskaya (b.1919). Most of these were Shostakovich pupils, the Polish-born Jewish composer Mieczyslaw Vainberg being particularly close to the great man.

Fleeing the Nazis to the USSR in 1939, Vainberg (pronounced "vine-berg") settled in Minsk before moving on to Tashkent when Hitler invaded in 1941. In 1943 he sent Shostakovich the score of his First Symphony, whereupon the older composer engineered an official invitation to Moscow. Vainberg became his junior colleague and had begun to build a reputation before the 1948 crackdown, when he was approved by Khrennikov for stressing the Jewish side of his music - malevolent praise in view of Stalin's post-war anti-semitism. Indeed it was Vainberg's overt Jewishness (and the fact that his wife was the daughter of actor Solomon Mikhoels) which caused his arrest in 1953. According to Kirill Kondrashin, Shostakovich "inundated" Stalin and Beria with letters pleading for his release. Luckily Stalin died and his intended pogrom of 1953 lapsed, leaving Vainberg to pursue a career which, by 1988, had produced no less than twenty-two symphonies.

Anyone interested in Shostakovich will find the work of Vainberg instructive. Theirs was a unique compositional relationship in which, thanks to living in the same Moscow block, influence ran to and fro between them on a daily basis. Vainberg revered Shostakovich for showing him "a new continent" in music and called himself his mentor's "flesh and blood". He performed the four-hand piano reductions of Shostakovich's Tenth and Twelfth symphonies (with the composer and Boris Tchaikovsky respectively) at their auditions in the Composers' Union, acted as *consigliere* in the behind-the-scenes manoeuvring before the première of the Thirteenth, and depped for Sviatoslav Richter at the first outings of the *Seven Romances on Poems of Alexander Blok* and the Violin Sonata. In return, Shostakovich dedicated his Tenth Quartet to Vainberg and unfailingly enthused about his music (especially his 1968 opera *The Passenger*, which he called "an amazing work").

Few of Vainberg's works are familiar in Russia, let alone in the West. The reissued [symphony recordings](#), for example, effectively exhaust his recorded symphonic repertoire. (Only the Melodiya LP recording of the Fourth remains to be transferred to compact disc.) All the more scandalous that the music in them, while admittedly variable, is often so good - close to Shostakovich without being slavish (and certainly not as masterful), yet personal, cogent, and with a big emotional kick.

The **Fifth Symphony** is specially intriguing in that it adopts the two-note motif of Shostakovich's Fourth (premiered just before it was written), acknowledging the debt with an allusion to that work's eerie celesta-led coda. In fact the "influence" seems to have been mutual, the dotted duple rhythm in Vainberg's finale (10:52) turning up at the climax of Shostakovich's "Babi Yar", written later in the same year. With its echoes of Nielsen and taut control of a 45-minute span, Vainberg's Fifth is an eloquent work, its dissident message intelligible to anyone who understands a little of the Soviet ethos. Kondrashin's performance is exemplary (as is that of Vainberg's **Trumpet Concerto**, a brilliant confrontational drama between vulgar burlesque and desperate tragedy).

If Vainberg's formal fault as a symphonist is a tendency to overexploit plain ideas, newcomers to his music are likely to notice this less than his disconcerting similarity of tone to Shostakovich. (For instance, the desolate passacaglia *Largo* of his **Flute Concerto** of 1961 sounds uncannily like something a below-par Shostakovich might have written around 1950.) Yet Vainberg's Fifth is far from unique in suggesting that the exchange of influence between these composers was mutual.

No one would deny that the second and fifth movements of Vainberg's **Sixth Symphony** parallel their equivalents in Shostakovich's Thirteenth Symphony closely. Likewise, Vainberg's subject (Nazi massacres of Jewish children) derives - if only in the most immediate sense - from "Babi Yar". (His family were burned alive by the Nazis in Warsaw.) On the other hand, the brutally peremptory timpani of Vainberg's Sixth (III) seem to have come to Shostakovich's mind while writing his Second Cello Concerto and Second Violin Concerto a few years later. Similarly, the skirling "Malagueña" in Shostakovich's Fourteenth Symphony appears to be based on the central 3/8 passage in Vainberg's tumultuous scherzo (3:38 et seq.). In fact he may even have been moved to orchestrate *From Jewish Folk Poetry* by Vainberg's score (which, like the ninth movement of Shostakovich's cycle, ironically subverts the lie of Socialist Realist optimism in its finale).

Brilliant in many of its pages, Vainberg's Sixth deserves the attention of any serious admirer of Shostakovich - and by no means solely because of its manifest connections with the latter's work. This is music of the "school of Shostakovich", but fine and sometimes great music in its own right.

The **Seventh Symphony** is a fascinating instance of Vainberg and Shostakovich treading so closely in each other's footsteps that it is hard to distinguish who is following whom. It appears to have been written during the summer of 1964 between the composition of Shostakovich's Ninth Quartet (May) and Tenth Quartet (July), perhaps overlapping the completion of one and the start of the other. (On 21st July,

Shostakovich wrote to Isaak Glikman that he'd finished his Tenth and dedicated it to Vainberg. He was particularly pleased with this because, in 1963, Vainberg had "overtaken" him by writing a Ninth Quartet and now, with his own Tenth, he'd regained the lead!)

Steeped in the language of Shostakovich's quartets, Vainberg's Seventh Symphony is cast in a continuous sequence of five movements, of which the last is an extended finale - in other words, mirroring the lay-out of Shostakovich's Ninth Quartet. A delicate work, it is one of its composer's most fecund creations, bristling with restlessly proliferating ideas, among the best of which is the ghostly Jewish dance of its central *Andante*. A superb finale quotes obliquely from the passacaglia theme of Shostakovich's First Violin Concerto (III) whilst providing Shostakovich with some cues for his Tenth Quartet. This accomplished piece makes it easy to understand why Shostakovich so admired Vainberg's work. (Though differently credited, the recording of the Twelfth Symphony with which it is coupled is the same as the one paired with the Flute Concerto on Russian Disc.)

While Bartokian in some aspects, Vainberg's stark, dissonant, and emotionally ferocious **Tenth Symphony** was probably inspired by the republication in 1967 (after being out of print for 20 years) of Shostakovich's Prelude and Scherzo, Op. 11 - and perhaps, too, by the appearance, in 1968, of Barshai's arrangement of Shostakovich's Tenth Quartet (Symphony for Strings, Op. 118a). The violent cadenzas in Shostakovich's Second Violin Concerto are likewise suggested by Vainberg's solo interludes; yet his score transcends the derivative by virtue of its sheer intensity, while its limping Jewish "Burlesque" hints that Shostakovich's similar themes of the late Forties were influenced as much by listening to Vainberg as by studying Jewish popular music in the raw.

All the more puzzling, then, that Vainberg's 50-minute **Twelfth Symphony** (dedicated, with manifest passion, to Shostakovich's memory) sounds initially less like him than anything else here, evoking instead Hindemith and Stravinsky. However, its structure and language soon reveal that not only is it a classic Shostakovichian study of the individual under totalitarianism, but that it is modelled on the older composer's Fourth Symphony. Yet, for all its furious ambition, Vainberg's Twelfth is less balanced or varied than the similarly-inspired Fifth, and it would be wiser to begin with that earlier work - or the Cello Concerto - before moving on to sample the Sixth and Seventh.

Vainberg's **Cello Concerto** is his most popular work in Russia and, to judge by Rostropovich's exciting, if sometimes rough and ready, concert performance from 1964, it thoroughly deserves this acclaim. Melodious, dramatic, and instantly communicative, it possesses a richly soulful tragic-nostalgic main theme which recurs at key moments and guides the work to a moving *diminuendo* conclusion. Signs of tape corruption in Rostropovich's recording spoil the pleasure at points and a close recording picks up some wiry string action. Projected at high velocity, the fearsome unison lines of the pell-mell scherzo teeter on the verge of disintegration. Despite this, the music shines through strongly enough to invite several Western recordings as soon as possible.

(The concertos by Levitin and Lev Knipper are less distinctive but equally incisive. Levitin's is the better work, centred on a passacaglia slow march reminiscent harmonically of Honegger's concerto and spiritually of the funerary *Andante* of Fauré's G minor sonata. As with Vainberg's Fifth, this issue will reward anyone curious about the unexplored resources of mid-century Russian music.)

A typical Soviet utility ballet, Vainberg's *The Golden Key* is no better nor worse than most of Shostakovich's light incidental music. Natalya Gounko's sleevenote, wildly optimistic in invoking a comparison between this consciously simple and repetitive score and Stravinsky's astonishing *Petrushka*, aptly quotes Vissarion Shebalin on the Soviet technique of musical recycling:

"Turning a ballet into symphonic suites is very easy: you just divide the whole score symmetrically. In order to seem self-critical and severe you may drop one or two intermediate numbers from each half - and the work is done!"

That Vainberg bothered to revise *The Golden Key* and then go to the trouble of turning it into four suites is explicable solely in terms of the robotic Soviet publishing system, which paid composers more or less by the bar. (Hence Shostakovich's multiple recycling of functional dross and so much of Prokofiev's "bis" opus-list.) Vainberg's score contains one modestly ear-catching number (Malvina's Dance), but otherwise this issue will interest only indiscriminate completists.

On the strength of his recorded output, Vainberg's most persuasive claim to have influenced Shostakovich is provided by his two **Cello Sonatas** - strong, stark works whose general simplicity and particular mannerisms anticipate the style of Shostakovich's late sonatas for Violin (1968) and Viola (1975). Coupled with them is an impressive sonata (dedicated to Vainberg) by the thus-far neglected Boris Tchaikovsky. Anyone enjoying this should try Rostropovich in the same composer's Cello Concerto (Russian Disc RDCD 11115), a devious dissident work of 1964.

Vainberg's **Twelfth Quartet** of 1969-70 follows Shostakovich's Twelfth Quartet of 1968 in incorporating dodecaphonic techniques. Vainberg goes considerably further than Shostakovich in pursuing the serial line and, in so doing, occasionally enters that impersonal region in which twelve-note music sounds like no one composer in particular. This is a typically resourceful work, nonetheless, and the blank face never stays long (although the usual serial mood of generalised angst remains).

As it happens, the quartet, written at the age of 60, is completely overshadowed by Vainberg's **Piano Quintet**, written at the age of 25, one year after first arriving in Moscow in 1943. The "interest" here is in witnessing the composer's voice before he came decisively under the influence of Shostakovich - and, indeed, the work is fascinating from that purely objective point of view. The listener won't, however, be able to maintain a cold focus for long, for this is a living masterpiece independent of comparative evaluation. Presented in a quite stunning performance by the composer with the Borodin Quartet, recorded in 1963, Mieczyslaw Vainberg's Piano Quintet is one of the most convincing and gripping

compositions to be found on these discs. One can give it no higher praise than to say that it fully deserves to become the standard recording coupling for Shostakovich's own Piano Quintet of 1940. No one drawn to Russian music in the Soviet era should miss this reissue.

Mostly made over twenty years ago, these recordings are good-to-excellent as performances, and mostly very acceptable as productions, with only the Sixth Symphony's first movement coarsening badly at *fff*. (Unfortunately, too, Olympia was unable to edit together a side-break left over from the Sixth's LP format, while the lack of texts for this very welcome reissue is a serious omission.)

Otherwise, here is a composer in the mould of Shostakovich (sometimes overly so), yet still sufficiently gifted and forceful in his own right to demand space on your shelves. Do try him.

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MIECZYSLAW SAMUILOVICH VAINBERG

Compact discography

Symphony No. 4 in A minor, Op. 61 (1957, rev. 1961) Moscow Philharmonic Orchestra/Kirill Kondrashin // **Violin Concerto in G minor, Op. 67** (1960) Leonid Kogan (violin); Moscow Philharmonic Orchestra/Kirill Kondrashin // **Rhapsody on Moldavian Themes, Op. 47 No. 1** (1949) USSR Academic Symphony Orchestra/Yevgeny Svetlanov [*Olympia OCD 622*] ***

Symphony No. 5 in F minor, Op. 76 (1962) Moscow Philharmonic Orchestra/Kirill Kondrashin // **Trumpet Concerto in B flat major, Op. 95** (1967) Timofei Dokshiter (trumpet); Moscow Philharmonic Orchestra/Algis Zhiuraitis [*Russian Disc RDCD 11006*] ***

Symphony No. 6 in A minor (1963) Moscow School Boys Choir; Moscow Philharmonic Orchestra/Kyrill Kondrashin // **Symphony No. 10 in A minor** (1968) Moscow Chamber Orchestra/Rudolf Barshai [*Olympia OCD 471*] **

Symphony No. 7 in C major for strings and harpsichord, Op. 81 (1964) Moscow Chamber Orchestra/Rudolf Barshai // **Symphony No. 12, "In memoriam D. Shostakovich", Op. 114** (1976) USSR TV & Radio Symphony Orchestra/Maxim Shostakovich [*Olympia OCD 472*] **

Symphony No. 12, "In memoriam D. Shostakovich", Op. 114 (1976) Moscow Radio Symphony Orchestra/Maxim Shostakovich // **Flute Concerto in D minor, Op. 75** (1961) Alexander Korneyev (flute); Moscow Chamber Orchestra/Rudolf Barshai [*Russian Disc RDCD 11010*] *

Symphony No. 14, Op. 117 (1977) // **Symphony No. 18, "War - there is no word more cruel", Op. 138** (1984) USSR Radio Symphony Orchestra/Vladimir Fedoseyev [*Olympia OCD 589*] *

Symphony No. 17, "Memory", Op. 137 (1984) // **Symphonic Poem, "The Banners of Peace", Op. 143** (1985) USSR Radio Symphony Orchestra/Vladimir Fedoseyev [*Olympia OCD 590*] *

Symphony No. 19, "The Bright May", Op. 142 (1985) // **Chamber Symphony No. 3, Op. 151** (1991) USSR Radio Symphony Orchestra/Vladimir Fedoseyev [*Olympia OCD 591*] **

The Golden Key, Ballet, Op. 55 (1955/61/64) (Suites 1-3; Suite 4, excerpts) Bolshoi Theatre Orchestra/Mark Ermler [*Olympia OCD 473*] *

Cello Concerto in C minor, Op. 43 (1948) // *coupled with:*
LEV KNIPPER Concerto-monologue for cello, wind, and timpani in C major (1964) Mstislav Rostropovich (cello); USSR Symphony Orchestra/Gennadi Rozhdestvensky

YURI LEVITIN Concertino for cello and orchestra in E minor, Op. 54 (1961)

Mstislav Rostropovich (cello); Moscow Philharmonic Orchestra/Kirill Kondrashin [*Russian Disc RDCD 11111*] ***

§This recording is deleted, but appears as part of the boxed set "Rostropovich: The Russian Years 1950-1974" [*EMI Classics 7243 572016-2*]. ***

Cello Sonata No. 1 in C major, Op. 21 (1945) // Cello Sonata No. 2 in G minor, Op. 63 (1959) Alla Vasilieva (cello); Moishei Vainberg (piano) // *coupled with:*

BORIS TCHAIKOVSKY Cello Sonata in E minor (1957) Alla Vasilieva (cello); Boris Tchaikovsky (piano) [*Russian Disc RDCD 11026*] **

24 Preludes for Solo Cello, Op. 100 (1968) // Sonata for Solo Cello No. 1, Op. 72 (1960) Yosif Feigelson (cello) [*Olympia OCD 594*] **

Piano Quintet, Op. 18 (1944) Moishei Vainberg (piano); Borodin Quartet // **String Quartet No. 12, Op. 103 (1969-70)** Yevgeny Smirnov (violin); Arnold Kobryhansky (violin); Vyatcheslav Trushin (viola); Alla Vasilieva (cello) [*Olympia OCD 474*] ***

String Quartet No. 1, Op. 2/141 (1937/85) // String Quartet No. 10, Op. 85 (1964) // String Quartet No. 17, Op. 146 (1987) Gothenburg Quartet [*Olympia OCD 628*] **

Children's Notebooks I-III (1944-5) Anatoli Sheludyakov (piano) // **Piano Trio, Op. 24 (1945)** Anatoli Sheludyakov (piano); Irina Tkachenko (violin); Tatiana Zavarskaya (cello) [[Olympia OCD 581](#)] ***

Piano Sonata No. 4 in B minor, Op. 56 (1956) // *coupled with:*

STRAVINSKY Suite from *Petrushka* (1911); SCRIBIN Piano Sonata No. 4 in F sharp major, Op. 30 (1903); PROKOFIEV Piano Sonata No. 3 in A minor, Op. 28 (1907, rev. 1917); MEDTNER *Sonata Reminiscenza in A minor, Op. 38 No. 1 (1918)*

Emil Gilels (piano) [*Mezhdunarodnaya Kniga MK 417072*] **

*** = worth buying ** = worth trying * = completists only

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GALINA IVANOVNA USTVOL'SKAYA

Chronology

1919	Born 17 June in Petrograd
1937-47	Studies with Shostakovich
1945	String Quartet
1946	Concerto for piano, strings, and timpani [fp Late 1960s]
	Cello Sonata
1947	Joins faculty of Rimsky-Korsakov Music school; also teaches at Leningrad Conservatory
	First Piano Sonata [fp 1974, Leningrad]
	Sonatina for violin and piano
1949	Stepan Razin's Dream for bass and orchestra [fp 1950, Leningrad]
	Trio for violin, clarinet, and piano [fp 1968, Leningrad]
	Second Piano Sonata [fp 1977, Leningrad]
1949-50	Octet for 2 oboes, 4 violins, timpani, and piano [fp 1970, Leningrad]
1950	<i>Hail, Youth!</i> , cantata
	<i>Young Pioneers</i> , symphonic poem
1951	Sinfonietta for orchestra
1952	<i>Man From A High Hill</i> , cantata
	<i>Dawn Over The Homeland</i> , cantata
	Third Piano Sonata [fp 1972, Leningrad]
	Sonata for violin and piano [fp 1961, Leningrad]
1953	Piano Sonatina

	Twelve Preludes for piano [fp 1968, Leningrad]
1955	First Symphony for orchestra and 2 boys' v [fp Spring 1966]
	<i>Children's Suite</i> for orchestra [fp 1957, Leningrad]
1957	<i>The Hero's Exploit</i> for orchestra
	Fourth Piano Sonata [fp 1973, Leningrad]
1958	<i>Fire on the Steppes</i> for orchestra (Symphonic Poem No. 1 [?])
	<i>Sports</i> , symphonic poem (Symphonic Poem No. 2 [?])
1959	Grand Duet for cello and piano [fp 1977, Leningrad]
1961	<i>Song of Praise</i> for boys' choir, trumpets, percussion, and piano
1964	Duet for violin and piano [fp 1968, Leningrad]
1970-71	Composition I - <i>Dona nobis pacem</i> for piccolo, tuba, and piano [fp 1975, Leningrad]
1972-73	Composition II - <i>Dies Irae</i> for 8 doublebasses, percussion, and piano [fp 1977, Leningrad]
1974-75	Composition III - <i>Benedictus, Qui venit</i> for 4 flutes, 4 bassoons, and piano [fp 1977, Leningrad]
1979	Second Symphony, "True, Eternal Bliss" , for orchestra and solo voice [fp 1980, Leningrad]
1983	Third Symphony, "Jesus Messiah, Save Us!" , for orchestra and soloist [fp 1987, Leningrad]
1985-87	Fourth Symphony, "Prayer" , for trumpet, tamtam, piano, and contralto [fp 1988, Heidelberg]
1986	Fifth Piano Sonata [fp ?]
1988	Sixth Piano Sonata [fp 1988, Moscow]
1990	Fifth Symphony for oboe, trumpet, violin, percussion, and reciter [fp 1991, New York]

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THE LADY *with* THE HAMMER

The music of
Galina
Ustvolskaya

Until very recently, the music of reclusive St Petersburg composer Galina Ustvolskaya (born 17th June 1919) had hardly been heard in Russia, let alone in the West. Five years ago, it was impossible to obtain any of it on compact disc; indeed only two of her works had been recorded in the Soviet Union by 1970 and these were known solely to connoisseurs of the nether regions of the Melodiya catalogue. Ironically both of these pieces have since been repudiated by the composer.

Things began to change in 1992-3 with the earliest foreign recordings and the simultaneous appearance of the first Western documentation of her controversial relationship with Shostakovich. To date, Ustvolskaya's [compact discography](#) shows her to be an artist of stubborn self-will uniquely unsuited to a career in the Soviet music service. Quite apart from its individual integrity, her work is driven by a spiritual ideal which would have placed her in diametrical opposition to the Communist state.

For one reason or another, the pursuit of her personal vision excluded Ustvolskaya from mainstream musical life in the USSR. Her music was performed at the Warsaw Autumn Festival during the late Fifties but, at home, she tended to be bracketed with Andrei Volkonsky (a cosmopolitan *enfant terrible* modernist) as largely beyond the pale. Not that this exclusion was total. For example, her Violin Sonata of 1952 seems to have been officially adopted as a token of the acceptable face of Soviet modernism, being played in 1958 to a visiting American delegation (including the composer Roy Harris who found it "kind of ugly") and trotted out again in 1962 to a party headed by Stravinsky, Robert Craft, and Nicolas Slonimsky. Nor was Ustvolskaya otherwise quite as heroically neglected as some Western idealists have fondly hoped.

Here, as in other aspects of foreign acquaintance with Soviet life, misapprehensions abound. For example, Mark Swed's liner note for David Arden's disc on Koch attempts to portray Shostakovich as an

evasive "neurotic" scared openly to challenge the Socialist Realist status quo, as compared with the supposedly uncompromising Ustvol'skaya, who was allegedly always "direct and boldly dramatic" and whose art "pulls no punches". Taking a similar line in his notes to Reinbert de Leeuw's hatART CD, Art Lange claims "no evidence of Ustvol'skaya compromising with the Party line - she never stooped to writing secular cantatas or programmatically accessible music for theatre or films, or to using recognizable folk material in glibly popular ways".

Had Ustvol'skaya really maintained such a stand throughout her career, she would have been unique in the world of Soviet music (not to mention uniquely hungry, in that she would have had no income). In fact the truth, like Soviet reality, was harder than most Western pundits are used to imagining. Ustvol'skaya, like any other artist in the USSR needed to live, and to live she had to come to an arrangement with the state.

A more informed commentator, Boris Schwarz, observed in 1972 (*Music and Musical Life in Soviet Russia*, p. 404) that while Ustvol'skaya's Violin Sonata was then regarded as "proof that modernism *can* survive and coexist with Socialist Realism", the truth was that "her dissonant writing is counterbalanced by some perfectly charming pieces in the best Socialist Realist tradition". Among these "charming" pieces are some occasional cantatas - *Stepan Razin's Dream* (1948), *Hail, Youth!* (1950), *Dawn Over The Homeland* (1952), *Man From The High Mountains* (1952), *Song of Praise* (1961) - and several symphonic poems, including *Young Pioneers* (1950), *Children's Suite* (1955), *The Hero's Exploit* (1957), *Sports* (1958), and *Fire on the Steppes* (1958). There are also a number of songs and even some cinema music.

A need for purity

The existence of these works is no scandal in itself. Every other "Soviet" composer has similar embarrassing necessities to his or her name. True, Ustvol'skaya packed an unusual quantity of these monstrosities into the early part of her career - she seems to have offered up more sops to the Soviet state in one decade than Shostakovich did in five - yet the scorching intensity of her personal "for the drawer" composing is more than sufficient to show that she can only have submitted to these compromises because she had to. Moreover in Ustvol'skaya's case there remains a special point of interest. The reason why Mark Swed, Art Lange, and other Western commentators have overlooked her many reluctant contributions to Socialist Realism is that, unlike Shostakovich, who kept his forced concessions in his opus list for all to see, Ustvol'skaya has chosen to eliminate hers in order to keep her *oeuvre* ostensibly pure.

Speaking of her Clarinet Trio of 1949, the composer has said that "all my music from this composition onward is 'spiritual' in nature". Whatever else this implies, it means that all but one of the ten manifestly *unspiritual* works listed above are, by definition, not her music. This is both understandable and fair. No one of creative spirit wishes to dwell on hackwork done under political duress - and nor should they be

made to. (The fact that, until recently, the *Children's Suite* and *Fire on the Steppes* were the only works of Ustvol'skaya which Melodiya deemed worthy of recording must have added insult to injury, notwithstanding the much-needed roubles accruing to her thereby.)

What remains significant is that the composer could so little tolerate sullyng her list with these pieces that she took the quasi-Stalinist step of erasing them from her personal history. A reflection of her fierce intensity of spirit, this simultaneously reveals a streak of absolutism which, by all accounts, functions naively in her personal dealings. She nurses ethical standards of an unworldly exaltedness, breaks off relationships at the merest hint of bad faith, and is in general as elusive and unbending as her music suggests. While not conventionally introverted, hers is the work of an artist travelling relentlessly into the heart of a private vision, with no distracted (or forgiving) glances in any other direction - a sort of musical edition of Simone Weil.

It is not difficult to imagine the disgust someone of Ustvol'skaya's temperament must have felt at having to filthy her hands with concessions to the Soviet Communist Party. Referring to her slab-like sonorities delivered with piledriving staccato attack, Dutch critic Elmer Schoenberger has called her "the lady with the hammer". Perhaps more accurate would be "the lady with the flail". The puritanical lashing fury of her music often suggests the image of Christ flogging the moneylenders from the temple, while several writers have remarked on the "Old Testament" vengefulness they hear in her work. There is a pounding masculinity in many of Ustvol'skaya's scores - few men, let alone women, have written music as violent as this - which bespeaks an affinity more for Jehovah than for Jesus, for the railing prophets of the Exile rather than the Gospel message of love. (Not entirely coincidentally, she dislikes having her music performed by women.)

Critics have strained for parallels between Ustvol'skaya's music and that of her nominal teacher Shostakovich - but, aside from a predilection for bleakly oscillating semitones and brief, rhythmically emphatic mottos, few similarities have been found. One close resemblance does, however, exist. If Ustvol'skaya's experience of spiritual repression under Communism cultivated an inner kinship with the moral anger of the Old Testament, then Shostakovich, particularly in his later music, expresses something very similar - and in similar language. In *The New Shostakovich* (1990), the present writer noted a motto link between Shostakovich's music for the 1964 film of *Hamlet* and his cantata *The Execution of Stepan Razin*, written in the same year:

"These scores share a militant simplicity, almost puritanical in its distrust of anything colourful or soft-edged. Inherited from the Thirteenth Symphony is an edge of irascible Old Testament violence, crashing down in vengeful blows from an enlarged percussion section. Both *Stepan Razin* and *Hamlet* feature these flagellating chords, cracked out with the help of the whip and woodblock introduced in the Thirteenth's third movement.

"That Shostakovich had a need for sackcloth and ashes after the Twelfth Symphony is

possible - but it squares neither with his usually forceful creativity nor his, by now, extreme toughness of mind. More probable is that after the failure of the third thaw (and more particularly, the banning of one of his most personal and outspoken works) he was simply furious with the Soviet mediocracy and the morally rotten art it brandished as exemplary. Solzhenitsyn's description of the Writers' Union as 'a rabble of hucksters and moneychangers' voices the same vituperative disgust as Shostakovich's *Hamlet* and *Stepan Razin*.

"It is as if the composer has seen too much evil, suffered too much duplicity. Like Britten, he ponders in old age a kind of Noh theatre of moral parable, chiselling away the superfluous to expose the essential human beneath, bereft of its camouflage of vanity and pretence. The further into the late period this theme is pursued, the more extreme it becomes. Lashing 'infamy and crime', 'those who jabber lies', and 'the malevolent crowd' in his *Suite on Verses of Michelangelo*, Shostakovich prowls the verge of misanthropy like some latterday Ecclesiastes, the whipcrack chords of *Hamlet* and *Stepan Razin* raining down in the eighth movement as though the scars of calumny were as livid to him in 1974 as they had been in 1936, 1948, and 1962."

The parallels between Shostakovich and Ustvol'skaya in the former's *Suite on Verses of Michelangelo* are specially interesting in that this work also contains, in its ninth movement, a folk-like theme from the finale of one of Ustvol'skaya's early pieces: the Clarinet Trio of 1949. (Conceivably Shostakovich's *Stepan Razin* of 1964 may likewise be connected in some way with Ustvol'skaya's *Stepan Razin* of 1948.) What, though, apart from a shared mood and method, does this link indicate?

Ustvol'skaya and Shostakovich

Ustvol'skaya was a pupil of Shostakovich in Leningrad between 1937 and 1947, and they maintained a close, and closely guarded, relationship. That she represented something special to him, both artistically and personally, is beyond doubt. Equally clear is that this closeness was eventually explosive. In an interview with Ustvol'skaya conducted by Dutch journalist Thea Derks (*Tempo* 193, July 1995) it emerges that Shostakovich proposed to her "during the Fifties", that she refused him, and that their relationship appears to have ended acrimoniously soon afterwards. In a recent letter to her German publisher, Ustvol'skaya writes dismissively of Shostakovich:

"Then, as now, I determinedly rejected his music, and unfortunately his personality only intensified this negative attitude... One thing remains as clear as day: a seemingly eminent figure such as Shostakovich, to me, is not eminent at all, on the contrary he burdened my life and killed my best feelings."

The true story of this affair may never be known. Ustvol'skaya refuses to say more. Yet, during the

Forties, their involvement seems to have been intense. Mstislav Rostropovich knew both of them around 1948 and records of Ustvol'skaya that "she certainly regarded Shostakovich very highly, and indeed there was a very 'tender' relationship between them." Rostropovich further notes that Ustvol'skaya was one of the close friends who gave Shostakovich emotional support during the aftermath of the Zhdanov Decree. Elizabeth Wilson (whose book *Shostakovich: A Life Remembered* is the source of Rostropovich's observations) reveals that Shostakovich's marriage to Nina Varzar was, by mutual agreement, "open" and that his liaison with Ustvol'skaya was an "open secret".

For his part, Shostakovich was obviously deeply struck by Ustvol'skaya, calling her his "musical conscience" and submitting his scores for her approval. He supposedly defended her music against official attack, declaring: "I am convinced that the music of G. I. Ustvol'skaya will achieve world fame, and be valued by all who hold truth to be the essential element of music." In a letter to her he acknowledged that she had influenced him - adding, perhaps cryptically, that he'd failed to influence her.

How, when, and for what duration their relationship exceeded that of teacher and pupil is, for now, unknown. The early Fifties were, by all accounts, a desperately isolated period in Shostakovich's life and his need for close companionship, evidently unsatisfied by his marriage, may then have caused him to lean too heavily on Ustvol'skaya with disastrous results. (It may be significant that the same quotation from her Clarinet Trio which appears in Shostakovich's *Suite on Verses by Michelangelo* first turns up in his work at a pivotal point in his stressful Fifth Quartet of 1952.)

A similarly intense, though chiefly epistolary, relationship developed between Shostakovich and another of his students, Elmira Nazhirova between 1953 and 1956. (This, too, led to a musical reference in one of his key works: the horn call in the third movement of the Tenth Symphony.) Possibly the Nazhirova affair began after the break with Ustvol'skaya, the former filling the absence left by the latter. There again, Marina Sabinina records that Ustvol'skaya was still part of Shostakovich's intimate entourage in late October 1955 (at the Moscow première of his First Violin Concerto). This suggests that the break with Ustvol'skaya happened near to, if not consequent upon, Shostakovich's sudden unexpected marriage to Margarita Kainova in July 1956. In this case, Ustvol'skaya, rather than Shostakovich, may have been the rejected party.

Whatever the truth, Ustvol'skaya's subsequent bitter repudiation of a man she had been close to for nearly twenty years indicates that the break-up was painful and final - so much so that the absolutist streak which drove to her to purge her opus list of all "compromised" material may likewise have prompted a retrospective revision of her relationship with Shostakovich. In his foreword to Ustvol'skaya's Sikorski catalogue of 1990, her friend and protector the composer Viktor Suslin (b. 1942) insists that "on several occasions Shostakovich supported her in the Union of Soviet Composers against opposition from his colleagues". Yet, five years later, talking to Thea Derks, he relays a different version of the past - one clearly emanating from Ustvol'skaya herself:

"Madame Ustvol'skaya is always represented as a pupil of Shostakovich, and time and again she is forced to read that he defended her music when she graduated from the

conservatory. This information stems from one single letter Shostakovich wrote to Edison Denisov. At the time, however, Galina was astounded and deeply disappointed by his conspicuous silence. It was not Shostakovich, but Mikhail Gnessin, who defended her."

If Ustvol'skaya was so deeply disillusioned by Shostakovich at the time of her graduation in 1947, why did she remain in such close proximity to him for a further eight years? Has the absolutism intrinsic to her music - one hesitates, if only out of politeness, to call it "fanaticism" - led to a wholesale rewriting of her personal history? This would not be at odds with the personality conveyed in Derks' account of her bizarre "interview" with Ustvol'skaya (conducted through Viktor Suslin, despite the fact that journalist and composer were alike fluent in both Russian and German). The abrupt, anxious, explosively eccentric old woman Ustvol'skaya has become may bear only a partial resemblance to the 37-year-old who broke with Shostakovich in 1956.

Shostakovich dedicated no works to Ustvol'skaya and there is no mention of her in *Testimony*. Several quite different conclusions might be drawn from this and there is too little evidence at present to choose between them. All we can be sure of is that the quotation from Ustvol'skaya's Clarinet Trio in the ninth movement of Shostakovich's *Suite on Verses of Michelangelo* shows that he did not blot her completely out of his mind after she rejected him. Louis Blois's thoughtful observations on the textual context of this latter quotation (*Tempo* 182, September 1992) - in particular his hint that the music, as well as the poem, may be taken as "an elegy of unrequited love" - suggest that, so far as Shostakovich was concerned, the fire had not quite gone out twenty years later. If this is so, the dual motifs of ascetic incorruptibility and eroticism in the Michelangelo cycle perhaps ultimately converge on thoughts of Ustvol'skaya; indeed, she may also be present in the stark Symbolist shadows of Shostakovich's austere *Seven Romances on Poems of Alexander Blok*.

The Shostakovich-Ustvol'skaya connection is full of interest for Shostakovich fans. Was his Piano Quintet (whose Bachian prelude is described by the present writer in *The New Shostakovich* as "the jeremiad of a modern *yurodivy*, foretelling weeping and gnashing of teeth") an early by-product of their relationship? Did she introduce him to the Psalms, which he claims in *Testimony* constitute a sub-text to his Seventh Symphony? - Or was all of this independently suggested by his studies of Bach's Preludes and Fugues and Stravinsky's *Symphony of Psalms* during the late Thirties?

Yet, for all this, Ustvol'skaya's music bears only a distant relationship to Shostakovich's. Her often radically skeletal polyphony has been plausibly cited as influential on Shostakovich's late style. More obviously, the two composers share a penchant for the semitone and an abiding reliance on the *passacaglia* form - though here the influence, if there was any, must surely have been from Shostakovich to Ustvol'skaya. (The second "theme" of the first movement of her Clarinet Trio recalls - albeit only in the most basic rhythmic-harmonic sense - the *passacaglia* in the second movement of Shostakovich's First Quartet of 1938.) Apart from that, similarities between the two composers are thin on the ground; indeed precedents for Ustvol'skaya's style in general are difficult to discern.

An art without influence?

Parallels have been drawn between Ustvol'skaya and figures as diverse as Hindemith, Bartok, Pettersson, Pärt, and the Minimalists. The Stravinsky of *Les Noces* and *Symphony of Psalms* is certainly audible in her Octet (1949-50). A commonality with Panufnik's simplicity and blocklike sectionality and the percussive attack of Gorecki's *Lerchenmusik* is likewise clear, if coincidental. More curiously, in her First and (particularly) her Second Piano Sonata, there seems to be a background influence from the hieratic music of Satie, especially that of his Rosicrucian phase. (The two styles share a lofty symbolic ambience, static tonality, steady crotchet pace, and inclination towards *passacaglia*/variation form, although these similarities are disguised by Ustvol'skaya's violence of attack.)

Aside from a Scelsi-like absorption in single notes and overtone harmonics, however, Ustvol'skaya is nearest in style and concept to middle-period Messiaen. This is suggested by similarities between her Fifth Prelude and "Par lui tout a été fait" from *Vingt regards sur l'enfant Jésus*, and (partly through the instrumentation) between her Clarinet Trio and the *Quatuor pour le fin du temps*. It is also apparent in the first and last movements of her Fifth Piano Sonata and virtually explicit in the Duet for violin and piano (1964), which, in parts, bears a resemblance to *Cantéjodaya*. Her mood, though, is dark and apocalyptic compared to the Frenchman's dazzling acid colours, and always deeply obsessional. (Whether Ustvol'skaya knew Messiaen's music is presently unknown. As the work of a Catholic modernist, his scores were excoriated as degenerate by Khrennikov at the 1948 Composers' Union Congress, and are unlikely to have circulated in Soviet conservatories during the Fifties.)

Much of how we eventually come to pigeonhole Ustvol'skaya will depend on what we think her music is saying. Doubtless there are clues to be found in musicological details, but since the composer severely discourages us from examining her methods too closely ("I implore all those who really love my music to refrain from theoretical analysis of it"), it seems appropriate to judge it from a respectful distance by trying to understand it as a whole. This, though, is no easy task. While Ustvol'skaya herself is convinced that her meaning will be transparent to anyone who approaches her work in the right spirit, very little music is as enigmatically personal as hers, and it is often difficult to decide what this right spirit might be. For example, in attempting to summarise Ustvol'skaya's art, Frans C. Lemaire (*Music in 20th Century Russia*, Fayard, 1994) waxes cosmological, likening it to a distant star on which gravity has collapsed the universe into the density of an orange:

"This state of density prior to the birth of the universe without doubt corresponds to a spiritual condition... one before all religion, before the Cross... In this cosmic, non-terrestrial dimension, nature has no place... Man himself, that incorrigible romantic, has no role here."

This might make more sense had Ustvol'skaya not composed symphonies imploring the mercy of Christ and addressing God in conventional Christian terms via The Lord's Prayer. Hers is certainly not impersonal music of the sort Lemaire suggests; if anything, the opposite. Such is its stylisation, however, that it can easily be mistaken for something inhumanly supramundane. For example, the cover of Reinbert de Leeuw's disc for hatART features an abstract by Konstantin Malevich, a link underlined in the sleeve note by Art Lange, who claims that "Ustvol'skaya is writing Suprematist music". Yet if by this, Lange means that Ustvol'skaya's music is purely abstract, there are several reasons to doubt it. Much of the otherwise stark and uningratiating Violin Sonata (1952) sounds like "music-speech", its repetitive motto units suggesting verbal phrases (indeed, at times, words of endearment). Again, in the Octet, there is a strong sense of emotional-pictorial images abstracted to the limit of "representation" - but not beyond it. Unlike Malevich's *Red Square*, in which his "peasant woman" has completely disappeared into planar abstraction, Ustvol'skaya's "peasants" in her Octet (if such they are) remain vestigially identifiable. If there is a parallel to her music in the 20th century Russian visual arts, it would seem more accurate to nominate the abstract expressionism of Vasily Kandinsky.

The composer herself is of little help in elucidating this. We have it on her assurance that her art is spiritual without possessing specifically religious associations - yet, in her work of the last quarter century, she has regularly used Catholic liturgical titles and concepts, and insists that the best place to perform and hear it is in church. That her concept of God is both vividly apprehended and thoroughly idiosyncratic is clear from the absence of tenderness and redemption in her music, which seems predominantly apocalyptic in tone and outlook. The texts she sets in her Second, Third, and Fourth symphonies are by Hermannus Contractus, a German monk of the 11th century who was almost completely paralysed and could hardly speak. Presumably the extremity of Hermannus' predicament appeals to a corresponding extremity - perhaps even a martyr-complex - in Ustvol'skaya. (This suggests a parallel with Lili Boulanger's setting of the work of a comparably disabled woman poet in her final song *Dans l'immense Tristesse*.) Whatever the ultimate nature of Ustvol'skaya's vision, there is no avoiding the fact that the absolutism of its hair-shirt integrity is unlikely to endear it to more than a small audience of devotees.

Viktor Suslin has spoken of Ustvol'skaya's Third Symphony as "a form of exorcism". This description might easily be applied to almost everything in her opus-list, the consistency of whose style is rigid from the start. Suslin has further offered that Ustvol'skaya's work is at once spiritual and temporal, and that its temporal face has been definitively conditioned by her life in Soviet society:

"Music such as hers could only develop in that place, at that time. In this century, St Petersburg witnessed numerous horrors, of which the siege in the Second World War is only one."

If the fate of Galina Ustvol'skaya is, finally, to be seen as a late 20th century echo of Heinrich Schütz in his capacity as the musical voice of catastrophe-wracked 17th century Protestant Europe, that will be an honourable, if intrinsically unpopular, role. Humour - indeed any form of relieving contrast - is scarcely to be found in her work, and, though doubtless ruthlessly true both to its times and its composer's inner voice, it remains difficult to penetrate and, for much of its extent, difficult to listen to, let alone to love.

A brief survey

Ustvol'skaya's official catalogue runs to twenty-one works and includes five symphonies, six piano sonatas, and a number of works for chamber groupings. What is crucial to grasp is that she regards all her music, for whatever instruments, as implicitly orchestral in scale.

Calling an eight-minute, one movement piece for four performers a "symphony" (her Fourth) may seem like the gesture of a *provocateuse*, but the composer is serious and her description plays a functional role in defining the music's cosmic scope. Very probably her preference for small groups stems from an early recognition that private performances by friends would be the only way she would get to hear her scores during her lifetime. Yet, as she forcefully insists, her pieces, whether for soloist or anything up to ten players, are never "merely" chamber music. (When her Grand Duet was programmed at the 65th Festival of the International Society for Contemporary Music in Switzerland in 1991, she made the organisers change the classification of the recital from Chamber Music to Concert.) Imaginatively, Ustvol'skaya's music is built on a cosmic scale with a ritualistic dimension she prefers realised in a church setting. While often only a few musicians may be at work in her pieces, it is up to us to hear the orchestra and choir within her striving sonorities and frantic dynamics. (Her Fifth Piano Sonata contains the marking *fffff*.)

So far, half a dozen discs have featured works by Ustvol'skaya, providing an incomplete view of her art. In the last year, however, the Belgium company Megadisc has begun to issue a complete edition in six volumes, recorded in St Petersburg by Oleg Malov and the St Petersburg Soloists. The first four volumes of this series are already available; the remaining two, devoted to the symphonies, will be issued around the beginning of 1996.

Malov, Professor of Piano at the St Petersburg Conservatory, has been associated with Ustvol'skaya's music for the last twenty years. He has given most of her premières and her Third Piano Sonata is dedicated to him. Though less well recorded than, say, the discs by Reinbert de Leeuw's group, Malov and his St Petersburg Soloists are by and large far more purposeful and energetic than their recorded Western rivals. (The London Musici's version of the Octet, for example, is lifeless by comparison.) This, of course, stems from the Russians' proximity to the composer, whose sometimes obscure wishes - no bar-lines, only maximum permissible speeds given - have evidently been communicated to them with an inspiring forcefulness. No one seriously interested in Ustvol'skaya can be without the Megadisc series as a whole, which must inevitably serve as a template and standard by which all other recordings will be judged. That said, Ustvol'skaya has recently withdrawn her support for Malov and transferred it to de Leeuw - although this appears to be solely the consequence of Malov's desire to play the music of other composers as well as hers.

For Shostakovich devotees, the main work of interest will, of course, be the Clarinet Trio, which may

well come to be regarded as Ustvol'skaya's best work. Of the three versions available in her current [discography](#), the Barton Workshop's on Etcetera is ruled out by an excessively precipitate reading of the opening *Espressivo*, reducing a fifteen-minute work to eleven minutes. Reinbert de Leeuw, on the other hand, stretches this movement out too far. Exactly bifurcating the time-differences between Barton and de Leeuw, Malov's group brings in the most convincing performance, albeit that his clarinet player is closely recorded to the point of occasional distortion. Honours are even in the quiet, motionless *Dolce*, but the Russians win again in the closing *Energico*, projecting the main theme (reminiscent of the climactic second section of the Second Piano Sonata) in a deliberate, *pesante* manner which allows the secondary "folk" tune (the one quoted by Shostakovich) to sound naturally, rather than being hastily garbled, as in the rival versions. In the St Petersburg recording, the effect is of an upsurge of rebellious popular feeling, such as is suggested by the variation finale of Shostakovich's Second Quartet.

If the Megadisc issues are generally first choices in this repertoire, it should be borne in mind that some of the Western discs are more varied in content and sometimes constitute valid alternative views. (De Leeuw's recitals are foremost in this category.) Furthermore, the Megadisc series suffers from sparse banding - which makes it impossible to sample individual movements - and, on the piano sonata disc, inadequate gaps between works. On the other hand, Megadisc do very well with their sleeve designs and full liner notes.

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GALINA IVANOVNA USTVOL'SKAYA

Compact discography

Clarinet Trio (1949) // **Duet for violin and piano** (1964) // **Piano Sonata No. 5** (1986) Reinbert de Leeuw (piano); Vera Beths (violin); Harmon de Boer (clarinet) [*hat ART CD 6115*] **

Clarinet Trio (1949) // **Symphony No. 4, "Prayer"** (1985-7) // **Grand Duet for cello and piano** (1959) // **Piano Sonata No. 5** (1986) The Barton Workshop [*Etcetera KTC 1170*] *

Clarinet Trio (1949) // **Sonata for violin and piano** (1952) // **Octet** (1949-50)
Oleg Malov (piano); Alexander Shustin (violin); Adil Feodorov (clarinet); The St Petersburg Soloists [*Megadisc MDC 7865*] ***

Symphony No. 5, "Amen" (1990-1) // **Composition No. 3, "Benedictus qui venit"** (1974-5) // **Octet** (1949-50) Sergei Leiferkus (reciter); London Musici/Mark Stephenson // *coupled with:*
SHOSTAKOVICH Piano Quintet in G minor, Op. 57 (1940) Katherine Stott (piano); London Musici Quartet [*Conifer CDCF 194*] **

Composition No. 1, "Dona nobis pacem" (1970-1) // **Composition No. 2, "Dies irae"** (1972-3) // **Composition No. 3, "Benedictus qui venit"** (1974-5) Schoenberg Ensemble/Reinbert de Leeuw [*Philips 442532-2*] **

Twelve Preludes (1953) // **Composition No. 1, "Dona nobis pacem"** (1970-1) // **Composition No. 2, "Dies irae"** (1972-3) // **Composition No. 3, "Benedictus qui venit"** (1974-5) Oleg Malov; The St Petersburg Soloists [*Megadisc MDC 7867*] **

Grand Duet for cello and piano (1959) // **Duet for violin and piano** (1964) Oleg Malov (piano); Alexei Vassiliev (cello); Alexander Shustin (violin) [*Megadisc MDC 7863*] *

Grand Duet for cello and piano (1959) // *coupled with:* **SOFIA GUBAIDULINA *In Croce* for cello and organ** (1979) // **Ten Preludes for cello solo** (1974) Maya Beiser (cello); Christopher Oldfather (piano); Dorothy Papadakos (organ) [*Koch International 37258-2*] *

Piano Sonata No. 1 (1949) // **Piano Sonata No. 2** (1949) // **Piano Sonata No. 3** (1952) // **Piano Sonata No. 4** (1957) // **Piano Sonata No. 5** (1986) // **Piano Sonata No. 6** (1988) Oleg Malov (piano) [*Megadisc MDC 7876*] **

Twelve Preludes (1953) // **Piano Sonata No. 6** (1988) // *coupled with:* **HENRYK GORECKI Piano Sonata No. 1** (1956/84/90) // **Four Preludes** (1955) // **ARVO PART *For Alina*** (1976) // **Variations for**

Arinuschka's Convalescence (1991) David Arden [*Koch International 37301-2*] *

*** = worth buying ** = worth trying * = completists only

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ALEXANDER LAZAREVICH LOKSHIN

Chronology

1920	Born 19 September in Biysk, Altai district
193?-41	Studies at Moscow Conservatoire with Myaskovsky
1940	Piano Concerto
1955	Clarinet Quintet
1958	First Symphony
1963	<i>The Roach</i> comic oratorio
	Second Symphony
1966	Third Symphony
1968	Fourth Symphony
1970	Fifth Symphony - "Shakespeare's Sonnets" for baritone, strings, harp
1971	Sixth Symphony
1972	Seventh Symphony on verses of Japanese poets of 7th-12th century
1973	Eighth Symphony
1975	Ninth Symphony
1976	Tenth Symphony
1977	<i>The Grieving Mother</i> cantata
1978	String Quintet (In memory of Dmitri Shostakovich)
1981	<i>From Lyrics by Francois Villon</i> , suite for tenor, quartet, tubaphone
198?	Eleventh Symphony
1987	Dies 11 June in Moscow

[NB This list omits an unknown number of vocal works]

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MIKHAIL IOSIFOVICH NOSYREV

Chronology

1924	Born 28 May in Leningrad (St. Petersburg).
1941	Finishes school at the Leningrad Conservatory and is enrolled as a first-year student of the Leningrad Conservatory.
1943	Probationer conductor of Leningrad's Musical Comedy Theatre. Soloist in the Radio orchestra.
	30 September. Arrested by the NKVD and sentenced to death by firing squad on 10 December in accordance with article 58 of the Criminal Code of the Russian Federation.
	31 December. Sentence commuted to 10 years in the Gulag.
1943-53	10 years at Vorkuta camps (2500 km north of Moscow). Pianist, violinist and conductor of the camp's musical theatre.
1947-50	Sonatina in 3 parts for piano.
1947	Symphonic poem: <i>Skazka (A Fairy Tale)</i>
1948	<i>Fantasia on Russian folk songs</i>
1954	Exiled to Syktyvkar, Komi Republic (1200 km north of Moscow). Works as orchestrator and conductor of Komi Drama Theatre.
1957	Capriccio for violin and orchestra. Performed in Voronezh.
1958	Family moves to Voronezh. Conductor of Voronezh Opera and Ballet Theatre.
	Symphonic poem: <i>Ballad of a Dead Warrior</i> . Performed in Voronezh.
1964	Four Preludes for harp.
1965	First Symphony . Performed in Voronezh.
1966	Ballet: <i>The Unforgettable</i> . Performed in Voronezh.

1967	Becomes a member of the USSR Union of Composers. (Recommendation given by D.D. Shostakovich.)
1968	Nocturne for flute and orchestra. Performed in Voronezh.
	First String Quartet. Performed in Voronezh.
1968-69	Ballet: <i>The Song of Triumphant Love</i> , based on Turgeniev's story. Performed in Voronezh in 1971 and staged for 23 seasons.
1971	Violin Concerto. Performed in Voronezh in 1974, 1999.
1973	Cello Concerto. Performed in Voronezh in 1974, 1978. Moscow 1977.
1974	Piano Concerto.
1976	Ballet: <i>The River Don Cossacks (Donskaya volnitsya)</i>
1977	Second Symphony. Performed in Voronezh in 1977.
1978	Third Symphony.
1979	<i>Night</i> , nocturne for mixed chorus. Performed in Voronezh in 1979.
1980	Fourth Symphony. Performed in Voronezh in 1982.
	Second String Quartet.
	Third String Quartet.
1981	Dies 28 March in Voronezh.
1988	Completely rehabilitated by the Supreme Court of the USSR.

During his career, Nosyrev wrote about 200 chamber pieces.



The material for this Chronology was compiled by Mikhail Nosyrev Jr.

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EDISON VASIL'YEVICH DENISOV

Chronology

1929	Born 6 April in Tomsk
1946	Studies piano at Tomsk Music School
1951	Graduates from Tomsk University as a mathematician
	5 Romances on Lyrics by Burns
1952	Piano Variations
1952-56	Studies at Moscow Conservatoire with Shebalin and Gershkovich
1953	Improvisations for violin and piano
1954	Trio
1955	Symphony in C
1957	First String Quartet
1958	Sonata for 2 violins
1959	<i>Ivan-soldat</i> opera
1960	Flute Sonata
1961	<i>Siberian Soil</i> oratorio
	Second String Quartet
1962	Symphony for 2 string orchestras and percussion
1963	Violin Sonata
1964	<i>Sun of the Incas</i> cantata
	<i>Italian Songs</i>
1965	Crescendo and Diminuendo for harpsichord and 12 strings
1966	<i>Laments</i>

1967	3 Pieces for cello and piano
	3 Pieces for piano
1968	Ode for clarinet, piano, and percussion
	<i>Romantic Music</i> for oboe, harp, and string trio
	<i>Autumn</i> for 13 soloists
1969	Trio
1970	<i>Peinture</i> for orchestra
	Alto Saxophone Sonata
	5 Songs of Ivan Bunin
1971	<i>2 Autumn Songs</i> for voice and orchestra
	Piano Trio
	Canon in memoriam Stravinsky for flute, clarinet, and harp
	Cello Sonata
	Solo for oboe
1972	Cello Concerto
	Solo Clarinet Sonata
1973	<i>La vie en rose</i> for voice and 5 instruments
1974	Piano Concerto
	Signes en blanc for piano
1975	Flute Concerto
1977	Violin Concerto
	4 Pieces for flute and piano
1979	Flute and Oboe Concerto

	5 Baratynsky Songs
1980	Requiem
1981	<i>L'Ecume des jours</i> opera
	Partita for violin and orchestra
	<i>The Bonfire of Snow</i> , song-cycle for soprano and piano
1982	Chamber Symphony
	Bassoon and Cello Concerto
	<i>Death Is A Long Sleep</i> for cello and orchestra
	Chamber Music
1983	Epitaph for chamber orchestra
1984	Concerto for 2 violins, harpsichord, and strings
1987	Symphony
	Piano Quintet
1989	Reflets for piano

[NB This list omits some stage, cinema, and electronic works]

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BORIS ALEXANDROVICH TCHAIKOVSKY

Chronology

Keys given where known

1925	Born 10 September in Moscow
1943-9	Studies at Moscow Conservatoire with Myaskovsky, Shebalin, and Shostakovich
1944	First Piano Sonata
1946	Sonatina for piano
	Suite for solo cello
1947	First Symphony
1949	<i>The Star</i> , opera (incomplete)
1950	Fantasia on Russian Folk Themes for orchestra
1951	Slavonic Rhapsody for orchestra
1952	Second Piano Sonata
1953	Sinfonietta for strings
	Piano Trio
1954	Capriccio on English Themes for orchestra
	First String Quartet
1955	String Trio
1957	Clarinet Concerto
	Overture for orchestra
	Cello Sonata in E minor
1959	Violin Sonata
1960	Suite for solo cello

1961	Second String Quartet
1962	Piano Quintet
1964	Cello Concerto
1965	4 Brodsky Poems for soprano and piano
1966	Partita for cello, piano, harpsichord, electric guitar, percussion
1967	Second Symphony
	Chamber Symphony
	Third String Quartet
1969	Violin Concerto
	State Prize of the USSR
1971	Piano Concerto
1972	Fourth String Quartet
	<i>Pushkin's Lyrical Poems</i> , song-cycle
1973	Theme and 8 Variations for orchestra
	Sonata for 2 pianos
1974	<i>Signs of the Zodiac</i> , cantata for soprano, cembalo, and strings
	Fifth String Quartet
1976	6 Studies for strings and organ
	Sixth String Quartet
1980	Third Symphony, "Sevastopol"
	<i>The Last Spring</i> , song-cycle
1984	<i>The Siberian Wind</i> , poem for orchestra
	<i>Youth</i> , poem for orchestra

	4 Preludes for chamber orchestra
1987	Music for Orchestra
	People's Artist of the USSR
1990	Sextet for winds and harp
1993	Fourth Symphony (<i>Harp Symphony</i>)
1996	Dies 7 February in Moscow

[NB This list omits 21 radio, 5 theatrical, and 32 cinema scores]

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SOFIYA ASGATOVNA GUBAIDULINA

Chronology

1931	Born 24 October in Chistopol, Tatar Republic
1954	Graduates from Kazan Conservatoire
1956	<i>Fatseliya</i> for soprano and piano
1957	Piano Quintet
1959	Graduates from Moscow Conservatoire, studying with Peiko. Post-graduate study with Shebalin.
1960	Serenada for guitar
1963	Chaconne for piano
	Allegro rustico for flute and piano
1965	Piano Sonata
	Five Etudes for harp, doublebass and percussion
1966	Pantomime for doublebass and piano
	Sonata for 14 percussion instruments
1968	<i>Night in Memphis</i> , cantata for mezzo-soprano, male chorus and chamber orchestra
1969	<i>Rubaiyat</i> , cantata for baritone and chamber ensemble
	<i>Musical Toys</i> , 14 piano pieces
1970	<i>Vivente - Non Vivente</i> for synthesizer
1971	<i>Concordanza</i> for chamber ensemble
	Music for harpsichord and percussion instruments
	First String Quartet
	Fairytale , poem for orchestra

	Toccata troncata for piano
1972	Detto II for cello and chamber ensemble
	Roses , 5 songs for soprano and piano
	Steps for orchestra
1973	Counting Rhymes , 5 songs for children
1974	Hour of the Soul , poem for mezzo and orchestra
	Rumore e Silenzio for percussion and harpsichord/celesta
	Ten Preludes for cello
	Quattro for 2 trumpets and 2 trombones
	Invention for piano
1975	Forms Astraea group with Vyacheslav Artyomov and Viktor Suslin.
	Concerto for bassoon and low strings
	Laudatio Pacis , oratorio for soprano, alto, tenor, bass, speaker, 3 mixed choruses and orchestra without strings
	Sonata for double-bass and piano
1976	Concerto for symphony orchestra and jazz band
	Light and Darkness for organ
	Two Ballads for trumpet and piano
	Dots, Lines, and Zigzags for bass clarinet and piano
	Trio for 3 trumpets
1977	Mysteriozo for 7 percussionists
	On Tatar Folk Themes for domra and piano
	Lamento for tuba and piano
	Song Without Words for trumpet and piano

	Duo Sonata for 2 bassoons
	Quartet for 4 flutes
	<i>In the Beginning There Was Rhythm</i> for 7 percussionists
1978	<i>Introitus</i> , concerto for piano and orchestra
	<i>Te Salutant</i> , capriccio for orchestra
	<i>Detto I</i> , sonata for organ and percussion
	<i>Sounds of the Forests</i> for flute and piano
	Flute Sonatina
	<i>De Profundis</i> for bayan
1979	<i>Jubilatio</i> for 4 percussionists
	Two pieces for horn and piano
	<i>In Croce</i> for celli and organ/bayan
1980	Along with Denisov and others, denounced by Khrennikov for composing atonal music "unconnected with real life".
	<i>The Garden of Joy and Sorrow</i> for flute, harp and viola
	<i>Offertorium</i> , concerto for violin and orchestra
1981	<i>Descensio</i> for 3 trombones, 3 percussionists, harp, harpsichord and piano
	<i>Rejoice</i> , sonata for violin and cello
1982	<i>Offertorium</i> , concerto for violin and orchestra (second version)
	<i>Seven Words</i> for cello, bayan and strings
1984	Hommage à Marina Tsvetayeva , suite for a capella chorus
1985	<i>Quasi Hoquetus</i> for viola, bassoon (or cello) and piano
	Letter to the Poetess Rimma Dallosh for soprano and cello
	<i>Et Exspecto</i> , sonata for bayan

1986	<i>Perception</i> for soprano, baritone and 7 stringed instruments
	<i>Offertorium</i> , concerto for violin and orchestra (final version)
	<i>Steps</i> for symphony orchestra (second version)
	<i>Stimmen... Verstummen</i> , symphony in 12 movements
1987	<i>Witty Waltzing in the Style of Johann Strauss</i> for soprano and octet
	Second String Quartet
	Third String Quartet
	<i>Hommage à T.S. Eliot</i> for soprano and octet
1988	<i>Night in Memphis</i> , cantata for mezzo, male chorus and chamber orchestra (second version)
	Two Songs on German Folk Poetry for mezzo, flute, harpsichord and cello
	String Trio
1989	<i>Pro et Contra</i> for large orchestra
	<i>The Unasked Answer</i> , collage for 3 orchestras
	<i>Witty Waltzing in the Style of Johann Strauss</i> for piano and string quartet
	<i>Jauchzt Der Gott</i> for mixed chorus and organ
1990	<i>Alleluja</i> for mixed chorus, boy soprano, organ and large orchestra
1991	<i>Aus dem Stundenbuch</i> for cello, orchestra, male chorus and female speaker
	<i>Can You Hear Us, Luigi? Look at the Dance a Simple Wooden Rattle is Performing for You</i> for 6 percussionists
	<i>Even And Uneven</i> for 7 percussionists
	<i>Lauda</i> for alto, tenor, baritone, speaker, mixed chorus and large orchestra
	<i>Silenzio</i> for bayan, violin and cello
1992	Leaves Russia, settling in Germany near Hamburg.

	Tatar Dance for bayan and 2 doublebasses
	<i>Night in Memphis</i> , cantata for mezzo, male chorus and chamber orchestra (final version)
	<i>Steps</i> for orchestra (final version)
1993	<i>"And: The Festivities at Their Height"</i> for cello and orchestra
	<i>Dancer on a Tightrope</i> for violin and piano
	<i>"Early in the Morning, Just Before Waking..."</i> for 4 kotos and 3 bass kotos
	<i>Meditation</i> for harpsichord, 2 violins, viola, cello and double-bass
	<i>Now Always Snow</i> for chamber ensemble and chorus
	Meditation on the Bach's Chorale "Vor deinem Thron tret ich hiermit" for harpsichord and string quintet
1994	Fourth String Quartet with tape
	<i>Ein Engel</i> for alto and doublebass
	<i>Figures of Time</i> for symphony orchestra
	<i>Aus den Visionen von Hildegard von Bingen</i> for alto
	<i>In Anticipation</i> for saxophone quartet and 6 percussionists
	Music for flute, strings and percussion (Flute Concerto)
1996	Galgenlieder 15 Pieces for Voice (mezzo), doublebass, and percussion
	Viola Concerto
	Impromptu for violin, flute and strings
	Quarternion for 4 cellos
1997	<i>Canticle of the Sun</i> for chorus, cello, and 2 percussionists
1998	<i>In the Shadow of the Tree</i> for koto, bass koto
1999	<i>Two Paths (A Dedication to Mary and Martha)</i> for 2 violas and orchestra

[NB This list excludes around 30 film and theatre scores]

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VALENTIN VASIL'YEVICH SIL'VESTROV

Chronology

1937	Born 30 September in Kiev
1952-55	Studies at Stetsenko Evening Music School
1955-58	Studies at Kiev Institute of Construction Engineering
1958-64	Studies with Lyatoshinsky at Tchaikovsky Conservatoire, Kiev
1960	First Piano Sonata
1961	Piano Quintet
	<i>Triada</i> for piano
	5 Pieces for piano
	<i>Quartetto piccolo</i> for string quartet
1962	Trio for flute, trumpet, and celesta
1963	First Symphony
1964	<i>Mystery</i> for flute and percussion
1965	Second Symphony for flute, percussion, piano, and strings
	<i>Spectre</i> for orchestra
	<i>Monody</i> , concerto for piano and orchestra
1966	Third Symphony, "Escatophony"
1967	<i>Hymn</i> for orchestra
1968	Poem in Memory of Lyatoshinsky for orchestra
1970	Violin Sonata
1971	<i>Drama</i> for piano trio
1972	<i>Meditation</i> , symphony for cello and orchestra

	rev. First Piano Sonata [see 1960]
1973	Pieces in Olden Style 1-7
	Children's Music, Books 1 and 2 , for piano
	Cantata for soprano and chamber orchestra
1974	First String Quartet
1974-77	<i>Quiet Songs</i> , song-cycle for voice and piano
1975	Second Piano Sonata
1976	Fourth Symphony
1977	<i>Kitsch Music</i> for piano
1978	<i>Serenade</i> for string orchestra
1979	Third Piano Sonata
1981	<i>Postlude</i> for violin
1982	Fifth Symphony
1983	Cello Sonata
1984-85	<i>Postludium</i> for piano and orchestra
1988	Second String Quartet

[NB This list excludes an unknown number of choral and cinema scores]

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BORIS IVANOVICH TISHCHENKO

Chronology

1939	Born 23 March in Leningrad
195?- 62	Studies at Leningrad Conservatoire with Salmanov
1956	Variations for piano, Opus 1
	Rondo for violin and piano, Opus 2
1957	First Piano Sonata , Opus 3
	First Suite for piano, Opus 4
	First Violin Sonata (Unaccompanied) , Opus 5
	Second Suite for piano, Opus 6
	Prelude and Fugue for strings/string quartet, Opus 7
	First Quartet , Opus 8
1958	First Violin Concerto , Opus 9
	<i>A White Stork</i> , song-cycle, Opus 10
	<i>A Muleteer</i> , fable for piano, Opus 11
	French Symphony (after Anatole France), Opus 12
1959	Second String Quartet , Opus 13
	<i>Yueh-Fu</i> , 4 unaccompanied choruses on Chinese texts, Opus 14/1
	<i>Energy</i> , fugue for unaccompanied chorus, Opus 14/2
	<i>Lenin Is Alive</i> , cantata on verses by Mayakovsky, Opus 15
	<i>Virgin Soil Upturned</i> , inc music after Sholokov's novel, Opus 16
	<i>The Wedding Song</i> for female chorus, Opus 16a

1960	Second Piano Sonata , Opus 17
	First Cello Sonata (Unaccompanied) , Opus 18
	3 Riddles for piano, Opus 19
1961	First Symphony , Opus 20
1962	Piano Concerto , Opus 21
	Melancholy Songs , Opus 22, song-cycle for soprano and piano
1962-5	Studies with Shostakovich at Leningrad Conservatoire
1963	First Cello Concerto , Opus 23 (orchestrated by Shostakovich, 1969)
	<i>Danaïde</i> , symphonic poem, Opus 24
	<i>The Twelve</i> , ballet after Blok, Opus 25
	<i>Octaves</i> for orchestra, Opus 26
1964	12 Inventions for organ, Opus 27
	Second Symphony, "Marina" , Opus 28 (after Tsvetayeva), choir and orchestra
	rev First Violin Concerto , Opus 29 [see 1958]
	<i>Suzdal</i> , suite for soprano, tenor, and chamber orchestra, Opus 30
1965	Capriccio for violin and piano, Opus 31
	Third Piano Sonata , Opus 32
	<i>Palekh</i> for orchestra, Opus 34
1966	Requiem for sop, ten, & orch (on verses by Akhmatova), Opus 35
	Third Symphony for chamber orchestra, Opus 36
1967	orch. Monteverdi's <i>L'Incoronazione di Poppea</i> , Opus 37
	<i>The Death of Pushkin</i> , dramatic music, Opus 38
1968	<i>The Golden Bee</i> , ballet, Opus 39 (after Kornei Chukovsky)

	<i>The Stolen Sun</i> opera, Opus 40 (after Kornei Chukovsky)
	<i>The Cockroach Home</i> comedy, Opus 41 (after Kornei Chukovsky)
	<i>Northern Exercises</i> , suite, Opus 42
1969	Second Cello Concerto , Opus 44
1970	2 Pieces for percussion, Opus 45
	<i>Sinfonia Robusta</i> ballet, Opus 46
	Fourth String Quartet , Opus 47
	3 Tsvetayeva Songs , Opus 48
1972	<i>Gagaku</i> , Opus 52 Nos 1 and 2
	orch. 3 Choruses from Prokofiev's <i>Boris Godunov</i> , Opus 52b
	Fourth Piano Sonata , Opus 53
	Concerto for flute, piano and strings , Opus 54
1973	<i>Circus</i> , suite, Opus 55
	Fifth Piano Sonata , Opus 56
	5 Songs , Opus 57
	<i>Eclipse</i> , ballet, Opus 58
1974	<i>Hard Frost</i> , aria for mezzo and orchestra, Opus 60a
	Fourth Symphony for narrator and orchestra (after Turgenev), Opus 61
1975	<i>A Lark</i> , suite, Opus 62
	Second Violin Sonata , Opus 63
	Sixth Piano Sonata , Opus 64
1976	Fifth Symphony (In memoriam Dmitri Shostakovich), Opus 67
1977	Harp Concerto , Opus 69

1979	Second Cello Sonata , Opus 76
1980	Fourth String Quartet , Opus 77
	orch. Shostakovich , <i>Satires</i> , Opus 81
1981	Second Violin Concerto , Opus 84
1982	Seventh Piano Sonata , Opus 85, for piano and tubular bells
1983	Praeludium in E for orchestra, Opus 87
1984	Fifth String Quartet , Opus 90
	<i>The Siege Chronicles</i> , symphony, Opus 92
1985	Piano Quintet , Opus 93
	4 Pieces for solo tuba, Opus 94
1986	<i>The Will</i> for soprano, harp and organ, Opus 96
	orch. Shostakovich , <i>Songs of Captain Lebyadkin</i> , Opus 97
	<i>To My Brother</i> for soprano, flute and harp, Opus 98
	Eighth Piano Sonata , Opus 99
1987	<i>The Garden of Music</i> , Opus 101, cantata for soprano, mezzo, baritone, piano trio
	<i>Heart of A Dog</i> , Opus 104 (after Bulgakov), for chamber ensemble
1988	Sixth Symphony for sop, contr, and orchestra, Opus 105
1989	<i>Concerto alla marcia</i> for 16 soloists, Opus 106
	orch. Shostakovich , <i>Rayok</i> , Opus 108
1990	Concerto for clarinet and piano trio , Opus 109
1991	orch. 4 Songs by Grieg , Opus 111
1992	Twelve Portraits for organ, Opus 113
	Ninth Piano Sonata , Opus 114

1993	orch. 7 Songs by Mahler , Opus 115
1993	rev. French Symphony , Opus 116 [see 1958]
1994	Fantasy for violin and piano, Opus 118
	Seventh Symphony , Opus 119

[NB This list excludes around 30 film and theatre scores]

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REVIEW



VAINBERG

Piano Trio, Opus 24 (1945)

*Children's Notebooks I-III (19?)

Irina Tkachenko (violin); Tatiana Zavorskaya (cello)

*Anatoli Sheludyakov (piano)

Olympia OCD 581 [69:36/DDD]

Olympia's Vainberg series reaches Volume 5 and the fascination of this composer continues to grow. As with the [earlier Olympia issues](#), not to mention Russian Disc's Vainberg discs, there is a close relationship with the work of the composer's mentor and friend Shostakovich; and, as before, the influence runs back and forth between them. For example, the opening Prelude and Aria of Vainberg's Piano Trio draws on the Prelude of Shostakovich's Piano Quintet of 1940, while at the same time offering a model for the first movement of Shostakovich's Fourth String Quartet (1949). Elsewhere, especially in the piano pieces of the Children's Notebooks, Vainberg takes as much from Prokofiev as from Shostakovich, yet the music is always totally - and often fiercely - his own.

Speaking of ferocity, the Piano Trio presents Vainberg at his most intense. A Polish Jew, he lost most of his family to the Nazis, burned alive during the onslaught on Warsaw in 1939. Composing the Trio in 1945, he would surely have been dwelling on the newly-discovered SS death camps in his homeland, not to mention the equally recent Nazi repression of the Warsaw Uprising (condoned by the Red Army). Compared to his richly-textured Piano Quintet of 1944 (Olympia OCD 474), the Piano Trio is stark, angular, and dissonant to the point of intermittent atonality. It is as if the flesh of this music has been scalded off its bones by a searing fusion of anger and anguish. Shadowing the "Jewish"

finale of Shostakovich's Second Piano Trio in its last movement, Vainberg's Piano Trio nevertheless holds its own by virtue of its intensity, intelligence, and constant invention. Suffice it to say that this performance (made in Moscow a little under six months ago) attains the extremities of feeling latent in this score, which is all one could ask for from a première recording.

In the Children's Notebooks, Anatoli Sheludyakov is too closely recorded to avoid pedal noise in the quieter pieces, but his interpretation is both secure and true to a range of imagery and emotion which would baffle, even frighten, all but the most thoughtful of children. Though sometimes simple enough to be played by beginners, these twenty-three short compositions are actually somewhere between musical parables for open young ears and stylistic studies in childlike directness in the face of intense experience. Thus, as well as expressions of innocence, we find here love lyrics, violent dances, and two death pieces of a skeletal eloquence which recall the saturnine moods of Alkan's shorter pieces. Not, perhaps, a first choice for anyone setting out to explore Vainberg, this disc will be gratefully snapped up by those who have already decided that they need to find out everything they can about this shamefully neglected composer.

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REVIEW



POPOV

Symphonic Suite No. 1, *Komsomol is the Chief of Electrification* (1932)

***Symphony No. 5 in A major, Op. 77, "Pastoral" (1956)**

Moscow Radio and TV Symphony Orchestra/Edvard Chivzhel

***USSR State Symphony Orchestra/Gurgen Karapetian**

Olympia OCD598 [62:40/ADD]

The third issue devoted to [Gavriil Popov](#) in Olympia's Soviet Symphonies series offers two works from wide apart in his career. Bridging the stylistic gap between his First and Sixth symphonies, his Fifth is extraordinarily *outré* for a work finished in 1956 - not so much in its unorthodox form as in its feeling, concluding as it does with twenty minutes of glowingly ecstatic free-tempo slow music with absolutely no objective application in the Soviet world. At its best, this five-movement work, running continuously for threequarters of an hour, is rather stunning; yet long stretches are vague and gestural in a way more than hinting at the influence of its composer's alcoholism, incurred as a result of his clashes with the *apparat*.

Here, the composer's characteristically eclectic bag of influences - Mahler's Fifth and Ninth, *The Fountains of Rome*, *The Rite of Spring*, *The Poem of Ecstasy*, *Daphnis et Chloé*, possibly even Delius - are incautiously close to the surface, sloshing about in a golden haze of rapturous tremolando and intoxicated surges from key to key. A pellmell contrapuntal scherzo confirms the great talent lying behind all this, as does much of the "sloshing about" itself; but this euphoric rhapsody of a symphony is, in the end, lost to vodka. All the more remarkable that Popov recovered full control in his [Sixth](#) - a screaming masterpiece (and I use those words advisedly).

Despite its failure, Popov's Fifth lingers and haunts, as does the accompanying film suite, written before the onset of Socialist Realism and as full of passionate and idiosyncratic expression as the symphony. A bouquet to Olympia for a disc of remarkable, if sometimes somewhat befuddled, music. A curse on the malign idiots who ran the USSR for driving a potentially terrific composer to drink.

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An interpretation of the composer's relationship with the Soviet regime

by Ian MacDonald

Part One: The Gambler

Leaving Revolutionary Russia for the West in May 1918, Sergei Prokofiev was given a message from an important figure whose identity was not revealed to him: "You are running away from events, and these events will never forgive you when you return. You will not be understood."

This prediction was to be only half-fulfilled. Events, or at any rate their human agents, did not forgive the composer and, by his death 35 years later, they had taken a terrible revenge on him. The lack of understanding, however, proved to be all Prokofiev's. He was a highly intelligent if somewhat self-centred man, and this impercipient did not last forever - merely long enough for illumination to arrive too late.

Prokofiev lived in Paris during the Twenties and continued to do so for four years after his "return" to Russia in 1932. During his visits to the USSR, he lodged like a foreigner at Moscow's Hotel National, leaving his Spanish wife Lina at home with their sons Svyatoslav and Oleg. Temperamentally he was a dry and egocentric aesthete; politically, an unreconstructed capitalist. What could have possessed a man like this, at 40, to lay everything he had won from fifteen years of Western fame upon the indifferent altar of Soviet Communism?

Shostakovich's explanation in *Testimony* is that Prokofiev knew that Soviet culture was becoming fashionable in the West and that the USSR would not long tolerate him as a weekend guest. A permanent move to Moscow would improve his image from both angles while simultaneously putting him beyond the reach of certain parties in Europe to whom he owed money in connection with his interest in poker.

Some may call such deductions too cynical. For instance, Prokofiev's fellow émigré Nikolai Nabokov recalls him in Paris "continuously repeating that the Revolution for him was an inescapable, positive event of Russia's national history, and that he did not see in it, as so many of his compatriots did at the time, a desperate and fatal calamity". On the contrary, Nabokov insists, "he believed that the Russian Revolution was teaching a lesson to the West and would ultimately lead to a regeneration of European society".

If genuine, Prokofiev's high-minded stance of the mid-Twenties represents a remarkable shift from the position he had taken during the Revolution itself. Then, with bullets humming down the boulevards of Petrograd, he had stayed indoors writing the anti-Bolshevik cantata *Seven, They Are Seven*, using lines by Balmont based on inscriptions from an Akkadian temple:

Charity they know not,
Shame they know not,
Prayers they heed not, to entreaties they are deaf!
Earth and heaven shrink before them,
They clamp down whole countries as behind prison gates,
They grind nations, as nations grind grain!

An unlikely socialist

On his own admission, Prokofiev's grasp of politics was so slight that any conclusion he drew about the USSR, particularly from a distance, could only have been based on self-interest. It is, after all, fair to ask why, if he believed so strongly in the Soviet "experiment", he happened to be living in Paris. The recent publication of the composer's *Soviet Diary 1927* shows that his attitude in that year to Communism was sceptical to the point of fundamental distrust - the typical Russian bourgeois position of the time. (In fact, given his background and social tastes, this is likely to have been his abiding stance towards the Soviet regime from 1917 onwards.)

During the mid-to-late Twenties, iconoclastic modernism was Prokofiev's calling card and being hailed by European critics as "an apostle of Bolshevism" for the constructivist ballet *Le Pas d'acier* was as useful in building a lucrative notoriety as being smeared by the American press as "a tool of Soviet propaganda" for the same composition.

This is not to deny that acquaintance with the Changing Landmarks school of fellow-travelling émigré writers and conversations with the ballet's scenarist Sergei Yakulov (and later with Maxim Gorky in Sorrento) may have influenced Prokofiev into a rosier view of the Revolution than he might naturally have taken. What, though, would have carried more weight with him was favourable news of his standing at home - and, in the liberal era of the New Economic Policy (NEP), such news was not hard to come by.

Under the aegis of Anatoly Lunacharsky, People's Commissar for Enlightenment and a keen Prokofiev fan, the composer's music was being heard in both the opera house (*The Love For Three Oranges* in 1926) and the concert hall (by the conductorless Persimfans orchestra). Nor is there any doubt that Prokofiev badly missed Russia ("The air! The soil!"). Careful to retain his passport and ensure that all formalities were scrupulously observed when leaving in 1918, he clearly had a long-term plan,

conditions permitting, for coming back - one perhaps so cherished that he was prepared to go a considerable way in self-deception in order to fulfil it.

Had he entertained a deeper interest in what was going on in his homeland, he might not have persuaded himself so easily. The "error" of *Seven, They Are Seven* was not the sort of thing lightly overlooked by the new regime, whose watchdogs were notorious for missing and forgiving nothing. Unknown to him, the composer had become an obsessive hate figure to Soviet Left activists.

Prokofiev versus the Left

Initially, events conspired to keep this from him. When, in January 1927, he made his first tentative return to the Soviet Union, the political scene was deceptively calm. Prokofiev met his old friend Nikolai Myaskovsky in Moscow, visited Leningrad to hear the 20-year-old prodigy of Soviet music Dmitri Shostakovich play his First Piano Sonata, and gave several concerts. Audiences applauded the elegant virtuoso whose music was officially said to be advancing the cause of the Revolution abroad.

His second visit, in November 1929, was very different. With Stalin in power, NEP had given way to the rigours of the First Five Year Plan and the radical Left were in full cry against "bourgeois individualism". Suspecting nothing, Prokofiev was invited to attend the Bolshoi's audition of his ballet *Le Pas d'acier*, an angular Modernist work depicting the industrialisation of Russia. Written to an opportunist commission from Diaghilev in 1925 when Soviet culture was first becoming chic in the West, the ballet had scandalised Europe, establishing Prokofiev as the daring "red composer" of the avant garde.

Despite the fact that to the Communist Left, he was an irredeemable "enemy of Soviet culture", Prokofiev must have assumed the work's success in the USSR to be a foregone conclusion. If *Le Pas d'acier* was an artist's fantasy of what life ought to have been like in modern Russia, the "comradely" discussion that followed it rudely introduced its composer to the reality of Soviet life in one of its ugliest phases.

A more diplomatic man might have disarmed his critics, but Prokofiev's response to charges of "dilettantism" was a display of terse arrogance. Tearing into the ballet with hyperbolic fury, the Leftists damned it as "a counter-revolutionary composition bordering on Fascism" and, powerless to do otherwise, the Bolshoi's directors turned it down. A piqued Prokofiev departed for Paris to reassess his position.

Despite this ominous brush with raw revolution, Prokofiev's renewed fascination with Mother Russia diluted what should have been a resolve never to go there again into a characteristically expedient decision to wait and see. Dismissing Rachmaninov and Stravinsky - who had had the sense to put Russia behind them - as rootless and declining talents, he projected his own brief lack of inspiration (*On the*

Dnieper, the Fourth Piano Concerto) onto Western art as a whole, declaring it precious and irrelevant. In effect, he was already trapped, unable to do much more than wait for better news from the country he had convinced himself he couldn't do without.

In April 1932, Prokofiev heard what he took to be *The Word*: the Central Committee's decree on the restructuring of existing artistic factions into centralised unions. The Left was no more, its adherents forswearing their "vulgar sociology" to embrace the new official creed of Socialist Realism.

Sold as paternalistic concern for the welfare of Soviet culture, Stalin's unionisation of art actually entailed total control of creativity in the service of the state, the sordid work of coercion to be visited by the artists upon each other. As in other walks of Soviet life, this allowed the talentless to avenge themselves on the talented by every means from bureaucratic scheming to posting anonymous "denunciations" to the secret police.

Prokofiev was not alone in being deceived by the 1932 decree; even Shostakovich, whose experience of political arm twisting was already extensive, welcomed it (or let himself be officially presented as so doing). Prokofiev does, however, seem to have allotted wishful thinking an imprudent prominence in his analysis of events. Chatting with Viktor Seroff in Paris before leaving for Moscow, he explained how he saw it:

"Here I have to kow-tow to publishers, managers, committees, sponsors of productions, patronesses of art, and conductors each time I wish my work to be performed. A composer doesn't have to do that in Russia. And as for 'politics', they don't concern me. It is none of my business."

Sadly, Prokofiev's acquaintance with both politics and kow-towing was only just beginning.

Despite his highly publicised "return" to the USSR, the composer spent much of the next four years in Paris, where his family remained and where he wrote most of his Soviet commissions. How far this failure to commit himself was due to caution is unclear. His closest adviser Myaskovsky had consistently warned him to stay put and his Western contacts never hid their own misgivings. More importantly, his wife Lina strongly wished to avoid uprooting herself in order to move to a colourless world in which makeup was derided as "the mask of the society matron" and tracking down the makings of a decent dinner required either a Party card or the patience of a saint.

Nonetheless, Prokofiev remained convinced that he should go. Without doubt, nostalgia was the main impulse, with the lure of being a big fish in a small pond an enticing secondary consideration. However, he seems also to have genuinely believed that the situation in Russia would better not only his own work, but the state of music in general.

From sheltered affluence to Socialist Realism

Mindful of the propaganda coup of securing Prokofiev's allegiance to the USSR, the Soviet authorities were misleadingly accommodating. "They paid court to him," writes Galina Vishnevskaya, "treated him with kid gloves, and tried to persuade him to return to Russia. They even paid his fees in foreign currency."

The carrot was, however, accompanied by a discreet stick: until the composer's family and furniture followed him to Moscow, he could not become a full Soviet citizen with all the benefits that this entailed. Since one such benefit was a "luxury apartment" (as, from 1933, was awarded to any artist proving himself a reliable conduit of state propaganda), Prokofiev stayed mostly in Soviet hotels, his contact with the outside world limited to official newspapers and phone-calls to Lina in Paris.

At first, he had too much trouble finding his feet on the cultural scene to notice which way the political wind was blowing. Arriving at a time when everyone was trying hard not to be something called a Formalist and the benchmark of artistic success was being set by elephantine novels about hydroelectric dams, Prokofiev was puzzled to discover that, from the perspective of Socialist Realism, his recent neoclassical scores lacked "actuality of subject matter".

On the other hand there were, he was told, vast quantities of this peculiar substance in his friend Myaskovsky's "Collective Farm" Symphony and the grandiose "song symphonies" of Lev Knipper. Fortunately, before he was forced to try his hand at a Soviet Hotel Symphony, Prokofiev was asked to score *Lieutenant Kije*. Ruined by the censor, the film sank without trace but the music, salvaged as a suite, was a big hit with the Soviet public.

Prokofiev's hit, silk ties, and patrician manner predictably infuriated the ex-Leftists, now jockeying for position in the Composers' Union. Playing on his vanity, they tempted him into compromising remarks and he incautiously obliged them, observing that to ignore new developments in Western music would render Soviet composers "provincial" and calling for a new "grand style" suited to the requirements of a heroic people (which his enemies deliberately misinterpreted as meaning one style for the intelligentsia and another for the workers).

Meanwhile, the lull in political upheavals came to an abrupt end on 1st December 1934 with the murder of Leningrad party boss Sergei Kirov (shot, on Stalin's order, so as to provide an excuse for a more sweepingly efficient destruction of the dictator's enemies - the only commodity in Russia of which there was an apparently limitless supply).

Was Prokofiev worried by these developments? Seemingly not. So wrapped up in his work that the fate of others failed to deflate his perpetual optimism, he had not even noticed that he was running out of friends. Lunacharsky was dead and Gorky about to join him. Myaskovsky, though still faithful, was toeing the Party line in every work he produced. But the most ominous indications surrounded Prokofiev's staunchest supporter, the theatre director Vsevolod Meyerhold.

In the aftermath of the Kirov assassination, Party meetings all over Russia had turned into confessional sessions on various themes, one of which was repentance for "former infatuation with the theatre of Meyerhold". As the pace of events accelerated in 1935, "Meyerholdism", signifying an effete brand of "anti-people" élitism, brewed up into a scandal - and Prokofiev, one of Meyerhold's most obviously effete associates, was a prime candidate for being drawn into it.

Yet far from looking to his safety, he was enjoying an idyllic summer in the country with Lina and the children, composing *Romeo and Juliet* and the Second Violin Concerto. Still ostensibly oblivious of the changing climate, he left Lina in Moscow to prepare for the final move six months later, took the boys back to Paris for their last year at lycée, and toured the new concerto through Southern Europe, returning to Russia in time for the New Year.

Questions and quandaries

With Stalin's Great Terror imminent, Prokofiev's apparent freedom to come and go as he pleased is a puzzle since, apart from him, no one outside the security organs was then allowed to leave Russia. Had the storm broken without his wife and children safely in the USSR, the government would have had no leverage over him and he might have stayed away, to the embarrassment of its image abroad. Were the Soviets taking a calculated risk to keep Prokofiev sweet by letting him tour? Or was Lina's winter sojourn in Moscow a form of collateral against the chance of him baling out?

Against this, it must be said that the authorities let the Prokofievs go abroad again in January to wind up their affairs in Paris - and this just before the *Pravda* attacks on Shostakovich shook Soviet music to its foundations. It is tempting to suppose that Prokofiev was simply too politically naive to realise which way the wind was blowing; yet such a deduction is arguably too simple. (See, for example, the remarks on the Second Violin Concerto in [Part Three](#) of this article.)

Conceivably, the composer felt irrevocably committed to a final return, trapped by his pro-Soviet public statements (or his foreign gambling debts). Perhaps he believed nothing terrible could befall an apolitical man in Russia so long as he did and said the right things. (His only work during his January stopover was on the mass-songs of Opus 66, a simplistic idiom to which he had previously been too fastidious to stoop.) Whatever the truth, neither the *Pravda* affair nor the urgent counselling of his friends in Paris were enough to slow the momentum of his careering life.

In March 1936, he returned to Moscow, leaving Lina and the boys to follow him. This time, the change of atmosphere was unignorable. The Terror had begun in earnest, the papers were full of denunciations, and a regime of silent anxiety had entered daily life. According to Seroff, the authorities now withdrew the composer's passport, stranding him in the Metropol Hotel:

"He did not even have Lina with whom to share the daily gruesome news... All he could do was to write meaningless postcards (all letters were censored) and keep telephoning her, urging her to come to him. He was virtually a prisoner of the State."

Part Two

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Below: Prokofiev with Svyatoslav, Oleg, and Lina in 1936



Prokofiev, Prisoner of the State

An interpretation of the composer's relationship with the Soviet regime

by Ian MacDonald

Part Two: ...Into the Fire

In May 1936, Prokofiev's wife and sons finally made the move to Moscow. What pressure, if any, was then exerted on the family by the Soviet authorities is unknown, but if ever there was a time not to settle in Russia, this was it. Having spent the last four years vacillating, Prokofiev found himself trapped in precisely the predicament he might have hoped to avoid.

The situation was, by any standard, unnerving. The waves of arrests that had been building since 1935 were now mountainous and, as the year progressed, the trials of Stalin's rivals trailed a parade of grotesque confessions across the pages of the world's press. Had Prokofiev been at the emergency session of the Soviet Composers' Union in Moscow that February (he was on tour in Europe), he might yet have reconsidered his move to Russia. Convened to debate the *Pravda* editorials of 28th January and 6th February accusing Shostakovich of "anti-people Formalism", these proceedings soon degenerated into frenzied denunciation of everyone in sight.

Quick to join in was Tikhon Khrennikov, a mediocrity determined to make a splash. "Too late," notes Viktor Seroff, "in denouncing Shostakovich, Khrennikov was anxious to be the first to assail Sergei

Prokofiev, thus showing his foresight, a quality much appreciated by the Communist Party". Seizing on Prokofiev's unguarded remarks of 1934 about "provincialism" and a new "grand style", Khrennikov demanded to know how this foreign Formalist dared lecture loyal Bolsheviks on composing music for a revolution he had run away from.

Returning to the USSR in March, Prokofiev got himself into hotter water by venturing that a sensible definition of Formalism might be "music which one does not understand at first hearing". However, fine points of aesthetics were not greatly valued by those now engaged in terrorising the Soviet people into numbed submission. The composer began to find it hard to get work.

A crash-course in Communism

Reasoning shrewdly that a piece for children could cause no offence, Prokofiev came up with *Peter and the Wolf*, such an immediate hit with Russian youngsters that barring it from the repertoire was impossible. After this, however, things got distinctly unpleasant.

For inscrutable reasons, the Bolshoi production of *Romeo and Juliet* was suddenly cancelled; then, invited to contribute some pieces to the Pushkin centenary, Prokofiev found, on delivering them, that they were not wanted. The mass-songs of Opus 66 having failed to redeem him, he resolved to come straight to the point with his *Cantata for the 20th Anniversary of the October Revolution*.

Using texts by the big three of Soviet Communism, Marx, Lenin, and Stalin, Prokofiev appears to have assumed he had caught the style in vogue - yet, once again, he misjudged the situation. The cantata was intercepted at its audition by Stalin's underlings who rubbished it for "Leftist deviation and vulgarity" (i. e., for dragging Marx and Lenin into it).

Desperate to contribute something - anything - to the 20th anniversary, the composer threw together a concoction of folk-tunes and Party singalongs entitled *Songs Of Our Days*. Mysteriously held back till 1938, the work was thereupon dismissed as "pale and lacking in individuality". Prokofiev must by now have been utterly bewildered. If he wrote like a simpleton, he was a depersonalised Left deviationist; if he wrote like Prokofiev, he was a mercenary Formalist. Individual, non-individual... there must have seemed no rhyme or reason to it - and, of course, none existed.

The novelist Ilya Ehrenburg, who met the composer at the Moscow Writers' Club around this time, records that "he was unhappy, even grim, and said to me, 'Today one must work; work's the only thing, the only salvation'". Insuring himself against creative impotence by turning inwards, Prokofiev started on his autobiography, *Childhood*.

A human chess-piece

As an item of human Soviet state property, and with his family as hostages - this being the term then used to cover such delicate situations - Prokofiev could be sent abroad on propaganda trips with no risk of defection. Thus, in December 1936 and again in early 1938, he was dispatched on propaganda concert tours of the West.

Nikolai Nabokov, who met him during these trips, saw, in place of his usual breezy demeanour, a "profound and terrible insecurity", while an American hostess recalls Prokofiev as a "grouch" who sat through dinner without saying a word. Doubtless partly a sombre realisation that, once back in Russia, he could kiss goodbye to cordon bleu, his bad temper had another more sinister cause: he was under NKVD surveillance.

According to Seroff, "he avoided his former close friends, and if by any chance he happened to meet one of them, he made a quick sign with his eyes indicating that he was being watched". Though invited back to the States the following year, Prokofiev was prevented from going and the 1938 trip was his last crossing of the Russian border.

Shortly after returning home, his luck changed. The director Sergei Eisenstein had been ordered to film an anti-Nazi version of the life of Alexander Nevsky, the medieval prince of Novgorod who defeated the invading Teutonic Knights.

Like Prokofiev, Eisenstein had returned to the USSR in 1932, though he had thereupon vanished from view so completely that for years it was thought that he had been liquidated as a "renegade".

Reappearing on the world stage as a victim of the drive against Formalism in 1937, he had been reprimanded for "overweening conceit and aloofness from Soviet reality" and had since been unable to find work. All things considered, a lot hung on *Alexander Nevsky* for both men and, working under tight government supervision, they were careful to do exactly what they gathered Stalin wanted. Their luck held: Stalin approved.

En prise

Capitalising on his winner, Prokofiev broke off work on his First Violin Sonata to turn *Nevsky* into a cantata. Opportunism triumphed over art: the public loved it. Moving smoothly to repeat the formula, he began an opera, *Semyon Kotko*, about German atrocities in the Ukraine in 1918, planning to have it directed by his friend Meyerhold.

Like Eisenstein, Meyerhold had been pilloried in 1937, while his theatre had been closed as "alien and hostile to Soviet aims". Enjoying a good argument, he had given as good as he got in a way no one else

ever dared do, his subsequent survival being widely regarded as a kind of paranormal phenomenon. He was, in short, trouble, and Prokofiev's belief that he could transmit his own rehabilitation to Meyerhold by involving him in his next triumph proved to be yet another mistake.

In June 1939, the director was arrested and his actress wife gruesomely murdered. Shaken, Prokofiev begged Eisenstein to take over but, thinking fast, the latter replied that he was busy. Then, in August 1939, the Hitler-Stalin Pact was signed and suddenly operas about German atrocities were no longer in demand. Following a visit from Prosecutor Vishinsky, *Semyon Kotko* turned into an opera about Austrian atrocities (the Ukrainian setting being retained in order to avoid having to repaint the scenery).

Towards the end of the year, Meyerhold died in jail under torture. Prokofiev's opera survived a short season before being taken off and left unplayed for twenty years. Meanwhile, he hastily concluded his autobiography (at a diplomatically early age) and wrote *Hail To Stalin* for the dictator's 60th birthday, receiving a gruff acknowledgement from the Boss for his thoughtfulness.

A quiet war

Summer 1940 found Prokofiev understandably warding off reality with the light opera *Betrothal in a Monastery*, begun at the suggestion of a young lady called Mira Mendelson who had shown him the Sheridan play on which the work is based. Where she popped up from is unknown. All that can be said for certain is that Prokofiev and Lina separated (or were separated) in 1941, after which Mira became his secretary and de facto wife until his death.

That she was politically orthodox is conceivably of no sinister significance. More important was that she made him happy, to some extent softened his character, and inspired him to create. Accompanying him on evacuation to the Caucasus at the start of the war, she soon had him working on *War and Peace* and *Cinderella*. Friends were astonished to report him smiling.

The success of *Romeo and Juliet*, at last produced by the Kirov in 1940, compensated for the disaster of *Semyon Kotko* and Prokofiev's return to favour was cemented by the Seventh Piano Sonata in 1942. A halcyon period now ensued, his Second Violin Sonata, Fifth Symphony, *Cinderella*, and score for Eisenstein's *Ivan the Terrible Part I* making him Russia's most popular composer. He seemed, finally, to have found his Soviet feet.

Stalin, meanwhile, chose to mark victory in the Great Patriotic War by decreeing an era of chauvinism in which all Western inventions were said to have been made first by Russians and the price of a warm remark about the Allies was twenty-five years' cold storage in Siberia. Accompanying this came a new wave of purges directed by Stalin's hatchetman Zhdanov, who was soon attacking Eisenstein's failure, in *Ivan the Terrible Part II*, to depict the Tsar with the correct Stalin-like dignity. (Stalin had recently formed the view that Ivan had been a previous incarnation of his.) This blow broke Eisenstein and must

have shocked Prokofiev, whose music was all over the soundtrack.

Around this time, his usual productivity tapered off. Apart from completing the First Violin Sonata, his attention was for eighteen months devoted to the Sixth Symphony, a brooding, tragic work which absorbed him deeply. Premiered by Mravinsky in Leningrad in October 1947, it drew thirty minutes of applause from an audience to whom it clearly spoke volumes.

Crackdown

But an ill wind was blowing. Orders from above halted rehearsals on Part II of *War and Peace*, the trouble this time being Prokofiev's disrespectful portrait of the great revolutionary liberator Napoleon (who, being roughly the same height as Stalin, might, after all, have been confused with him by the unsophisticated).

Music's turn to feel Zhdanov's boot on its neck came in February 1948. Officially, the cause was the failure of Vano Muradeli's opera *The Great Friendship* to entertain the Boss. Semi-officially, it was sparked by Politburo fury over the poor showing of the country's leading composers at the Revolution's 40th anniversary (Prokofiev's *Flourish, Mighty Land*, Myaskovsky's *The Kremlin At Night*, and Shostakovich's *Poem Of The Motherland* having all been flops).

In fact, the '48 affair, another step in the mechanisation of Russia's intellectual life, had been in the pipeline for years. From a file supplied by Khrennikov, Zhdanov was able to inform the assembly that not only had Prokofiev enjoyed a privileged youth attended by "downtrodden" servants, but that there was no record of him having helped the peasants with the harvest. On the contrary, he had, like a typical exploiter, lounged indoors playing the piano. Other contributors wished it to be known that the composer dressed like a dandy, had soft hands, and owned an American razor.

Too unwell to attend, Prokofiev was obliged to thank the Party for its guiding wisdom and admit his "alien" Formalism in a letter read before the Central Committee. (Published in the Soviet press, this confession, to which he probably contributed little more than his signature, duly baffled Western observers.) To drive the point home, the composer's Sixth Symphony, "War Sonatas", and works written between abroad 1918 and 1932 were all banned. Rocked by the death of Eisenstein, Prokofiev became seriously ill.

Endgame

Fate pursued him relentlessly. His marriage to Lina annulled by a decree forbidding matrimony between Soviet citizens and foreign nationals, Prokofiev was "advised" to wed Mira, with which order he

complied in January 1948. The legal niceties out of the way, the authorities now arrested Lina, awarding her ten years for "espionage". (She had asked the American ambassador to send some money to her mother in Paris.) Deported to the Arctic colony of Vorkuta, she never saw her husband again.

Soon after came the fiasco of the composer's dutiful song-opera *The Story Of A Real Man*, ruined because the orchestra were too frightened about playing music by an Enemy of the People to be able to stop their fingers shaking. The egregious Khrennikov, now First Secretary of the Composers' Union, dutifully savaged the work for "bourgeois Formalism, anti-melodious content, and lack of understanding of Soviet heroism and Soviet humanity" - not so much criticism as a deliberate attempt to break Prokofiev's spirit and health for good. Six months later, the same treatment was meted out to his ballet *The Stone Flower*.

The composer's final years were a scandalous tale of neglect. In 1950, the state awarded him Stalin Prizes, second grade, for his suite *Winter Bonfire* and oratorio *On Guard for Peace* - but this was little more than a pretence of rehabilitation linked to the so-called "struggle for peace", a strategy by Stalin to mobilise pacifism in the West by using Soviet artists as cultural ambassadors.

Apart from the care of Mira, the only saving grace of Prokofiev's last period was his relationship with the young cellist Mstislav Rostropovich. Deprived of income, he was, for the first time in his life, experiencing hardship. Rostropovich's wife Galina Vishnevskaya has described how her husband, finding a "helpless and bewildered" Prokofiev unable to pay his cook, went and shouted at Khrennikov until he coughed up some union funds.

The composer's last works were either conformist or noncommittal. Even the quietest pages of his Symphony-Concerto are guarded, as if he feared to be accused of musical "facecrime" - of not smiling confidently enough at the prospect of his country's ever-receding "radiant future". "My soul hurts," he kept whispering to Mira during his final illness.

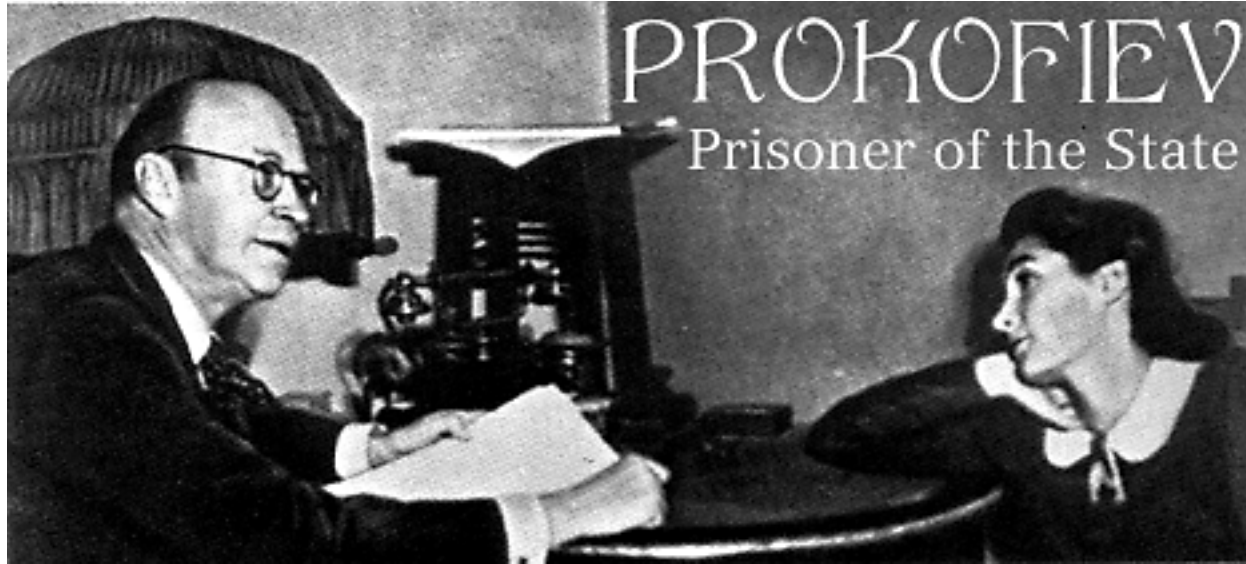
Prokofiev died on 5th March 1953, fifty-five minutes before Stalin. He was 61. At his memorial service, David Oistrakh played the first and third movements of the composer's First Violin Sonata. Then 37, Mira Mendelson devoted herself to looking after the composer's archive and effects until her own death in 1968.

[Part Three](#)

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Below: Prokofiev with Mira Mendelson



An interpretation of the composer's relationship with the Soviet regime

by Ian MacDonald

Part Three: The Protest Music

In an official symposium on the composer in 1954, Ilya Ehrenburg, encoding his meaning in the way customary under such circumstances, observed:

"Posterity will not be able to understand our difficult and glorious period of life without intently listening to the works of Sergei Prokofiev, and contemplating his extraordinary fate."

Had Ehrenburg said this about Shostakovich, few Western pundits (in recent years, at least) would have missed what he was getting at. Applying similar criteria to Prokofiev, however, is still quite a new idea.

Though much of his brisk arrogance was curbed by the adversity of his final years, Prokofiev remained fundamentally self-centred, interested chiefly in his own inner world. His capacity, or desire, to empathise with the lot of other people being limited, it is hardly surprising that, compared with Shostakovich, his work should be thinner on tragic subtexts. All too often brilliantly one-dimensional, a large part of Prokofiev's music is that of a clever, derisive child, achieving its best effects in the context of fairy-tale, romanticised history, or nostalgia for boyhood.

As with Ravel, whom he particularly admired, Prokofiev's engagement with the practical world of adulthood was reluctant (and often sarcastically ill-tempered). Unlike Ravel, however, it was his "extraordinary fate" to be forced to see far enough beyond his own predicament for his creativity to deepen in spite of itself. Whatever else it did to him, life in the USSR made him grow up.

While less interested in the moral predicaments of Soviet life than his rival Shostakovich, Prokofiev was far from a complete political naïf. On the contrary, he demonstrably knew what times he was living in and, when he felt impelled to, informed his music with this knowledge. How soon he saw the truth of the situation in Stalin's USSR is hard to assess, and, unless new evidence on this subject comes to light, all judgements on it must remain conjectural.

It is easy, for example, to make a case that by 1938 Prokofiev was aware of what was going on in Russia and reflecting this awareness in his music. Apart from musical testimony to this effect, there is the monumental fact of Stalin's Terror, which had by then grown so intense that even the most self-absorbed aesthete could hardly fail to notice it. It is similarly legitimate to suggest that the composer's *Cantata for the 20th Anniversary of the October Revolution* of 1936-7, far from being entirely earnest, is tongue-in-cheek and, in parts, actively satirical.

In other words, though novel in the context of current assumptions about Prokofiev, it is fair to deduce that he began to take a critical attitude to the Soviet regime after finally settling there in 1936 and perceiving what sort of a cauldron he had landed himself in. It is, however, pushing the boundaries of the acceptable to suggest that his music contains hints of such a critical outlook prior to his conclusive move back to Russia in May 1936. Why would he have made the move if he had already formed such an opinion?

Here speculation runs out of road. As things stand, we simply do not know, in the end, why Prokofiev chose to return to his homeland. Yet there is reason to think that by mid-1935 he had realised, if only on a creative level, that the USSR was in the hands of people fundamentally hostile to his artistic vision.

A secret scheme?

Though absent from the country during the Composers' Union conference on Soviet symphonism in February 1935, Prokofiev was informed of its gist by Myaskovsky. He knew that "absolute" symphonism had been vigorously attacked by many delegates and its opposite, the propaganda "song-symphony", advocated as the official ideal. He was likewise aware that, as a result of this, his enemies had seized the high ground, with all that this implied for composers like himself.

Probably he believed that he could appeal directly to the Soviet people via his scores, thereby placing himself safely above the argument. Indeed, in terms of strategy, his main work of 1935, *Romeo and Juliet* was almost certainly designed to outflank the *apparatchiki* by winning the hearts of concertgoers.

If so, it is tempting to hear its contemporary companion, the Second Violin Concerto, as a covert satirical reply to the anti-symphonic faction within the Composers' Union. Surely the childish pedantic arpeggio accompaniment to the aria-like theme of the work's slow movement ("clumsily" scored for flute) is tongue in cheek? In which case, what can it be but an ironic response to simple-minded demands for a lyric-heroic "symphonism of the People"? If this is so, the shadowy bass drum which drives the soloist to jump through hoops in the finale requires no explanation.

Prokofiev here arguably anticipates Shostakovich's own Second Violin Concerto written thirty years later. (If this interpretation is valid, it shows him abreast of his contemporary in commenting musically on the prevailing situation in the Soviet arts in 1935. Shostakovich's Fourth Symphony may have begun as a similar riposte to the "song-symphonism" advanced at the Composer's Union conference.)

Music of the Terror

A less controversial interpretation may be attached to Prokofiev's First Violin Sonata, begun in December 1938 (and which, with ghastly irony, later received a Stalin Prize).

During the two years before the work was commenced, around seven million Russians had been sent to the Gulag and about half a million shot. There is no space here to say anything adequate in furtherance of these bald statistics. These people had done nothing wrong and were rounded up merely to fill quotas designed to ensure that everyone in Russia knew someone who had "disappeared".

Prokofiev got as far as drafting the sonata's outer movements (linked by desolate scale passages which, he told Oistrakh, should sound "like the wind in a graveyard"), before being summoned to score *Alexander Nevsky*. Thereafter, as if oppressed by its monochrome solemnity, he avoided the piece for seven years, finishing it during work on the similarly dark Sixth Symphony in 1946.

In context, the threnody of the first movement and pale, elegiac third speak for themselves. Elsewhere, the contrast of wanly tender measures with music of military brutality expresses the impact on Soviet life of Stalin's new-wave *apparatchiki* - thugs who despised intellectuals and were indifferent to culture. In classic style, the viciousness of these men was exceeded only by their stupidity. Like Shostakovich, Prokofiev satirised them with the musical image of a club-fingered amateur pianist spraying out wrong notes - a device employed in both the finale of his First Violin Sonata and the second movement of the Sixth Piano Sonata.

First of the so-called "War Sonatas", the Sixth has recently been recorded by the young Russian virtuoso Yevgeny Kissin, who scornfully dismisses the idea that the work had anything to do with the war*:

"The Sixth Sonata was written in 1939, before the war, so the experience Prokofiev

portrays is that of the period of Stalinist repression, the 'cult of personality'. He truly captures this in the bitter, pompous opening theme of the first movement, a sort of 'Stalin leitmotif' which returns in the finale. The second movement is a parody of a military march, full of Prokofiev's veiled humour, sarcasm and mischief.

"The finale is truly a 'big sarcasm' and in the middle section Prokofiev recalls the 'Stalin leitmotif', giving it a completely different, ominous character to create a premonition of impending doom. And listen to what Prokofiev does at the very end of the coda: he crushes Stalin with the very weight of his own pompous leitmotif!"

Andrei Gavrilov, too, rejects the received idea that the "War Sonatas" had anything to do with the struggle against Hitler:

"If we consider the Seventh as a kind of 'monster-mould' for the all-embracing Stalinist system, then we must accept the Eighth as an even deeper and more personal reaction to this theme."

Gavrilov contends that in these works the composer was compelled by circumstance to explore new resources:

"Prokofiev's strong personality withstood the tragedy that surrounded him. Instead, he adopted a very critical attitude toward sentiment in general and expressed his views on life with irony, scepticism, and a great tendency towards sarcasm. In these two sonatas, however, Soviet reality weighed heavily upon Prokofiev and forced him (especially in the Eighth) to look at life in a more tragic light and to assume an active and personal role in the unfolding drama."

Gavrilov's fascinating "political" analysis of these works is too long and detailed to reproduce here** - but the point is made. Properly called "Terror Sonatas", they exude an acidulous atmosphere indicative of scalding emotion contained at high pressure, as if serving as repositories for feelings unsafe to express in more public form.

Sincerity or satire?

Prokofiev's revenge on his tormentors, when public, tended to take serpentine guises. For example, his *Ode To The End Of The War* - scored, for no apparent reason other than sheer bloodymindedness, for giant wind orchestra, four pianos, and eight harps - manages to be bombastic and trivial at the same time, being presumably a private joke at the apparat's expense. Indeed the *Cantata for the 20th Anniversary of the October Revolution* - recorded complete for the first time by Neeme Järvi in 1992 for Chandos - is tolerable chiefly for its similar sarcasms, which, unsubtle as they are, may have contributed

to its banning.

The libretto for the *Cantata* is, in effect, a veiled critique of the Revolution up to the time it was written, and if Prokofiev alone was responsible for it, any idea that he was a political ingenu will have to be discarded. The work is nonetheless a dreadful botch for which the only obvious explanation is that the composer had initially planned to pursue a more blatantly subversive line than circumstances allowed.

To be specific, the *Cantata* came into being just as the Terror was reaching its peak and it is inconceivable that even so self-sufficient an artist could have remained oblivious of events in the world outside Nikolina Gora at that time. Thus, the work starts in a vein of almost blatant irony before retrenching to a dry inscrutability secreted within some of the most absurdly grandiose pages ever perpetrated by a major composer.

Opening in apocalyptic mood with an orchestral commentary on Marx's menacing epigraph "A spectre is haunting Europe - the spectre of Communism", Prokofiev moves into satirical overdrive with the overtly ridiculous "The Philosophers", in which an apparent attack on pre-Marxist thinkers carries undertones of derision directed against all "philosophers", including the 19th century anarcho-nihilists upon whose intolerant texts Lenin's violent revolution was founded.

With "A Tight Little Band", we reach Lenin himself - and here again the title is to the point, for it was precisely the paranoiac élitism of the Bolsheviki which precipitated Russia into totalitarianism and civil war.

Considered as a subject for a musical setting, the text itself is intrinsically funny - yet here, as for the rest of the work, Prokofiev risks no obvious ironies. In effect, everything is in the libretto, the text of "Revolution", for example, arguably selected to display Lenin's essential fascism. Only the music disappoints, being an unlistenable eruption of bombastic *kitsch*. (Material from the "Symphony" was recycled in the *Ode To the End of the War*.)

Clarity returns briefly with the ominous introduction to the finale on Stalin's "Constitution", but generally speaking the *Cantata* is a compromised failure whose neglect is justified.

Prokofiev's *Requiem*?

Notwithstanding his inability to solve the tricky aesthetic problems raised by the *Cantata*, Prokofiev's feelings about the political situation in Russia were clearly as strong in their cautious way as those of Shostakovich. Indeed, in the finale of his Second Quartet he foreshadowed some of the satirical devices his colleague subsequently employed in his own work (such as the use of the cello as a "Stalin" cipher, borrowed by Shostakovich for his Third Quartet).

Less resilient in the face of Socialist Realist bullying, however, Prokofiev rarely dared speak as directly as Shostakovich did in his Ninth and Tenth symphonies. (The dissident critic Andrei Olkhovsky's suggestion that the chorus "Arise, Ye Russian People" in the meretricious *Alexander Nevsky* had a contemporary application seems forced in the context of the music itself.)

Even so, the dissonant distant brass in the mad motoric coda of his Fifth Symphony are as obviously admonitory as the over-all structure of the finale of Shostakovich's Tenth. (For signposts towards a deeper understanding of the Stalinist background to the Fifth Symphony, consult David Fanning's notes to Seiji Ozawa's otherwise disappointing version on Deutsche Grammophon 435029-2.) Moreover, taken as a whole, Prokofiev's great, and much misunderstood, Sixth Symphony is as explicitly dissident as his colleague's outspoken Thirteenth.

Protecting himself with the ambiguous statement that the Sixth was an expression of "admiration for the human spirit, manifested so clearly in our era and in our country", the composer's real intentions were nevertheless plain. Taking a leaf out of his friend Myaskovsky's book, he used all his resources of nostalgia to draw a heartbreaking contrast between the worlds of the old and new Russia, the former portrayed with yearning tenderness, the latter as a calamity of callous indifference.

"Kindness," wrote the memoirist Nadezhda Mandelstam, "is not an inborn quality - it has to be cultivated, and this only happens when it is in demand. For our generation, kindness was an old-fashioned, vanished quality, its exponents as extinct as the mammoth. Everything we have seen in our times - the dispossession of the kulaks, class warfare, the constant 'unmasking' of people, the search for an ulterior motive behind every action - all this taught us to be anything you like but kind."

As a précis of Prokofiev's Sixth, Mme Mandelstam's words are perfect. The same nostalgia for gentleness is present in the composer's Seventh Symphony, but at lower tension (and with a falsely optimistic coda tacked on by order of his masters). The Sixth, however, meets the issues head-on and its superb finale - routinely dismissed as a misconceived anti-climax by underinformed Western critics - is one of music's most sophisticated tragedies.

Here, a bustling mood of deliberate superficiality - such as one might assume in order to blot out fear or grief - is undermined by an ugly, drumming bass figure which, in the coda, achieves a victory of black negation paralleled in Shostakovich only by his Fourth Symphony. As in the finale of Prokofiev's First Violin Sonata, this crude, blundering bass motif is almost certainly a musical representation of Stalin himself.

Envoi

According to the Shostakovich of *Testimony*, Prokofiev had "the soul of a goose" and was "frightened out of his wits" by what happened to him after his return to the USSR. Since the alleged author of these

remarks elsewhere confesses to having been himself suicidal with fear during 1936, this hardly seems fair.

There is, however, less evidence of panic in Shostakovich's output after 1938 than in that of Prokofiev, whose penchant for working on several pieces at once then degenerated into an undignified scramble to come up with something - anything - to please the authorities. This turmoil prevented continuous work on a number of substantial works, and the overall coherence of some of these (the so-called "War Sonatas", in particular) may have suffered as a result.

That he nonetheless managed to recover his poise and go on writing good music - including, in 1946, a symphony and a violin sonata high among the finest of our time - is formidable testimony to his inner strength.

In these works, Prokofiev acknowledged that while he himself was extraordinary, his fate was not, and that the tragedies and pain of others were things in which he shared and sympathised, and could turn into very great art.

*Sleevenote to Carnegie Hall Debut Concert (RCA Victor Gold Seal RD60443).

**Sleevenote to Prokofiev: Piano Sonatas Nos. 3, 7, 8 (Deutsche Grammophon 435 439-2).

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THE SHOSTAKOVICH DEBATE

The KGB's *Anti-Testimony* Campaign

A detailed account of the KGB disinformation campaign against *Testimony* can be found in Allan Ho and Dmitry Feofanov's [*Shostakovich Reconsidered*](#), pp. 48-60. The following three documents complement that account. The first, a Reuters report printed in the British leftwing newspaper *The Guardian* in 1979, describes the first step in organising opinion against *Testimony* abroad. The second, a report in a pro-Soviet American leftwing paper, shows the results being put into practice only two days later. The third document is an excerpt from a Western study of Soviet espionage confirming the status of Vassily Sitnikov, who coordinated the KGB anti-*Testimony* campaign.

SHOSTAKOVICH MEMOIRS 'FORGERY'

From Reuter in Moscow. [*The Guardian*, 8th November 1979]

Soviet officials have told foreign Communists that a book just published in the West as the memoirs of the late composer Dmitri Shostakovich is a forgery, reliable sources reported today. The sources said that Moscow correspondents of Western Communist newspapers were called to the state copyright agency on Friday to hear a passionate attack on the book, *Testimony*, which suggests that the composer was not the devoted advocate of the Soviet System he appeared.

Correspondents of non-Communist news organisations were not invited to the meeting. There has been no mention of it in the Soviet press where the publication of *Testimony* in the US and Britain at the end of last month has also been ignored. The book has been serialised in several Western newspapers. It recounts several of Shostakovich's brushes with the authorities and is said by its publishers to be based on interviews with him over four years by the former Leningrad musicologist Solomon Volkov. Soviet musical sources said they were aware that Mr Volkov, who now lives in New York, had extended talks with the composer, who died in 1975 at the age of 69, in the early 1970s. In an introduction. Mr Volkov says that Shostakovich signed every chapter as he compiled it.

The sources who reported the agency's meeting said that the agency's deputy chief Mr Vassily Sitnikov, told the Communist reporters: "We know that Shostakovich had very little to do with the book. For one thing, he never wrote or dictated any memoirs." But at the same time the official agreed that Mr Volkov, who says in an introduction that he had the composer's permission to publish in the West after his death, had four interviews with Shostakovich in the spring of 1973. Harper and Row, the US publishers of the Shostakovich memoirs, yesterday denied that the book was a forgery.

DEFAMING THE MEMORY OF A FAMOUS COMPOSER

By Phillip Bonosky [New York Daily World, 10th November 1979]

MOSCOW -- "It is a lie from beginning to end."

This is how Vassily R. Sitnikov vice-president of the Soviet Copyright Agency, VAPP, characterised *Testimony: the memoirs of Dmitri Shostakovich*, published in New York by Harper and Rowe [sic] Oct. 31. The book purports to be the authentic opinions of the Soviet Union's great composer, "as related to and edited by" one, Solomon Volkov. Shostakovich's widow Irina, son Maxim, and daughter Galina, have denounced the book as a forgery and have called Solomon Volkov an impostor who deliberately created a fraudulent version of the composer's character and ideas in an attempt to compromise not only Shostakovich's honor but also as part of the ongoing "dirty war" against the Soviet Union.

Here are the facts: Volkov gained entry to Shostakovich in 1973, pretending that he had been sent for an interview by the magazine *Sovietskaya [sic] Musika*, on whose staff he was listed. Actually, the idea was his own. His purpose became clear later on.

The book states that "For some four years before Shostakovich's death, working first in Leningrad and then in Moscow, the brilliant young Soviet musicologist Solomon Volkov drew forth from Shostakovich memories whose publication the composer came to see as mandatory." Volkov did not have continuous dealings with Shostakovich "for four years." He met Shostakovich for the first time at his summer home near Leningrad twice in the spring of 1973 and twice later that same spring in Moscow. At the Leningrad sessions, Shostakovich's friend and pupil, the eminent musician, Boris Tishchenko, through whose graces he got to see Shostakovich in the first place, was present. And during those sessions, as Tishchenko has testified, Shostakovich spoke of nothing but music. The two sessions later in Moscow were not attended by a third person and it is on these two sessions, a few hours long, that Volkov bases his fraudulent account, fattened into a book, safe in the knowledge that the only person who could have branded him a liar is now dead.

Once it was known that a manuscript existed, and no piece had appeared in any magazine, Mrs. Shostakovich asked Volkov to show it to her. He snarled back that things would "become much worse" for her if she interfered with his sending it abroad. It is a lie that the manuscript was submitted to Soviet publishers and turned down. Volkov was well aware that no Soviet publisher would have accepted or even read such a patchwork of slander.

Many aspects of the case don't survive even the most casual examination. The main one, of course, is that there is no supporting proof anywhere for Volkov's statements, except his own. Even so, he does not dare state that Shostakovich actually said what Volkov quotes him as saying. All Volkov claims is that he had taken down the composer's "ideas and facts" in shorthand, which he then later wrote up in Shostakovich's "language," and which Shostakovich approved by writing "Read." The publishers themselves, fearing more skepticism than already exists about the book, added the cautionary "As related to" and then "Edited" before they revealed the name of Volkov. The "researchers" at the notorious Russian Institute of Columbia University added the rest.

But even so, the gaps in the explanations yawn wide at the reader. Shostakovich, as the whole world knows, is the composer of a number of great symphonies. Well-known in the U.S. is the Seventh, Leningrad Symphony, which he wrote during the siege of Leningrad. He also wrote many songs, including a number based on Jewish themes. A song from his works will be the official song of the 1980 Olympics. Shostakovich was a deputy to the Supreme Soviet, a winner of the Lenin Prize, a Hero of Socialist Labor, People's Artist of the USSR, secretary of the USSR Union of Composers, a man whose views were well-known to the whole world.

Now one is supposed to believe that this man lived a monstrous secret life of deception, was so morally corrupted that he could even delude his wife and children, not to speak of his Party and friends, and to top it off even wrote lying music -- and that he revealed his true self only to a man he had never met before, who spoke to him four times, and only twice alone. Can anyone in his right mind believe that? "Shostakovich," said Sitnikov, "was a Communist until the day he died."

Volkov is now listed at the Russian Institute at Columbia University as "researcher" -- euphemism for "working for the CIA".

***The Secret World* by Peter Deriabin and Frank Gibney
(Ballantine Books, 1959, revised edn. 1982), pp. 339--40**

DERIABIN: Take my old co-worker Vassily Romanovich Sitnikov, for example. You met

him as head of the KGB spy group subverting American and British officials in Vienna during my time there. Today he does his work in the "literary" field. While I've been in the West, Russian writers have been harassed, put on trial, imprisoned and tortured, many have died or have been exiled; the best among them now live in the West as emigrants. They've been defeated and driven out of their country by the Soviet regime, working through its KGB. As one weapon in this battle, the Soviet government ratified the International Copyright Convention and ever since has been manipulating copyright laws to silence and jail writers who dared stray from narrow orthodoxy. The KGB's role is clear: Sitnikov and another old colleague of mine moved into the top leadership of the Soviet Copyright Agency as soon as it was formed, in 1973. Well, one might say, Sitnikov had some qualifications. He got into the world of books via the KGB's "Disinformation Department" (he was its deputy chief), which spent its time planting fraudulent documents in the West, sponsoring books for the lies they spread, painting swastikas on synagogues to give the impression that Nazism was reawakening in West Germany -- all sorts of things to suppress and distort truth and to confuse and mislead the West...

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THE SHOSTAKOVICH DEBATE

The Question of Dissidence

--UNDER CONSTRUCTION--

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THE SHOSTAKOVICH DEBATE

The Question of Dissidence

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THE SHOSTAKOVICH DEBATE

The Case for Dissidence

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THE SHOSTAKOVICH DEBATE

"Dissident" Meanings in Shostakovich's Music

by Allan B. Ho

Richard Taruskin has suggested ("Casting a Great Composer as a Fictional Hero," *New York Times*, 5 March 2000) that the "dissident" meanings attributed to Shostakovich's works were fabricated by the composer, late in life, to revise his own historical image, or are merely the result of speculation and "fantasizing" by members of a Shostakovich "cult". In doing so, he ignores the numerous testimonies of people who knew the composer personally and understood these hidden meanings long ago, not just in hindsight.

As Margarita Mazo states, "Those of us who were 'in the know' were *always* searching for the second layer of meaning in Shostakovich's works." (*DSCH Journal* 12, p. 72. Emphasis added.) Kurt Sanderling adds: "For us contemporaries who knew and worked with Shostakovich, it has *never* been difficult to interpret his works along with their double meanings. For us, it was all very clear." ("Performers on Shostakovich: Kurt Sanderling", *DSCH Journal* 6, p. 12. Emphasis added.)

Shostakovich told his longtime friend Flora Litvinova that "without the authorities...'contort[ing] us... warp[ing] our lives'... without 'Party guidance', he would have been 'stronger and sharper' in his work and could have 'revealed his ideas openly instead of having to resort to camouflage..." (Wilson, *Shostakovich: A Life Remembered*, p. 426.) At the same time, he believed his music was still crystal clear to those "who had ears to listen." (Op. cit., p. 317.) As for those without ears, who "did not understand what he was trying to say in his music without having to be told," Shostakovich believed "there was just no hope." (Maxim Shostakovich, "Shostakovich Symposium", *Shostakovich Reconsidered*, p. 389.)

Consider the following works and testimonies...

The Fifth Symphony

(1937; an example of "forced rejoicing" in the USSR during the Terror)

(1) Mstislav Rostropovich, the dedicatee of Shostakovich's cello concertos and a close friend of the composer, confirms that the rejoicing in the finale is forced:

The applause went on for an entire hour. People were in uproar, and ran up and down through the streets of Leningrad till the small hours, embracing and congratulating each other on having been there. They had understood the message that forms the "lower bottom", the outer hull, of the Fifth Symphony: the message of sorrow, suffering and isolation; stretched on the rack of the Inquisition, the victim still tries to smile in his pain. The shrill repetitions of the A at the end of the symphony are to me like a spear-point jabbing in the wounds of a person on the rack. The hearers of the first performance could identify with that person. *Anybody who thinks the finale is glorification is an idiot....* (Juliane Ribke, "From a Conversation with Mstislav Rostropovich," notes to Deutsche Grammophon 410 509-2. Emphasis added.)

(2) conductor Kurt Sanderling -- Yevgeny Mravinsky's assistant for twenty years with the Leningrad Philharmonic (which premiered many of Shostakovich's works) -- states:

In the Fifth Symphony, with the so called "Triumph" at the end -- we understood what he was saying. And it was not the "Triumph" of the mighty, those in power. There was no need for further explanation. ("Performers on Shostakovich: Kurt Sanderling," p. 12.)

(3) Alexander Fadeyev, who was present at the work's premiere, noted in his diary that "The end does not sound like an outcome (and ever less like a triumph or victory), but like a punishment or revenge of someone." (Solomon Volkov, *St. Petersburg: A Cultural History*, p. 425.)

(4) Russian musicologist Inna Barsova explains how Shostakovich would often "defend the truth of the music with untruthful words about it." ("Between 'Social Demands' and the 'Music of Grand Passions' [The years 1934--37 in the life of Dmitry Shostakovich]," paper, University of Michigan, 28 January 1994.) Galina Vishnevskaya, the wife of Rostropovich and a close friend of the composer, elaborates:

Before the Fifth Symphony was allowed to be performed, it was heard by the Party *aktiv* in Leningrad. A few dozen nincompoops together to judge a genius: to make objections, to lecture him, and in general to teach him how to write music. He had to save his newborn from their talons. But how? He

tried to deceive them in the most rudimentary way, and succeeded! All he had to do was use other words to describe the huge complex of human passions and suffering that is so apparent in his music -- he described his music to the Party as joyous and optimistic -- and the entire pack dashed off, satisfied. (Vishnevskaya, *Galina*, p. 212.)

(5) The finale also includes a quotation from Shostakovich's song "Rebirth," the words of which corroborate the hidden meaning of the work. Curiously, Laurel Fay, in her recent book *Shostakovich: A Life*, does not even mention this quotation, which was acknowledged by Elizabeth Wilson, Gerard McBurney, and others at least six years ago:

The four notes that set the first three words of that poem ["A barbarian painter with his somnolent brush / Blackens the genius's painting, / Slapping over it senselessly / His own lawless picture"] form the kernel of the initial march theme, while a whole later section makes reference to the lilting accompaniment to the poem's final quatrain, "Thus delusions fall off / My tormented soul / And it reveals to me visions / Of my former pure days". (Wilson, p. 127.)

Here the "barbarian painter" is, of course, Stalin, who repeatedly defaced the works of Shostakovich and his colleagues, forcing them to conform to the dictates of socialist realism. Shostakovich also predicts (correctly) that these old delusions will eventually fall off, revealing the original work and its true meaning.

The Seventh Symphony

(1941; a work not just about the Nazis, but also about Stalin)

(1) Maxim Shostakovich, the composer's son, states:

Critics felt it described the tragedy of the war; but it was *not* just about the war....My father always said, "I think long; I write fast" -- the time preceding the war was probably the inspiration of Symphony No. 7, the tragedy of a nation. There were negative evil forces -- in Germany and in the USSR; the USSR had its own fascism and its own "Hitler." The Seventh Symphony is *not* just military... ("Six Lectures on the Shostakovich Symphonies," *Shostakovich Reconsidered*, pp. 410-11.)

(2) Rostislav Dubinsky, a member of the Borodin Quartet and a friend of the composer, notes that "Soviet musicologists conveniently forgot that the first movement of the Seventh Symphony already existed a year before the war, back when Stalin was still

Hitler's faithful friend." (Dubinsky, *Stormy Applause*, p. 155.)

(3) Lev Lebedinsky, a longtime friend of the composer and a collaborator on several works, adds:

The "Leningrad" Symphony [...was] planned and begun *before* Hitler's attack on Russia in 1941. The tune of the notorious march in the first movement was conceived by Shostakovich as the "Stalin" theme (all who were close to the composer knew this). After the war had started, Shostakovich declared it to be the "Hitler" theme. Later, when the work was published, he renamed it the "Evil" theme -- justly, since both Hitler and Stalin met the specification. ("Code, Quotation, and Collage: Some Musical Allusions in the Works of Dmitry Shostakovich", *Shostakovich Reconsidered*, p. 482.)

(4) Flora Litvinova, the composer's neighbor when the Seventh Symphony was composed, documented in contemporaneous notes what the composer himself said about the work:

"Fascism, yes, but music, real music, is never literally bound to one theme. Fascism is not just National Socialism; this music is about terror, slavery, the bondage of spirit". Later, when Dmitry Dmitryevich got used to me and started to trust me, he told me straight out that *the Seventh (as well as the Fifth) were not just about fascism, but also about our system, about any tyranny and totalitarianism in general.* (Wilson, pp. 158-59; *Shostakovich Reconsidered*, p. 488.)

(5) Russian musicologist Vladimir Zak concurs: the Seventh Symphony is not only about "a foreign fascism -- German -- but also (and this is so very unbearable) of our own native fascism. This is the reason why many listeners seem to hear in the 'invasion theme' not only the aggressors drawing near and defacing the Russian land, but also the trampling of the boots of the NKVD..." (Shostakovich's Idioms," *Shostakovich Reconsidered*, p. 500.)

(6) The Symphony was begun before the Nazi invasion (22 June 1941) and thus could not have been inspired solely by it:

[the] Seventh Symphony was included in the program for the Leningrad Philharmonic's 1941--42 season, that is, before the German invasion. That could have been done only with the composer's consent and indicates that Shostakovich had a clear idea of his Seventh Symphony and was sure that he would complete it by the fall season. (Volkov, *St. Petersburg*, p. 427; Sofiya Khentova, *Shostakovich. zhizn' i tvorchestvo* [Shostakovich. Life and Work] (Leningrad: Sovetsky Kompozitor, 1986), Vol. 1, p. 543.)

Yuly Vainkop, who kept close track of the composer's activities, reported in May 1941 that "In the near future, D. Shostakovich, apparently, will finish his Seventh Symphony (the completion of which was postponed by the composer because of his work on the orchestration of Musorgsky's opera *Boris Godunov* [finished in 1940]." (Khentova, op. cit., p. 526. When contacted in November 1995, Khentova confirmed the accuracy of Vainkop's statement.) In addition, Aleksandr Sherel' claims to have seen a sketch of the "invasion theme" dated 26 June 1939. (*Shostakovich Reconsidered*, pp. 157-58.)

The Ninth Symphony

(1945; a light work intended to deflate Stalin's ego after World War II)

(1) Stalin wanted a largescale, heroic symphony with chorus to celebrate his victory in World War II. Shostakovich provided just the opposite. According to Isaak Glikman, the composer feared that "on the crest of this victory, Stalin would consolidate his tyranny, consolidate his despotism, and his inhumanity." (*The War Symphonies: Shostakovich Against Stalin* [video, 1998].)

(2) composer Dmitry Tolstoy recalls:

When he first showed it, some people asked, "Is he serious about all this?" And many Communist zealots and ideologues said: "What, is he making fun of our victory? What is this?" This kind of melody. A kind of street whistling. Too light, I would say, for a symphony. Shostakovich did [in this work] what is called giving the "finger in the pocket." (*The War Symphonies: Shostakovich Against Stalin* [video, 1998].)

(3) conductor Yevgeny Mravinsky, who premiered many of Shostakovich's works, told his orchestra (re the finale): "You have the wrong sound. I need the sound of the trampling of steel-shod boots." (Wilson, p. 315.) Violinist Yakov Milkis adds, "We knew he wasn't referring to ordinary soldiers, but to KGB forces." (Ibid, p. 315.)

From Jewish Folk Poetry

(1948; written in support of beleaguered Jews at a time of growing anti-Semitism in the USSR)

(1) Manashir Yakubov, curator of the Shostakovich family archive, says this work was "a direct response to growing official anti-semitism." (*Shostakovich 1906-1975*, booklet for

the Rostropovich/London Symphony cycle [1998], p. 11.)

(2) Natalya Vovsi-Mikhoels, the daughter of slain Jewish leader Solomon Mikhoels, recalls how, after the "presenter" declared about "Lullaby" [one of the songs] that "it all took place in Tsarist Russia...people barely restrained themselves from laughing [because they understood the contemporary references]. For a long time after that Dmitri Dmitriyevich liked to repeat, 'It all took place in Tsarist Russia, it all took place in Tsarist Russia.'" (Wilson, p. 230.)

(3) Nina Dorliak, one of the singers at the first (private) performance, recalls worrying that her "colleagues might balk at the idea of singing [this] 'unacceptable' music." (Wilson, p. 236.)

(4) musicologist Daniil Zhitomirsky, who was present at the above performance, wrote in his diary that it was "very good" that the performance scheduled for the Composer's Union in late 1948 was canceled. He "feared that new attacks would take place. Anti-Semitism was already gaining ground higher up." (*Shostakovich Reconsidered*, p. 471.) In another article, he notes: "But it [the scheduled performance] was not to be. First came casual warnings, followed by unexplained delays -- then, finally -- explicit prohibition decreed from above." ("[Shostakovich: the Public and the Private.](#)")

(5) Russian musicologist Abraam Gozenpud notes: "Shostakovich first showed his cycle *From Jewish Folk Poetry* at the Moscow Union of Composers early in 1953, just after the news bulletin in the press had appeared denouncing the [Jewish] Doctors....The performance of this cycle at that time was an act of civic courage." (Wilson, p. 238.)

(6) musicologist Joachim Braun, the leading authority on the Jewish aspect of Shostakovich's music, also comments on the dissident aspect of this work in two articles: "The Double Meaning of Jewish Elements in Dmitri Shostakovich's Music," *Musical Quarterly* 71, No. 1 (1985), 68-80; "Shostakovich's Vocal Cycle *From Jewish Folk Poetry*," in Malcolm H. Brown, ed., *Russian and Soviet Music: Essays for Boris Schwarz* (1984), pp. 259-86.

Braun notes that "the Jewish subject matter was, by its mere existence, provocative. At a time when Jewish culture was under fire, the performance of such a work would have been dangerous." (*Musical Quarterly*, p. 75.) He goes on to comment on "the more or less obvious dissidence of the text" which he describes as starting a new trend in Soviet music "notable for its anti-establishment...overtones" and use of "Aesopian language" (ibid, p. 78-79), notes that the use of Jewish elements "may be interpreted as hidden dissidence [and] is in fact a hidden language of resistance communicated to the aware listener of its subtle meaning," (ibid, pp. 78-79) and praises the cycle as "one of Shostakovich's most beautiful and richly symbolic compositions, a masterpiece of the composer's secret

language of dissent" (*Russian and Soviet Music*, p. 260).

Why, then, does Laurel Fay, in her recent book, quote Braun describing *From Jewish Folk Poetry* as, in part, "stylized urban folk art," but remain silent about the dissident aspects of the work mentioned repeatedly above and even alluded to in Braun's title "The *Double Meaning of Jewish Elements in Dmitri Shostakovich's Music*"? Why does Fay mention Shostakovich's statement "I envy him" while visiting the family home of the murdered Solomon Mikhoels, but remain silent on his words that show his awareness of what was happening to Jews. Vovsi-Mikhoels reports that the composer, during his visit to the family home, also stated "'This' had started with the Jews but would end with the entire intelligentsia." (Ibid, p. 261.) This statement appears in a book edited by Malcolm Hamrick Brown, to which Fay herself was a contributor.

Rayok

(1948-1960s; a musical satire of Soviet officials and their policies regarding music)

(1) according to Rostropovich, this anti-Stalin satire, which viciously parodies the officially sanctioned music as well as the officials themselves (Stalin, Zhdanov, Shepilov, Khrennikov, and others) "proves how he [Shostakovich] really thought," refuting Soviet books that say "what a good Communist Shostakovich was." (John Rockwell, 'Rostropovich to Conduct Premiere of Unpublished Shostakovich Work', *New York Times* [11 January 1989], p. C17.)

(2) Vissarion Shebalin, a close friend, recognized the danger of composing such a work and advised Shostakovich to destroy all trace of *Rayok*: "You could be shot for such things." (Wilson, p. 296.)

The Eleventh Symphony

(1957; inspired by both the Hungarian Uprising in 1956 and the events of 1905)

Shostakovich links the tragedies of the past and present by quoting the music of several revolutionary songs, which, in turn, call to mind texts apropos for 1956-7. The first movement quotes the prison song 'Listen', the original text of which reads: 'The autumn night is as black as treason, black as the tyrant's conscience. Blacker than that night a terrible vision rises from the fog -- prison.' The finale quotes a famous revolutionary song with the words: 'Rage, you tyrants -- Mock us, threaten us with prison and chains. We are strong in spirit, if weak in body. Shame, shame on you tyrants!'

(1) Lev Lebedinsky points out:

What we heard in this music was not the police firing on the crowd in front of the Winter Palace in 1905, but the Soviet tanks roaring in the streets of Budapest. This was so clear to those "who had ears to listen", that his son, with whom he wasn't in the habit of sharing his deepest thoughts, whispered to Dmitri Dmitriyevich during the dress rehearsal, "Papa, what if they hang you for this?" (Wilson, p. 317; Volkov, *St. Petersburg*, pp. 461--62.)

(2) Manashir Yakubov confirms that "*from its very earliest performances*, [some] viewed the symphony as an allegorical reflection of contemporary bloody events in Hungary (1956), where the Soviet Union had acted as 'policeman of Europe' and executioner of a democratic movement." (Yakubov, op. cit., p. 57. Emphasis added.)

(3) Igor Belsky recalls the composer saying, "Don't forget that I wrote that symphony [the Eleventh] in the aftermath of the Hungarian Uprising." (Wilson, p. 320.)

(4) Irina Shostakovich, the composer's widow, confirms that Shostakovich had the events of the Hungarian Uprising in 1956 "in mind" when he wrote this work. (*DSCH Journal* 12, p. 72.)

Satires

(1960; a commentary on present as well as past ideologies)

Vishnevskaya recognized how the texts referred to contemporary as well as past events. It was she who suggested to the composer that the song cycle be called "Pictures of the Past" because otherwise the authorities would never approve verses such as "Our Posterity," which, though written in 1910, was also "an indictment of the current Soviet regime and its insane ideology." "Throw them that bone and they might sanction it. Yesterday is part of the past, too; the public will see it that way." Shostakovich responded: "Beautifully thought out, Galya! Beautifully thought out. Under 'Satires' we'll put 'Pictures of the Past' in parentheses, like a kind of fig leaf. We'll cover up the embarrassing parts for them." (Vishnevskaya, *Galina*, pp. 268--29.)

The Eighth Quartet

(1960; an autobiographical work, the composer portraying himself as a victim of fascism)

(1) a letter from Shostakovich to Isaak Glikman (16 July 1960) corroborates that this work

was not about the victims of fascism and war in Dresden, but an autobiographical work in which the composer himself is the victim:

When I die, it's hardly likely that someone will write a quartet dedicated to my memory. So I decided to write it myself. One could write on the frontispiece, "Dedicated to the author of this quartet".

The main theme is the monogram D, Es, C, H, that is -- my initials. The quartet makes use of themes from my works and the revolutionary song "Tormented by Grievous Bondage." My own themes are the following: from the First Symphony, the Eighth Symphony, the Piano Trio, the Cello Concerto and *Lady Macbeth*, Wagner's Funeral March from *Götterdämmerung* and the second theme from the first movement of Tchaikovsky's Sixth Symphony are also hinted at. And I forgot -- there's also a theme from my Tenth Symphony. Quite something -- this little miscellany! (Wilson, p. 340; from Glikman, p. 159.)

(2) Rostislav Dubinsky, a member of the Borodin Quartet and a longtime friend, recalls that "when, at the first performance at the Composers' House, the chairman announced the quartet and started talking about the war and the heroism of the Soviet people and the Communist Party, Shostakovich jumped up and shouted, 'No, no... that is, you see, I, I, myself, personally, so to speak, am protesting against any sort of Fascism.'" (Dubinsky, *Stormy Applause*: p. 282.) The composer also confided that the Eighth Quartet "is myself."

(3) Lebedinsky adds:

The composer dedicated the Quartet to the victims of fascism to disguise his intentions, although, as he considered himself a victim of a fascist regime, the dedication was apt. In fact he intended it to be a summation of everything he had written before. It was his farewell to life. He associated joining the Party with a moral, as well as physical death. On the day of his return from a trip to Dresden, where he had completed the Quartet and purchased a large number of sleeping pills, he played the Quartet to me on the piano and told me with tears in his eyes that it was his last work. He hinted at his intention to commit suicide. Perhaps subconsciously he hoped that I would save him. I managed to remove the pills from his jacket pocket and gave them to his son Maxim, explaining to him the true meaning of the Quartet. (Wilson, p. 340. The abbreviated references to the "Dies irae" at the end of the third and fifth movements, sometimes juxtaposed to DSCH, may also allude to the composer's anticipated death.)

(4) Maxim Shostakovich confirms the special, personal significance of this work to his

father:

My father cried twice in his life: when his mother died and when he came to say they've made him join the Party. [...T]his was sobbing, not just tears, but sobbing. It was in the 1960s that they made him join the Party. There was simply no other way for him at that time. [. . .] The powers-that-be put a lot of pressure on Shostakovich to give some kind of title to the Eighth Quartet in order to explain its pessimism. Something about Dresden, or the destruction of Dresden at the end of World War II. And, of course, only a stupid person could not understand the combination in that quartet of his musical signature ('DSCH'), along with the tune of a well-known Russian prison song ("Tortured by grievous bondage"). And the knocks on the door by the KGB, you can also hear them there. ("Shostakovich Symposium," *Shostakovich Reconsidered*, p. 390.)

The Twelfth Symphony

(1961; originally to be a satire of Lenin)

(1) Lebedinsky confirms that the Twelfth Symphony was originally to be a satire of Lenin:

In 1961 Shostakovich made another attempt to express his true attitude to what was going on in his country. He decided that his Twelfth Symphony was to be a satire of Lenin. When he told me this I tried to talk him out of it. It was too dangerous and nobody would understand anyway. He brushed off my advice with, "He who has ears will hear" (a favourite Shostakovich expression). [... Shostakovich later] explained: "I wrote the symphony, and then I realized that you had been right. They'd crucify me for it because my conception was an obvious caricature of Lenin. Therefore I sat down and wrote another one in three or four days. And it's terrible!" (Wilson, p. 346.)

(2) Sofiya Khentova, Shostakovich's authorized Soviet biographer, confirms that sketches of the earlier version of the Twelfth, satirizing Lenin, exist in the Shostakovich family archive and include "a parodying waltz based on material from the fourth song, 'Misunderstanding,' of the vocal cycle *Satires*. The waltz motif coincides with the song's text, 'he did not understand the new poetry.'" (Wilson, p. 344.)

The Thirteenth Symphony

(1962; another work in honor of Jews at a time of increased anti-Semitism)

(1) Manashir Yakubov states: "Evtushenko's poem inspired Shostakovich to compose a fierce protest against Nazi atrocities, and a passionate denunciation of anti-semitism and chauvinism in general." (Op. cit., p. 64.) He views it as another "direct response to growing official anti-semitism [in the USSR]." (Op. cit., p. 11.)

(2) Kiril Kondrashin, who premiered this work, reports Shostakovich's strong views on anti-Semitism. When the Russian soloist Vitaly Gromadsky asked Shostakovich "why are you writing about anti-Semitism when there isn't any?" Shostakovich, almost shouting, told Gromadsky, "No there is, there is anti-semitism in the Soviet Union. It is an outrageous thing, and we must fight it. We must shout about it from the rooftops." (Wilson, pp. 358--59.)

Michelangelo Verses

(1974; a commentary on Solzhenitsyn's exile from the USSR)

(1) Manashir Yakubov states:

As always with Shostakovich, a work on "eternal themes" proved to be excitingly relevant for the audience and painfully topical for the authorities. Three central movements of the cycle echoed events in Soviet social and artistic life that were uncomfortably close: the persecution of dissidents, the exile of Solzhenitsyn and forced expulsion of Rostropovich and Vishnevskaya from the Soviet Union. (Op. cit., p. 72. Emphasis added.)

(2) Irina Shostakovich confirms that in this work there is a "parallel between Dante's expulsion from Italy and Solzhenitsyn's exile from the Soviet Union." (*DSCH Journal* , p. 72.)

Closing

(1) As can be seen above, the "fantasizing" members of the Shostakovich "cult" disparaged by Richard Taruskin include the composer's immediate family, longtime friends and colleagues, and authorized Soviet biographer, the curator of the Shostakovich family archive, and noted Russian musicologists: that is, people who *knew* the composer and have "ears to listen."

(2) It is curious that the "dissidence" in Shostakovich's music is now openly acknowledged in Russian journals, such as *Muzykal'naya Akademiya* (formerly *Sovetskaya Muzyka*), yet remains largely ignored in the Western writings of Taruskin and Fay. For example, Mark Aranovsky's article about Shostakovich "[The Dissident](#)" (*Muzykal'naya Akademiya* 4 (1997), pp. 2-3; translated in *DSCJ Journal* 12, pp. 24-26) is not even mentioned in Fay's recent book, even though she cites 22 other articles from the same special Shostakovich issue (*Muzykal'naya Akademiya* 4 [1997]), including another piece by Aranovsky. Why does Fay remain silent on passages such as the following?

The victory of Shostakovich is even more amazing and extraordinary because, after all, it was his art (and we understand it more clearly now), which, over the course of many years, remained practically the only artistic event which, socially and substantively, *actively resisted* the totalitarian regime. Without risking exaggeration, we can say that *dissidence* was the unifying integral feature of the entire artistic output of this great musician. And, if we understand this, we must also note that the history of "dissidence" among the Soviet intelligentsia finds its roots decades ago, and in fact began long before the time when this term itself appeared.

...For those who listened attentively to his strong voice, filled with anxiety and, at times, breaking with despair, Shostakovich became a *crucial symbol of intellectual integrity*. For many years his music remained a *safety valve* which, for a few short hours, allowed listeners to expand their chests and breathe freely. At the time, his music was that truly indispensable lungful of *freedom and dissidence*, not only in its content, but also -- which is no less important -- in its musical form. However, first and foremost, we were grateful to Shostakovich for the fact that during those precious minutes of communion with his music, we were free to remain ourselves -- or, perhaps, to *revert* to ourselves. The sound of Shostakovich's music was not only always a celebration of high art, but also an *interlude of truth*. Those who knew how to listen to his music would take it away with them from the concert hall.

His music became an emblem of spiritual experience and of hope for the future. It can be said, without exaggeration, that Shostakovich was the authentic *conscience of his time*...

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THE SHOSTAKOVICH DEBATE

The Case for Dissidence

Youth (1917-26)

One of the mainstays of the old Soviet myth of Shostakovich was that he was brought up in a radical socialist atmosphere and was therefore disposed from his boyhood to be sympathetic to Communism. However, when Elizabeth Wilson interviewed the composer's younger sister Zoya (1908-1990) in Moscow in 1989, a different picture emerged. According to Zoya, Shostakovich's father, Dmitri Boleslavovich, like other liberal *intelligenty*, welcomed the February 1917 revolution as a liberation from Tsarism (Wilson, p. 6). On the other hand, he and his wife Sofiya held views which, far from ideologically radical, were humanely generalised. "The atmosphere in our house," insisted Zoya, "was very free and liberal" -- i.e., there were no fixed opinions derived from the ideology of Marxism or the Socialist Revolutionaries (SRs). According to Zoya, Sofiya gave shelter to "all kinds of people... [Black Hundreds] and Communists included". In Zoya's phrase, this equivalence of right-wing anti-Semites and Communists implies that the family regarded them as of comparable ideological extremity, even though the Communists included Shostakovich's uncle Maxim Kostrykin. The extraordinary breadth of Sofiya Shostakovich's tolerance, otherwise difficult to account for, may have been based on her religious outlook (see below). In general, Zoya recalled her parents' apartment as quietly apolitical: "I do not remember talk of politics." Significantly, this was at a time -- between the February and October revolutions -- when most of the *intelligenty* debated incessantly about politics. (Balancing her evidence, Zoya confirmed the Soviet official tradition that her brother witnessed Lenin's arrival at the Finland Station on 3rd April 1917, recording that Dmitri was "in raptures" about it and adding in rueful mitigation: "Well, he was only a young boy of ten...")

By themselves, Zoya Shostakovich's recollections of Shostakovich's apolitical upbringing would be insufficient to scotch the old Soviet myth -- yet she is far from alone in these

impressions. Writing in 1989, Shostakovich's school friend Boris Lossky sought to counter the Soviet view of the composer's youth as presented by Sofiya Khentova in her two-volume study (1975, 1980) of this period in his life. Lossky confirmed Zoya's claim concerning the Shostakovich family's virtual apoliticism, recording that Dmitri's parents "belonged to the liberal traditions of the intelligentsia", adding that "the family was of a fairly conservative nature" (Wilson, p. 30). Lossky described the Shidlovskaya pupils as "chiefly drawn from the ranks of the 'out-lived' liberal intelligentsia who were unsympathetic to the 'official' [Soviet] bureaucracy of the day". One of these pupils, though, was none other than Trotsky's son Lev with whom, Lossky insisted, Dmitri "particularly" failed to get on. "During the spring of 1918, during Trotsky's rise to power," wrote Lossky, "Mitya never so much as hinted at any kind of sympathy with the 'existing regime', and I can vouch that this was the case until 1922 [when Shostakovich entered the Petrograd Conservatory as a full student]."

To illustrate the continuity of the Shostakovich family's beliefs, Lossky recalled Shostakovich performing his *Funeral March in Memory of Victims of the Revolution* at the Stoyunina Gymnasium in January 1918 during a commemoration for *intelligenty* killed by Communist troops whilst protesting against Lenin's dissolution of the Constituent Assembly (in which elected body the Bolsheviks held barely a quarter of the seats, being outnumbered by two-to-one by their main rivals the Socialist Revolutionaries). Since Communism is militantly atheistic, it is significant that Sofiya Shostakovich gave her husband a full Orthodox funeral which she took very seriously (Wilson, pp. 30-1). Even more significant is that the wife of the family's doctor dared to refer, in her funeral oration, to "the thinning ranks of the intelligentsia". By 1922, Lenin's contempt for *intelligenty* whose views differed from his had sent thousands of them to death or imprisonment on the Solovetsky Islands; indeed 1922 was the year in which he saw that his remaining Socialist Revolutionary rivals were done away with. These facts again suggest that the Shostakovich family circle was far from Communist orthodoxy. (Lossky thought the story that Dmitri saw Lenin was "inconceivable", calling it "sheer invention by the guardians of [the composer's] 'ideological purity'".)

Quoted in Viktor Seroff's biography of 1943, Shostakovich's aunt Nadezhda Galli-Shohat confirms the impressions of Zoya and Boris Lossky: "Mitya did not belong to any party, nor did Sonya [Sofiya, his mother] -- and Sonya had lost her job partly on account of it." (Seroff, p. 121) She adds: "It was clear that Mitya's position in the conservatory during the winter [of 1923-24] was only tolerated." So conspicuous were Shostakovich's lack of Communist credentials at this point that a group of "political" students tried, during spring 1924, to oust him and have his stipend suspended. In September 1924, his home piano, on loan from Muzpred, was repossessed (Wilson, p. 31). (Fay characteristically supplies no further information on these "internal political intrigues", describing them as "an enigmatic episode in Shostakovich's biography" [p. 24].) Curiously enough, the only

references to Lenin in Shostakovich's letters to Tatyana Glivenko coincide with this period of political harassment at the Conservatory. Three of these four references are less than orthodox, including twice giving his address as Saint Leninburg. "If I become as great a man as Lenin," he wrote dryly to Tanya, "when I die will the city be renamed Shostakovichgrad?" (The inhabitants of Leningrad were, in general, resentful of the renaming of "Peter", as they referred to their city.)

The young Shostakovich's true estimation of Lenin's "greatness" is suggested by a dangerous joke he indulged in around this time (possibly under the free-thinking influence of Ivan Sollertinsky). According to Nikolai Malko (*A Certain Art*, p. 190), the composer was given to baffling admirers by telling them "I love the music of Ilyich". Since "Ilyich" was the Soviet popular name for Lenin, the composer's victims would naturally express puzzlement, whereupon he would explain, as though in surprise, "I am talking about the music of Petr Ilyich Tchaikovsky". Solomon Volkov comments: "From the ideological point of view, such jokes were not harmless. The Lenin mystique was being broadly inculcated; even superficial deviations from the official cult were perceived as heresy. So it was only among close, trusted friends that Shostakovich would sometimes sing, after having a few drinks, the song of the Baltic sailors: 'Burn bright, candle in Ilyich's ruddy backside.'" [*St Petersburg: a cultural history*, p. 339.] In a similar spirit, Shostakovich's friend Valerian Bogdanov-Berezovsky remarks (Wilson, p. 26) on the composer's "early independence of thought and behaviour". Since independent thought and Communist orthodoxy were mutually incompatible, this is dependable Aesopian code for "he wasn't a Communist". Bogdanov-Berezovsky also confirms the young Shostakovich as "totally absorbed" in music, an opinion echoed by the composer himself in a letter to Boleslav Yavorsky of 1925: "There are no other joys in life apart from music. For me, all of life is music." (Wilson, p. 30)

The contentions of Zoya Shostakovich, Boris Lossky, and Nadezhda Galli-Shohat that the young composer was completely uninterested in politics, let alone in Communism, are supported by Nikolai Malko's claim that, in 1923, Shostakovich failed to answer a single question in the political section of his piano exam (*A Certain Art*, p. 186). The composer's lack of political enthusiasm persisted through the middle 1920s. In her recent biography, Laurel Fay confirms that the "October" subtitle of Shostakovich's First Piano Sonata (1926) did not come from him and that he repudiated it. She also reveals that, in December 1926, he told the musicologist Boleslav Yavorsky that he feared he would fail his Conservatory exam in Marxist methodology and consequently be declared "politically unreliable". Shostakovich's initial term for Marxist methodology, ostentatiously crossed through in his letter to Yavorsky, was "Scripture". In a subsequent letter, he describes his ideological examination in comic terms, recounting how he and a friend collapsed in hysterical laughter when the examiner in Marxist methodology asked a fellow student to outline the socio-economic differences between Chopin and Liszt.

Is there any reason to doubt or discount these six witnesses? The testimony of Valerian Bogdanov-Berezovsky may, perhaps, be dismissible as somewhat oblique. Conceivably, it might be objected, vis-à-vis the testimony of Nadezhda Galli-Shohat, that we should not seriously consider the claims of someone who left Russia in 1923 when Shostakovich was only 16; on the other hand, she did know Dmitri until then and stayed in touch with him and his mother as long as this remained possible thereafter. Of Boris Lossky, who left the USSR in 1922, it could be argued that, since he had read *Testimony* by the time he wrote his memoir (Wilson, p. 19), he was merely lending surreptitious support to the "Testimony view" of Shostakovich. His claim to have been engaged in the business of countering the false picture painted by Sofiya Khentova would, on this view, be no more than a smokescreen for a crypto-Volkovist agenda. If such an argument strikes the reader as far-fetched or contorted, it must be pointed at once that the assumption it is based on is fundamental to anti-revisionism.

For example, Royal S. Brown, reviewing Larry Weinstein's documentary *The War Symphonies*, accused Weinstein's dozen witnesses (dignified Russian ladies and gentlemen of advanced years but fully functioning minds) of "going through great contortions to make their view of history fit the Volkov thesis" -- much as if these dozen Slavic elders had all had access to *Testimony* and, whether individually or collectively, resolved to change their memories to fit those supposedly ascribed to Shostakovich by Volkov. The same thinking inhabits Paul Mitchinson's curious new proposal (*Lingua franca*, May/June 2000) that, after defecting to the West in 1981, Maxim Shostakovich was "reluctant to disavow" *Testimony* "because of his hatred for the greater distortions imposed on his father's memory by official Soviet biographers such as Sophia Khentova". This idea, of unknown origin, coincidentally accords with Laurel Fay's view of Khentova, opening the neat possibility for her of killing two birds (Volkov and Khentova) with one stone. Unfortunately for this thesis, Maxim has endorsed *Testimony* on a regular basis ever since quitting the USSR (see [Chronology](#)) and has only mentioned Khentova once during all this time.

The fact of the matter is that Boris Lossky's sole reference to *Testimony* is dismissive. (He flatly rejects the Finland Station story.) This, though, is unlikely to prevent hardline anti-revisionists from discounting him as a possible crypto-Volkovist. The same, no doubt, can be said of Shostakovich's sister Zoya. But what of the sixth witness: Shostakovich himself in his letters to Glivenko and Yavorsky? He cannot be a crypto-Volkovist (or at least not in the 1920s) -- and, what is more, Nikolai Malko confirms Shostakovich's incompetence in political exams at the Conservatory, supporting what the composer wrote to Yavorsky in 1926. Have these witnesses conspired to misrepresent Shostakovich as he was in 1918-26? One would have to be willing to distort probability quite perversely to reach such a conclusion.

Are there any witnesses to the contrary? Disregarding officially sanctioned biographical statements attributed to the composer himself, there is no such reliable witness. The 1976 testimony of Lev Arnshtam, adduced by Elizabeth Wilson apparently to bridge a gap in her chronological account, portrays the young Shostakovich as enthusiastic for Communism, claiming that his "rhythmic sense" was "forged by the rhythm and pace of the Revolution" (Wilson, p. 23). This statement, which invokes a standard cliché of Soviet officialdom based on Proletkult theories about "rhythms" and "tempos" of production, is musically meaningless and unlikely to have emanated from Arnshtam except in a spirit of Aesopian parody. As for the idea that the ardent young composer "did not notice deprivation" because his "conscious awakening in life coincided with the Revolution", this is extensively contradicted in Shostakovich's own words in his letters to Glivenko, where his illnesses, depressions, and suicidal impulses bulk large while allusions to the Revolution are virtually non-existent. Sadly, Lev Arnshtam died in 1980, so Wilson had no opportunity to ask him whether he would have consented to this article appearing in her book.

In summary, there is no plausible cause to reject or even query the testimony of the six witnesses referred to above. *Pace* Laurel Fay, there is no evidence that any of them are "self-serving, vengeful, and distorted by faulty memory, selective amnesia, wishful thinking, and exaggeration" or "rife with gossip and rumor". There is no readily obvious reason to treat these witnesses with "utmost caution, filtering out false or improbable allegations and screening for bias and hidden agendas". Indeed, they have the virtue of corroborating each other without any evidence of collusion. To cut a long story short, the old Soviet myth of Shostakovich's youthful revolutionary sympathies can now confidently be rejected as, to borrow Boris Lossky's phrase, "sheer invention by the guardians of [the composer's] 'ideological purity'". On the contrary, the young Shostakovich was, intellectually, almost entirely absorbed in his love of music and literature. Politics, let alone Communist ideology, held no interest for him whatsoever and, as a result, he knew next to nothing about these subjects.

Laurel Fay mentions that Trotsky's son attended the Shidlovskaya school, but omits Lossky's recollection that Shostakovich "particularly" failed to get on with him. She directly quotes none of the material excerpted above. (Zoya's testimony goes unmentioned except for her story of her father crying "Children, Freedom!" upon the fall of Tsarist rule in February 1917.) Notwithstanding her reluctance to quote verbatim from witness testimony, Fay acknowledges the apoliticism of Shostakovich's immediate family background, dismisses the tale that he saw Lenin arrive at the Finland Station, and concludes that "the young Shostakovich's grasp of the import, and his conscious embrace, of the revolutionary milestones of 1917 were almost certainly exaggerated by both his Soviet biographers and, when expedient, by himself". It should be said that her suggestion

that Shostakovich later exaggerated aspects of his life out of "expedience" is, in the absence of contextual exegesis, prejudicial. For example, in the era of the Cultural Revolution it became a matter of survival to establish, falsely if necessary, one's political credentials. Further, in view of the striking consistency of the available evidence, Fay's verdict that the young Shostakovich's political awareness was "almost certainly exaggerated" is a classic example of over-cautious (pseudo-centric) academicism.

Ironically, Fay offers another piece of evidence that Shostakovich, as a child of liberal tolerance, was not only averse to politics but also to Communism in its practical guise: "Petrograd's intelligentsia was especially horrified by the brutal murder by pro-Bolshevik sailors of two incarcerated leaders of the recently outlawed Constitutional Democratic (Kadet) Party, Andrey Shingaryov and Fyodor Kokoshkin, in their prison hospital. In a letter written to his Aunt Nazdezhda early in April 1918, [Shostakovich] lists a funeral march 'in memory of Shingaryov and Kokoshkin' among his recent works." (Fay, p. 12) The Kadets were the first party to be outlawed by Lenin following their demonstration in defence of the Constituent Assembly on 28th November 1917. Shingarev [sic], an eminent economist who had been Minister of Finance in the Provisional Government, and Kokoshkin, a law professor who had served as State Controller in the same body, were among those arrested, being transferred on 6th January 1918 from the Peter and Paul Fortress to the nearby Marinskaya Hospital where they were lynched the following night. This outrage appalled their fellow *intelligenty*, who realised that the Bolsheviks would go to any lengths to consolidate their coup. Gorky condemned the murders of Shingarev and Kokoshkin in *Novaya zhizn* on 9th January, the 13th anniversary of Bloody Sunday (which he compared to the massacre of those protesting the liquidation of the Constituent Assembly).

The eleven-year-old Shostakovich's musical statements vis-à-vis the protest against the dissolution of the Constituent Assembly and the murders of Shingarev and Kokoshkin two days later indicate, at the very least, that his family held a critical view of the progress of the Bolshevik regime. In the absence of further evidence, it is impossible to say how far Shostakovich himself understood the issues involved -- only that his musical reaction in this case was as deeply felt as his later musical reaction to his father's death (the Suite for two pianos, Opus 6). Certainly the composer's distanced stance towards politics and Communism can, in this case, be described as actively critical (i.e., dissenting). Whether that stance persisted, becoming the basis of a considered "secret dissidence" during 1918-26, remains, for now a matter of probability. The recollections of Boris Lossky and Zoya Shostakovich, together with the testimonies of Nadezhda Galli-Shohat, Nikolai Malko, Valerian Bogdanov-Berezovsky, and the composer himself in his letters to Tatyana Glivenko, suggest that the young Shostakovich deliberately continued to steer clear of Communism and Lenin-worship until at least 1926. His "amusement" at reviews of his First Symphony in the "Red press" (letter to Glivenko, 21st May 1926) and his

anticipation that "it will probably be very unpleasant to be present at the [Symphony's] rape by the [collectivist] Persimfans orchestra" (letter to Glivenko, 20th April 1927) confirm this distanced stance without suggesting anything definite enough to be construed as active dissent. Indeed, until recently, the very idea that Shostakovich might secretly have held anti-Communist views as early as his late teens would have struck most Western commentators as outlandish.

Such incredulity was partly a consequence of the uncritical (non-contextual) tendency to accept Shostakovich's "political" music of 1927-36 -- the Second and Third symphonies, the ballets, the film and incidental theatre scores -- as genuinely, rather than merely ostensibly, pro-Communist. This willingness to believe in the composer's political sincerity, in turn, partly derived from the common Western view of the Soviet 1920s as a time of economic surfeit and politico-cultural pluralism in which the system's apparent success persuaded artists like Shostakovich to throw in their lot with the regime and its "October" propaganda. We now have a markedly different concept of the Soviet 1920s [see [The young man \(1927-36\)](#)] and, as a result, of the politico-cultural context in which Shostakovich took his first steps as a composer. What should be understood, however, is that the evidence of Shostakovich's youthful apoliticism, together with his stance of actively critical reproach towards Lenin's Bolshevism in 1918, turns our assumptions upside-down. It now becomes necessary to construct an evidential case that, after 1926, Shostakovich shifted towards a more politically engaged position -- even became a believing Soviet Communist -- rather than to contend to the contrary: that he was, during 1927-36, hiding disaffection under a mask of conformism.

Since the present writer has argued for twelve years that Shostakovich was never sincere in his ostensibly Communist music, even as early as the Second Symphony (1927), he will leave it up to anti-revisionists to make the now necessary case to the contrary. What he would like to point out to anyone who proposes to construct this case is that (1) it cannot rest on Soviet official documents alone and (2) it must take account of the established fact of the composer's youthful apoliticism (veering to actively critical anti-Communism in 1918) and explain *why, how, and when Shostakovich came to change his views*. No account of Shostakovich's music in 1927-36 which founds itself on the assumption that he *began* as a believer in Communism is any longer sustainable.

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Note 1: Akhmatova's radio address

Much Western misunderstanding of the Russian dissident intelligentsia is based on a mixture of sentimental hearsay and naive acceptance of Soviet propaganda. The notion that Anna Akhmatova "read poetry to the Russians every day on the radio" is a minor example of this sadly enduring syndrome. When the war broke out, Akhmatova had for years been living in penury, often depending on the charity of friends. Long since deprived by the Soviet authorities of the right to publish her own writings, she earned a pittance from translations and had little enough money to meet her grocery bills, let alone contribute to the war effort (although she did do a few days of duty as an air-raid warden before being evacuated).

Akhmatova appeared on Soviet radio only once during the war -- a propaganda speech to the women of Leningrad*-- shortly before, on Stalin's orders, she was flown out to Moscow, and thence to Chistopol', later making her way to Tashkent in Uzbekistan. There she roomed with her friend Nadezhda Mandel'shtam in conditions of poverty and illness until returning to Moscow on 15th May 1944. (See Madam Mandel'shtam's brilliantly penetrating memoirs, *Hope Against Hope* and *Hope Abandoned*.) The Soviet government's sole war-time concession to Akhmatova -- she being, in their view, an outmoded "individualist" writer -- was to allow limited publication of her verses, many of which, during 1942-44, were "patriotic" in the sense of being pro-Russian (rather than pro-Soviet). While she gave some recitals in Tashkent's hospitals, reading to wounded soldiers, Leningrad heard no more from her until 1946. Upon her return to Moscow, Akhmatova gave a reading which drew such excited audience response that NKVD agents reported the event as a "provocation" and Stalin demanded to know who had "organised" this show of enthusiasm. The Moscow recital led, via her Leningrad appearance in April 1946, to Zhdanov's Stalin-mandated attack on Akhmatova and Zoshchenko -- and thence to her expulsion from the Writers' Union on 4th September.

Asked about her brief experience of the siege of Leningrad, Akhmatova told her friend Chukovskaya (upon meeting her, during evacuation, in Chistopol'): "Germans, what Germans, Lydia Korneevna? No one is thinking about Germans. The city is starving, already they are eating dogs and cats. There will be plague and the city will perish. No one is concerned about the Germans." (Quoted in Amanda Haight, *Anna Akhmatova: A Poetic Pilgrimage*, p. 123.) Shortly before Akhmatova arrived in Chistopol', her friend Marina Tsvetaeva hanged herself in nearby Yelabuga in a fit of grief and despair, having been callously neglected by the Soviet authorities. Tsvetaeva had unwisely returned from overseas exile towards the end of the Terror in 1939, whereupon her husband had been arrested and shot, her sister imprisoned, and her daughter sent to the Gulag for nineteen years. Akhmatova was deeply distressed by Tsvetaeva's suicide. Talking to Isaiah Berlin four years later in Leningrad, she occasionally interrupted her own narration to say "No, I cannot [say more about this], it is no good, you come from a society of human beings, whereas here we are divided into human beings and..." She would then fall silent. -- I.M.

*Amanda Haight (op. cit, p. 122) gives excerpts from Akhmatova's radio address, quoting Olga

Berggol'ts:

"My dear fellow citizens, mothers, wives, and sisters of Leningrad. It is more than a month since the enemy began trying to take our city and has been wounding it heavily. The city of Peter, the city of Lenin, the city of Pushkin, Dostoyevsky, and Blok, this great city of culture and labour, is threatened by the enemy with shame and death. My heart, like those of all the women of Leningrad, sinks at the mere thought that our city, my city, could be destroyed. My whole life has been connected with Leningrad: in Leningrad I became a poet and Leningrad inspired and coloured my poetry. I, like all of you at this moment, live only in the unshakeable belief that Leningrad will never fall to the fascists. This belief is strengthened when I see the women of Leningrad simply and courageously defending the city and keeping up their normal way of life... Our descendants will honour every mother who lived at the time of the war, but their gaze will be caught and held fast particularly by the image of the Leningrad woman standing during an air-raid on the roof of a house, with a boat-hook and fire tongs in her hands, protecting the city from fire; the Leningrad girl volunteer [*druzhnitsa*] giving aid to the wounded among the still smoking ruins of a building... No, a city which has bred women like these cannot be conquered. We, the women of Leningrad, are living through difficult days, but we know that the whole of our country, all its people, are behind us. We feel their alarm for our sakes, their love and help. We thank them and we promise them that we will be ever stoic and brave."

[Akhmatova's reference to "the city of Lenin" was purely formulaic. She detested Soviet Communism throughout her life. -- I.M.]

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Note 2: Emigration from the USSR

The frequently asked question "Why didn't Shostakovich emigrate?" reliably indicates absence of knowledge of the Soviet background.

There were three waves of emigration from the Soviet Union: (1) between 1917 and 1921, (2) during the Second World War, and (3) from 1970 to the fall of the USSR during 1989-91. While it was still possible for members of the intelligentsia to "escape" abroad in the mid-1920s, this was officially discouraged, inasmuch as the Soviet regime was by then intent on presenting itself as culturally tolerant and vibrant. (In 1930, Shostakovich's hero, the eminent and highly popular playwright [Mikhail Bulgakov](#), begged the Central Committee to "order" him to leave the country; Stalin intervened, effectively blocking the flight of an artist whose essentially counter-revolutionary outlook he found perversely intriguing. In the same year, [Evgeny Zamyatin](#), author of the anti-Communist allegory *We* and co-author of the libretto to *The Nose*, approached Stalin himself for leave to go abroad; the dictator left him hanging on until 1932 before granting permission. The last known individual to be allowed to leave the USSR under Stalin's dictatorship, Zamyatin spent his final years in Paris.)

By the late 1920s, so far from blithely allowing its best brains to leave the country, the Soviet government was channelling its overseas resources into the "return to the homeland" propaganda campaign, an effort to persuade émigrés (such as Gorky and Prokofiev) to come back to the USSR and join in "building Socialism". (Key figures among the émigré populace who would not play ball were often kidnapped or even assassinated.) In 1930, the Soviet Union's borders were sealed and the country went into quarantine, no further public discussion of émigré culture being permitted and all news from abroad becoming subject to total Soviet censorship (the beginning of "Soviet information space"). Anyone thereafter requesting to leave the country was charged with "anti-Soviet sentiments". (A speaker in CBC's 1994 radio series [see [Centre and pseudo centre](#)] suggests that, such was the fear within the USSR during 1936-9, that many "committed suicide or emigrated". Suicide was indeed endemic then; apart from the case of Zamyatin, emigration was inconceivable during 1930-41 and 1945-1956.)

Millions, of course, left the USSR when its borders collapsed during the war with Nazism. After the war, however, the NKVD resumed the "return to the homeland" campaign in various ways, including the notorious program of "forced repatriation" of Soviet citizens "displaced" during the conflict. Five million "returners" (*vozvrashchentsy*) were welcomed back to the USSR during 1945-7, many being either summarily shot for "espionage" or given 25-year sentences for "anti-Soviet activity whilst living abroad". Except for rare heroic escapes from the Gulag, there was no traffic in the opposite direction.

Following Khrushchev's "secret speech" denouncing Stalin in 1956, conditions were relaxed in a few selected cases. Otherwise, leaving the country remained extremely difficult until 1970, when pressure from Soviet Jews to be allowed to resettle in Israel caused the Brezhnev government to rethink its emigration protocols. Even so, getting out of the USSR was still difficult even as late as 1986. ("Those

applying to emigrate became pariahs; they were fired from their jobs, defamed in the press, attacked and beaten in the streets, and sometimes forced to wait for their exit visas for years or to pay 'ransom' in the form of an exorbitant fee." -- Heller and Nekrich, *Utopia in Power*, p. 682.)

According to the widow of the late Joseph Schillinger (see *Shostakovich Reconsidered*, p. 184, fn. 250), Shostakovich's mother pleaded with Schillinger to do what he could to secure her son's emigration to America in autumn 1928. If true, and supposing Shostakovich to have been aware of his mother's scheming, this would constitute a fatal blow to the view (in the face of persuasive evidence to the contrary) that he was then a believing Communist. This was only months before the first RAPM attacks on his music, and uncomfortably close to the point at which Stalin moved to seal off the USSR from the outside world. Autumn 1928 would have been Shostakovich's last chance for nearly thirty years to flee abroad. The notion that he could have defected in 1949 -- during a propaganda trip to the USA, on sufferance and with his family left behind as "hostages" -- is fanciful, to say the least. Defections of this kind only became a motif of Soviet cultural delegations during the early 1960s, long after Stalin was dead. Surrounded by KGB "supervisors", Shostakovich would have had no option but to smile and go through the motions during his American trips of 1949 and 1959. Furthermore, the chances of his being allowed to emigrate in the window of opportunity of 1956-66 (see *Shostakovich Reconsidered*, pp. 184-5, 397) must realistically be assessed as slim to non-existent. For the Soviet Union to have stood back and let its supposed musical laureate leave the country at that time would have been a disastrous propaganda defeat. In short, the question "Why didn't Shostakovich emigrate?" is, in itself, a revealing and regrettable solecism. -- I.M.

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Note 3: The status of music in Soviet Russia

Solomon Volkov's observation on the "logocentricity" of Russian culture is true in the sense that Russia is unusually biased to literature compared with other European countries, even allowing for the fact that (language being the basic coinage of human exchange) all countries with any history of literacy regard books as the backbone of their culture. In Russia, centuries of censorship have charged the word, written or spoken, with an oracular power recognised and honoured alike among the intelligentsia, artistic and scientific, as well as (in more demotic forms) among "the people". There is no equivalent of this "word-mystical" literature-worship anywhere elsewhere in Europe.

On the other hand, the split between the central literary tradition in Russia and its other creative outlets -- music, ballet, the visual arts -- is not necessarily very much more extreme than in Western Europe or America. It's rare, for example, to find anyone, in whatever country, with a deep interest in literature and comparably intense interests in music, dance, or art -- let alone all of these. Most people are drawn to one form of artistic expression to the relative exclusion of the others; and, because of the cultural dominance of language, the preponderant speciality in most cultures will be literature. Such is the case in Russia, the effect being accentuated by the quasi-mystical significance which Russians attach to the word. Yet this is compensated by the serious and soulful way in which Russians approach their arts in general. (The average educated Russian was once conspicuously more "arts aware" than the average educated citizen of other countries; less so nowadays.)

Oddly enough, poets are rarely musical in any country or culture. The logocentricity of Brodsky, as cited by Volkov, is probably typical of the average writer, let alone of the average poet. This being so, it's not unusual that he should think little of Shostakovich. On the other hand, generational factors must be taken into account. Poets of Brodsky's generation were less widely cultured than, for example, those of the "Silver Age", in which literary people were brought up to admire art, dance, opera, song, and instrumental music as well as the products of their own very rich literary tradition. For example, Pasternak was deeply interested in Chopin and Scriabin. (The "Scriabin cult", indeed, crossed most genre barriers in Russian art during the fifteen years immediately after his death.) Likewise, Bulgakov took what appears to have been a genuine interest in Shostakovich's music. As for Anna Akhmatova, she not only lived for a while with the composer Arthur Lourié, whose music she never ceased to praise, but also voiced an exalted view of Shostakovich's music, impressing her literary colleagues with her willingness, in his case, to elevate the significance of music over literature during the Soviet period. As for the Russian musical community, its members were, by and large, never in doubt of Shostakovich's eminence in mid-century Russian music. Their proclivity for living within their own aesthetic ethos -- as divorced from the sensibility and repertoire of allusion enjoyed by poets like Brodsky as his world was from theirs -- represents a contrast which, in Russia, would naturally be felt more markedly than elsewhere. In essence, though, the same mutual incomprehension obtains in other countries, where literary people are as certain that writers are the keepers of the cultural flame as musical people believe in the pre-eminence of composers and visual people worship painters and sculptors.

As for SV's subsequent observations about Shostakovich's place in "the intellectual debate" within the USSR, this phrase is somewhat misleading.

Insofar as the democratic West would comprehend an intellectual debate, nothing of the kind existed under Soviet rule. On the one hand, there was, within the artistic Unions, limited discussion of the principles and prescriptions of Socialist Realism (in respect of how far writers, artists, composers, etc, could be said, at any given time, to be fulfilling these). On the other hand, within the private world of the dissident intelligentsia there was almost equally limited discussion of what little work of worth managed to squeeze past the Soviet censors (or, later, of what manuscripts happened, currently, to be in samizdat circulation). Since literature, drama, and cinema were the most heavily censored genres in the Soviet aesthetic spectrum, there was, in practical reality, not much in the way of contemporary work for writers to "debate". Indeed, there were neither many writers nor consumers of literature around to "debate" it, thousands of these being sent to the Gulag. Independent literature during the Soviet era was not so much under siege as virtually annihilated. Little wonder that, in those years, the Russian literary community was too inward-looking to notice activity in the other arts.

Far fewer musicians and composers went to the camps, partly because Stalin's arts watchdogs valued music for its propaganda power (a function which could not, as in Socialist Realist literature, be usurped by untrained hacks), and partly because non-vocal music could be subversive without betraying itself to the Soviet censors. The fact that Shostakovich meant little to most Soviet writers chiefly signifies that, in general terms, writers are interested in writing, musicians in music (and ordinary citizens in neither). Shostakovich's temporary "promotions" as a result of Stalin's orchestrated attacks on him indicate the significance which music held for the dictator (whose contempt for all but a handful of "inspired" writers was no secret). Yet these "promotions" raised Shostakovich's profile in no discernible "debate". What actually happened was that the Soviet media conferred on him a passing notoreity in the eyes of the broad public -- a notoreity, moreover, which soon passed (and which, with the exception of deeper minds in the literary community such as Akhmatova and Pasternak, made no more impression on the country's writers than upon the country's workers and peasants).

We must, furthermore, bear in mind that Shostakovich's name and work was, from time to time, deliberately and thoroughly suppressed so far as the general public was concerned. I have encountered educated Russians who only vaguely recognise Shostakovich's name as a result. For instance, when I asked an otherwise intelligent Russian what she knew of him, she replied, "Wasn't he that composer whom the West made a fuss of and who emigrated there?" Within the world of Soviet music, of course, the story was different: Shostakovich was seen as the only artist doing consistently truthful and honest work of greatness during the Stalin epoch. (See Akhmatova's verdict, below.) Yet even the perspectives of the Russian musical community were subject to generational discontinuities and distortions brought about by changes in the official cultural line. [Vera Volkova](#), a music student at the Gorky (Nizhny Novgorod) conservatory in the early 1960s, records that the city's Shostakovich festival in 1964 revealed a composer hitherto largely hidden to her and her young contemporaries by the post-1948 ban on his work (a ban slower to be lifted in the provinces than in Moscow and Leningrad):

"Our young heads were at that time thoroughly indoctrinated by the official propaganda which constantly harped on the 'formalistic deviations' in [Shostakovich's] work. As for his music, we knew only several cheerful marches, songs, and overtures. Suddenly a world of unforeseen, irresistible musical beauty and unprecedented intensity of feeling was flung open for us. People were crying at the festival concerts, for the first time perceiving without prejudice or doubt the tragic revelations of the Fifth, Seventh, and Eleventh symphonies. Liberated from prohibition, Shostakovich's music became a symbol of the severe truth of our time..."

None of this detracts from Shostakovich's claim to have been the greatest artist in any genre to have worked under the Soviet dispensation. Certainly no contemporary writer, painter, or film-maker can remotely rival him in the scale, quality, and outspokenness of his creative achievements (and not simply because no writer, painter, or film-maker enjoyed the creative opportunities to attempt to match him). If many Russians knew and know little about him, that merely reflects the fact that art music, in any culture, embodies the interests of a relatively small part of the population. Ask the average British citizen about Benjamin Britten, a composer who worked in complete creative freedom, and you will receive no more informed or impressed a response.--I.M.

The following is a slightly edited version of Appendix 2 of *The New Shostakovich*.

Akhmatova, Shostakovich, and the 'Seventh'

There is no doubt that Shostakovich greatly admired Akhmatova as an artist. A portrait of her hung in his Moscow apartment and, in *Testimony* (p. 274), he acknowledges his regard for her work, making special mention of *Requiem* and the "incomparable" late verse of her last decade, 1955-66. Equally certain is that Akhmatova was fascinated by Shostakovich. Much affected by his Fifth Symphony, which she first heard during the late Thirties, she thought sufficiently highly of him to have inscribed the 1958 Soviet selection of her verse *To Dmitri Dmitryevich Shostakovich, in whose epoch I lived on earth*. Indeed, so intense was her interest in his art that it occasionally claimed precedence over enquiries from devotees about her own. The scholar and translator Peter Norman recalls that, while visiting Akhmatova at Komarovo in 1964, his conversation with her was halted when the poet Anatoli Naiman arrived with a tape of new pieces by Shostakovich which she insisted on hearing immediately. (These were the Ninth and Tenth Quartets, premiered in Moscow by the Beethoven Quartet on 20th November 1964 and brought to Komarovo by Galina Shostakovich's husband Yevgeny Chukovsky. According to Anatoli Naiman, Akhmatova and her circle listened to the quartets "repeatedly, day after day".) As for the composer himself, he records that Akhmatova regularly attended his premieres and (somewhat to his embarrassment) wrote poems about them.

While their respect for each other as artists was deep, Shostakovich and Akhmatova were very dissimilar people and *Testimony's* reminiscences of the poetess are wry with faint amusement over her famously cultivated mystique. Remembered by all who knew her as the most dignified person they ever met, she

moved through the flustered shallows of modernity with the anachronistic grace of a Renaissance galleon. Shostakovich's iconoclastic streak, however, prevented him from viewing Akhmatova's majestic demeanour without irony and, while he prized the serene translucence of her language, he was unable to share her Christian acceptance of suffering. Intellectually, he had more in common with her sister in verse Marina Tsvetaeva who, like him, had Polish blood, identified with the Jew as a fellow outsider, and was restlessly preoccupied with death.

Banned in the USSR between 1922 and 1956, Tsvetayeva's work came to Shostakovich's attention only in his sixties, whereupon he marked his belated acquaintance with it by writing the Six Romances, Opus 143, of 1973. The last and longest of these, *To Anna Akhmatova*, is based on a poem saluting a uniquely stately and incorruptible spirit in words whose turbulence paradoxically draws from Shostakovich a setting of stark gravity. His reverence for Akhmatova, elsewhere tempered by his innate scepticism, is here unequivocal. If, as a satirist, he was essentially as foreign to her as their mutual friend Mikhail Zoshchenko (whose supremacy in the domain of prose she conceded with awe), as a tragedian he was very close to her and *To Anna Akhmatova* remains one of his most solemn and imposing musical monuments. (His only explicit memorial to her, it quotes the first movement of the Second Violin Concerto, suggesting that something of her is likewise to be found in that unsung creation of 1967. More Akhmatovian meditations may figure in the similarly neglected Second Cello Concerto, written soon after her death in 1966.*)

For her part, Akhmatova shared the misgivings of several of Shostakovich's literary friends concerning the quality of some of the texts he chose to set. (Biased to the vernacular, he was intrigued by the poignant and ironic aspects of artlessness; in *Testimony*, he records with a patient shrug her fastidious disapproval of the "weak words" of *From Jewish Folk Poetry*. According to Anatoli Naiman, her actual pejorative was "kitsch" and her anger on the subject unassuageable.) Despite this, her poet's hypersensitive ear made Akhmatova highly susceptible to music and she seems to have heard in Shostakovich's work a clear enough continuity with her favourite composers (Bach, Mozart, Beethoven, and Chopin) for any reservations about his general outlook to be of little account to her. Taking a more mysterious -- if not religious -- view of inspiration than he could, she perhaps saw deeper into him than he himself did.

On the subject of inspiration, Akhmatova's sense of a sublime, causative "music" immanent in the lines of her verse -- a sense very much shared by Osip Mandelstam -- is nowhere more apparent than in her incantatory *Poem Without A Hero*, commenced in 1940 and thereafter endlessly revisited by her for the purpose of fine tuning. Approving the poet Mikhail Zenkevich's description of the *Poem* as a "Tragic Symphony" and herself twice exploring its potential as a ballet scenario, she clearly found the boundaries between her text and the media of abstract sound and movement pregnantly vague. Dense with shadowy allusions, *Poem Without A Hero* is of special interest to Shostakovich students for its characteristically manifold reference to "my Seventh" (II, ix), usually held simultaneously to concern Shostakovich's Leningrad Symphony, Beethoven's Seventh (her favourite), and her own ill-fated "Seventh Book" of poems. The cause of Akhmatova's particular attachment to Shostakovich's Seventh is unknown, though the likeliest explanation is that her sentiment was based on a feeling of identity with the symphony's fate. According to the latest Soviet scholarship, she bore the manuscript of its first

movement on her lap when evacuated by plane from Leningrad on 29 September 1941 -- implying that Shostakovich, who left the city three days later, had ensured himself against bad luck and enemy anti-aircraft guns by entrusting a copy to her. Since he cannot have had time to duplicate the orchestral score, this would seem to have been the piano reduction he played to a small audience in his apartment on September 17. (That being the day on which both he and Akhmatova addressed Leningrad by radio, it seems likely that she was among his guests that evening.)

A rejected draft of the Epilogue of *Poem Without A Hero* suggests an intriguing alternative: "All of you would have been able to admire me, / when I saved myself from evil pursuit, / in the belly of the flying fish / and flew over lake Ladoga and the forest / as though possessed by the devil / to Brocken like a witch in the night. / And the Seventh, as it called itself, / was after me, its secret sparkling, / rushing to a feast that had never been heard of. / The famed Leningrad / in the guise of a notebook with notes in it / returned into the native ether." (tr. Richard McKane.) Did the "notebook with notes in it" contain Shostakovich's jottings towards his first movement, or was it a complete version in short-score? Inasmuch as he is known to have done most of his composing in his head, the second possibility seems likelier.

The poetess's mission to rescue the symphony from the flames understandably resonated in her mind as a metaphor for the salvation, by individual conscience, of Russian culture. More than a mere symbol, though, the *Leningrad* assumed for her the significance of a major creative landmark in itself. Anatoli Naiman, a close friend of Akhmatova during the early Sixties, reveals that the musical sub-text of *Poem Without A Hero* "begins" with Stravinsky's *Petrushka* and "ends" with Shostakovich's Seventh Symphony. Behind this, he explains, lies her vision of the first quarter of the century as being, artistically speaking, "under the sign of Stravinsky" and of its middle years as "under the sign of Shostakovich" (personal communication). While Western literary audiences may find this classification strange, it should be said that Akhmatova seems to have felt music to be a form of supravocal speech and that her taste in it was, consequently, fairly sophisticated. Her group of pupils and admirers regularly circulated records, mostly of baroque music -- Bach, Vivaldi, and Purcell (*Dido and Aeneas* being a special enthusiasm) -- while she herself stretched as far as early Schoenberg and even *Wozzeck*.

Much of what Akhmatova said or wrote possessed a double meaning. *Poem Without A Hero*, for example, is a masque in which the good and evil of two eras in a single city (the pre-Revolutionary Petersburg of 1913 and the Soviet Leningrad of 1941) confront each other in a hall of mirrors. Conceivably, her idea of musico-astrological "signs" in connection with Stravinsky and Shostakovich is similarly ambiguous. Taking for granted her love for their music, there is room for speculation that she saw these composers as archetypes representing not only the propitious but also the unfortunate sides of their respective epochs. Just as, for instance, Stravinsky's individualism and ironic sense of style epitomise the best of the St Petersburg of Akhmatova's *Poem*, so the city's dark side stands reflected in his shortcomings: the capricious modishness noted by Schoenberg; the superficiality regretted by Nijinsky ("Stravinsky is a good composer, but he does not know life -- his compositions have no purpose"). In the same way, while the tragic stoicism and undecipherable honesty of Shostakovich accord with what was positive about Leningrad in 1941, his sceptical materialism can be said to represent -- at least to someone of Akhmatova's spirituality -- its inauspicious obverse. Whether, had she lived to hear

it, she would have shared her fellow believer Solzhenitsyn's disapproval of Shostakovich's pessimistic Fourteenth Symphony is impossible to say; aesthetically a pantheist, she was broadminded enough to admire the expressive virtuosity of any amount of art whose philosophy she deplored. More to the point is that she would have seen Shostakovich's despair as implicit in his godless outlook -- and that her favourite work of Stravinsky's was the *Symphony of Psalms*.

*Akhmatova came from Odessa, a city with its own distinctive literary tradition. Playing piano for Rostropovich and Vishnevskya in Zhukovka at New Year in 1966, Shostakovich turned to an Odessa street-song (see Wilson, p. 394). Two months later, Akhmatova died in Moscow (on 5th March, the thirteenth anniversary of the death of Stalin). Then completing his Eleventh Quartet, Shostakovich immediately afterwards set to work on his Second Cello Concerto in which the Odessa street-song is quoted, mainly in the second movement.

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Note 4: Anti-Stalinism, anti-Sovietism

It's important to understand the distinction which Solomon Volkov draws here. During the "thaw" years (1956-1966) and the early Brezhnev era (1966-1974), it was, in theory, possible for the relatively free dissident intelligentsia (those lucky enough not to be deprived of the means of earning a living, or imprisoned, internally exiled, expelled, or incarcerated in psychiatric wards) to express cautiously anti-Stalinist views, provided that they made it clear that they were not, as a consequence, proposing anti-Soviet views. In practice -- as Volkov and Shostakovich discovered -- this was not so.

In actual Soviet reality, to publicly express, let alone linger on, anti-Stalinist views was highly unwise -- indeed, potentially injurious to one's career. This was partly because the apparatus of Soviet power then remained essentially intact as Stalin had left it (as did the privileged *nomenklatura*); and partly because few dissidents genuinely stopped at anti-Stalinism, privately regarding the entire Soviet "experiment" as a disaster from start to finish. Being "anti-Stalinist but not anti-Soviet" was a game which dissident writers quickly learned to play during the late 1950s and early 1960s, invoking the official euphemism of "the cult of personality" (of J. V. Stalin). Yet the history of Soviet magazine publishing during the Sixties is a cautionary record of endless evasion, revision, bowdlerisation, and outright censorship on the part of editors and associated *apparatchiki*. Not until *glasnost* was any *explicitly* anti-Stalinist fiction published.

As for the Soviet Constitution, it was a notoriously worthless document drafted, on Stalin's orders, shortly before the onset of the fiercest excesses of the Terror in 1936-8 so as to make the USSR appear to the outside world to be a virtuously democratic and law-abiding state. As such, the 1936 Constitution was a grim standing joke among older *intelligenty*. (Solzhenitsyn, for example, remarked that it never went into effect... even for a single day.) When the dissidents of the 1960s and 1970s appealed to the Soviet Constitution with reference to the principle of freedom of expression, few if any of them could possibly have done so in anything but a spirit of irony, however determined.

Such is the context of the distinction drawn by Volkov between Shostakovich's anti-Stalinism and his circumspect caution with respect to being seen as anti-Soviet. The composer's calculation seems to have been that, whilst young firebrands were not then permitted to denounce Stalin in so many words, he, Shostakovich, as a cultural elder statesman, might be allowed more leeway -- always providing that he didn't overstep the mark by being explicitly anti-Soviet. For him, this would have constituted a strategic withdrawal from the sort of front-line anti-Sovietism heard in the Thirteenth Symphony (a work whose suppression by Soviet agencies he seems to have regarded with real fury). Accordingly, the refusal of publication for *Testimony* would have represented, for him, a further (enforced) step backwards from telling the truth. While perhaps momentarily surprised by this, and probably angry about it, he must have understood that, under Brezhnev and his Stalinist Old Guard during 1970-74, the Soviet Union was freezing over again.

In fact, of course, *Testimony* is *implicitly* anti-Soviet from start to finish. No hint of redeeming light is

allowed to obtrude amid the bitter gloom. The book's references to Lenin are, at best, darkly ambiguous, while its anecdotes of cultural life after Stalin's reign are as sour and contemptuous as those appertaining to 1928-53. Indeed, it would be puzzling if this were not so -- especially since we now have the near-unanimous testimonies of Elizabeth Wilson's [witnesses](#), the explicit anti-Soviet mockery of Shostakovich's [letters to Isaak Glikman](#), and the often harrowing stories behind the Eighth Quartet, the Thirteenth Symphony, and many other works composed from 1953 onwards. Contrary to those who would have us believe that Shostakovich endorsed Soviet Communism and deplored only the "aberration" of Stalin's dictatorship, the evidence -- as Vladimir Ashkenazy insists -- is that he detested the entire Soviet system from end to end and top to bottom. (Such is my understanding of Solomon Volkov's view of Shostakovich, from our letters and conversations.)--I.M.

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SHOSTAKOVICH'S FILM SCORES

1929	<i>New Babylon</i>	dir. Grigori Kozintsev and Leonid Trauberg
1930-1	<i>Alone</i>	dir. Grigori Kozintsev and Leonid Trauberg
1931	<i>Golden Mountains</i>	dir. Sergei Yutkevich
1932	<i>Counterplan</i>	dir. Fridrikh Ermler and Sergei Yutkevich
1933-4	<i>The Tale of a Priest and His Servant Balda</i>	cartoon, dir. Mikhail Tsekhanovsky
1934-5	<i>Maxim's Youth</i>	dir. Grigori Kozintsev and Leonid Trauberg
	<i>Girl Friends</i>	dir. Lev Arnshtam
1935	<i>Love and Hate</i>	dir. Alexander Gendelshtein
1936-7	<i>Maxim's Return</i>	dir. Grigori Kozintsev and Leonid Trauberg
	<i>Volochayevsk Days</i>	dir. Georgi and Sergei Vasiliev
1938	<i>Vyborg District</i>	dir. Grigori Kozintsev and Leonid Trauberg
	<i>Friends</i>	dir. Lev Arnshtam
	<i>The Great Citizen, Part 1</i>	dir. Fridrikh Ermler
	<i>The Man with a Gun</i>	dir. Sergei Yutkevich
1939	<i>The Great Citizen, Part 2</i>	dir. Fridrikh Ermler
	<i>The Silly Little Mouse</i>	cartoon, dir. Mikhail Tsekhanovsky
1940	<i>The Adventures of Korzinkina</i>	dir. Klementi Mints
1944	<i>Zoya</i>	dir. B. Chirskov and Lev Arnshtam

1945	<i>Simple Folk</i>	dir. Grigori Kozintsev and Leonid Trauberg
1947	<i>The Young Guard</i>	dir. Sergei Gerasimov
	<i>Pirogov</i>	dir. Grigori Kozintsev
1948	<i>Michurin</i>	dir. Alexander Dovzhenko
	<i>The Meeting on the Elbe</i>	dir. Grigori Alexandrov
1949	<i>The Fall of Berlin</i>	dir. Mikhail Chiaureli
1950	<i>Belinsky</i>	dir. Grigori Kozintsev
1954	<i>The Unforgettable Year 1919</i>	dir. Mikhail Chiaureli
1954	<i>Song of the Great Rivers</i>	dir. Joris Ivens
1955	<i>The Gadfly</i>	dir. Alexander Faintsimmer
955-6	<i>The First Echelon</i>	dir. Mikhail Kalatozov
1960	<i>Five Days, Five Nights</i>	dir. Lev Arnshtam
1964	<i>Hamlet</i>	dir. Grigori Kozintsev
1965	<i>A Year As Long As A Lifetime</i>	dir. Grigori Roshal
1967	<i>Sofya Perovskaya</i>	dir. Lev Arnshtam
1970	<i>King Lear</i>	dir. Grigori Kozintsev

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THE SHOSTAKOVICH DEBATE

The Case for Dissidence

The young man (1927-36)

UNDER CONSTRUCTION

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THE SHOSTAKOVICH DEBATE

The Question of Dissidence (1)

To be read in conjunction with the [Chronology of the Debate](#).

From the "*Testimony* view" to the "dissident" conception

Though still a cause of controversy, the "*Testimony* affair", as described in [A Manual for Beginners](#), is now a subsidiary issue within the wider Shostakovich debate. This is because the "*Testimony* view" of Shostakovich -- in a nutshell: that he was, in Solomon Volkov's words, "a hidden dissident" (see [Chronology](#), 1981 [April]) -- has, during the last twenty years, been extensively confirmed by the "small 't' testimony" of the composer's many Russian and East European colleagues. Early signs of this confirmation were evident within weeks of the Western publication of *Testimony* in 1979 when the composers Boris Chaikovsky, Rodion Shchedrin, Georgiy Sviridov, and [Galina Ustvolskaya](#) bravely refused to sign [the KGB's](#) "letter" to *Literaturnaya gazeta* denouncing *Testimony* as a "pitiful forgery". Harlow Robinson recalls that, in Moscow in November 1979, when copies of *Testimony* were circulating in secret, "Soviet musicologists and musicians (including those who knew him well) expressed reservations about Mr Volkov's motives and methods, [but] they agreed almost unanimously that this was the Shostakovich they knew". A few months later, the British critic John Warrack, reviewing *Testimony*, quoted "a very distinguished Soviet musician, privately" as saying "I wish [the memoirs] were not true; but I am afraid they are", adding: "Other Soviet musicians and acquaintances have confided more or less the same thing." Similar opinions were subsequently aired by Warrack's colleague Gerald Abraham and by Simon Karlinsky, the professor of literature who, with Laurel Fay, had discovered the "recycled" passages in *Testimony*.

By the time Ian MacDonald wrote [The New Shostakovich](#) in 1988-9, over a dozen witnesses were on record as endorsing, if not the literal text of *Testimony*, then the impression of the composer which the book conveys -- the "*Testimony* view" of him.

These included the composer's son Maxim who, contrary to claims still repeated by anti-revisionist writers, began endorsing the *Testimony* view of his father within weeks of defecting from the USSR in April 1981 and has done so regularly ever since, taking issue only with minor details concerning Shostakovich's evaluation of Tchaikovsky and Prokofiev. Additional witnesses included: the conductors Rudolf Barshai and [Kyrill Kondrashin](#), Shostakovich's close friends Mstislav Rostropovich and Galina Vishnevskaya, and other leading Russian musicians such as [Rostislav Dubinsky](#) and [Vladimir Ashkenazy](#). Freed to speak in the USSR following the collapse of Soviet hegemony in Eastern Europe, further Russian associates of Shostakovich (the musicologists Lev Lebedinsky, [Daniil Zhitomirsky](#), and Lev Mazel') added their voices to this choir within a year of MacDonald's book appearing in 1990. By 1993, the chorus was reinforced by the musicologists [Israel Nestyev](#), [Marina Sabinina](#), and [Vera Volkova](#), the conductors Gennadi Rozhdestvensky, Yuri Temirkanov, and Semyon Bychkov, the distinguished novelist Andrei Bitov, and Shostakovich's friend [Isaak Glikman](#).

In 1994, the trickle became a flood with the publication of Elizabeth Wilson's [Shostakovich: A Life Remembered](#), containing testimony from seventy [witnesses](#). Without necessarily endorsing or even mentioning *Testimony* itself, Wilson's witnesses confirmed the "*Testimony* view" of the composer so overwhelmingly that *Testimony* itself ceased to be the ultimate touchstone of the revisionist position. The American music critic Terry Teachout summed up the paradigm-shifting impact of Wilson's book in *Commentary* (February, 1995):

Testimony or no *Testimony*, it is no longer possible to regard Shostakovich as a faithful servant of the Communist party. *Shostakovich: A Life Remembered* leaves no doubt whatsoever that he hated Stalin, hated Communism, hated the *apparatchiki* and the *nomenklatura*, and that much of his music was in some meaningful sense intended to convey this hatred.

Among Wilson's witnesses were those prepared to speak without equivocation of Shostakovich's moral-aesthetic opposition to the Soviet regime. The viola player Fyodor Druzhinin: "People who lived in Shostakovich's epoch have no need to dig in the archives or to marvel at the evidence of repressions and executions and murders. It is all there in his music." The violinist Yakov Milkis: "Shostakovich's whole musical output is logical and consistent in its expression. Through it Dmitri Dmitriyevich found a way of registering a protest and of mocking the Soviet regime." The film director Grigori Kozintsev: "Music is not a profession for Shostakovich, it is the necessity to speak out and to convey what lies behind the lives of people, to depict our age and our country... In Shostakovich's music I hear a virulent hatred of cruelty, of the cult of power, of the persecution of truth..."

As a result of *Shostakovich: A Life Remembered*, the "*Testimony* view" of the composer

gave way to a broader-based "dissident" conception of him, a view confirmed in 1997 by Larry Weinstein's documentary [The War Symphonies](#) in which a dozen witnesses, several of whom had earlier been interviewed by Elizabeth Wilson, endorsed this general interpretation of Shostakovich's outlook. While revisionists immediately recognised the significance of *Shostakovich: A Life Remembered*, little was said about it by anti-revisionists. Richard Taruskin briefly referred to it as "the one indispensable book about the composer", but he did not review it and has barely mentioned it since. Laurel Fay lists the book in the bibliography of her study [Shostakovich: A Life](#), but refers to it only inferentially as a collection of the sort of "memoir" material she deems intrinsically unreliable. Not surprisingly, some anti-revisionists have yet to absorb the significance of Wilson's book, continuing to take *Testimony* to be the benchmark of revisionism and thus attacking revisionists as "Volkovists".

The "dissident" conception versus "open" meaning

At a seminar during the Borodin Quartet's recital-season of the Shostakovich quartets at Bantry House in April 2000, Elizabeth Wilson said that she had no doubt that the composer had despised his country's rulers during most of his life. As the author of *Shostakovich: A Life Remembered*, she draws the obvious conclusion from the testimony of witnesses quoted in her book; as an observer of the Soviet music scene since the mid-1960s, she also, no doubt, relies on personal impressions of Shostakovich in his last decade and of the way he was seen by his circle of associates, many of whom had known him since the 1920s.

Wilson's statement echoes Terry Teachout's deduction that Shostakovich hated the Soviet system and confirms the revisionist character of her own historical commentary in *Shostakovich: A Life Remembered*. Revisionism, however, proposes that Shostakovich did not merely hate and despise the Soviet regime (a common enough sentiment among the Russian intelligentsia) but morally *resisted* it in as much of his music as he could, as well as in such non-musical statements, verbal and otherwise, as he felt safe to indulge in. This distinction -- that Shostakovich was not merely passively alienated from Soviet Communism but actively morally critical of it, and that his work is fundamentally shaped by this *resistant* outlook -- is crucial both to revisionism and anti-revisionism. Without this distinction, there would be no argument over whether Shostakovich can be termed a dissident. Hence, this point of view is forcefully contested by anti-revisionists, most notably and at greatest length by Richard Taruskin.

Before examining the anti-revisionist case against the dissident conception of Shostakovich, it is necessary to answer a general objection to this point of view often voiced by Western listeners -- which is that any form of "extra-musical" interpretation

restricts the range of meanings deducible from a given piece of music, confining its expression in such a way as to "trivialise" it. This objection contains several challengeable assumptions (not excluding the concept of extra-musicality itself which, being literally indefinable, alters its meaning according to usage). The essence of the objection to considering Shostakovich's music as expressing a dissident outlook is that "political" (or "ideological") interpretation reduces the potentially infinite meaning which music should allegedly allow. In fact, no music possesses potentially infinite meaning. While there may be some who believe the opening of Beethoven's Fifth Symphony to encipher the secrets of the pyramids or to evoke fly-fishing on a wet morning, such "readings" would be rejected by most listeners. On the other hand, even the most abstract music cannot help evoking a recognisable range of moods, if nothing else. This range, though, will have restrictions. Music, far from infinitely meaningful, succeeds *because of* its interpretive limitations rather than in spite of them. A given piece of music becomes "universal" by meaning more or less the same thing to all of us -- not by meaning entirely different things to everyone who apprehends it. This, though, does not mean that within the naturally limited range of meanings which any music evokes there is not an equally natural scope for different lines of interpretation. The question becomes: which, if any, of these "readings" is more plausible?

For example, one critic hears the slow opening movement of Shostakovich's Sixth Symphony as an evocation of rural landscape with spiritual associations: "the immensity, the vagueness, the infinitude of the Russian land." Another proposes instead that the envisaged "landscape" is urban and the mood one of muted funerary meditation in the wake of Stalin's Terror of 1935-39. To the extent that both of these responses will induce in the listener a mood of awed and sombre contemplation, it might be argued that it does not matter which, if either, is more plausible (or even correct). But if one reading can be shown to be much more likely, what is the justification for clinging to the other?

Very often the endeavour, by means of contextual investigation, to distinguish relative levels of likelihood is resolvable only in terms of probability, even if such probabilities may be high. Sometimes there is specific confirmation of what may have begun as a conjecture (e.g., MacDonald's speculation in *The New Shostakovich* concerning the relationship between the Eighth Quartet and the composer's induction into the Communist Party in 1960, later confirmed by Lev Lebedinsky [1990], Maxim Shostakovich [1992], and Isaak Glikman [1993]). Other such conjectures may remain merely more or less probable compared with rival interpretations. Yet to demand, as some commentators do, that meaning, musical or otherwise, be kept permanently open on principle, let alone maintained at the ultimately open level of "infinite" interpretability, flouts commonsense. (It is also contradicted by the willingness of anti-revisionists to accept any "extra-musical" meaning as long as it does not accord with revisionism, e.g., Richard Taruskin's "genocide" theory of *Lady Macbeth of Mtsensk*, Alex Ross's advocacy of the official "making of a man" rationale for the Fifth Symphony.)

Contrary to claims frequently made by some anti-revisionists, revisionism in Shostakovich studies is not a doctrinaire attempt to "limit" interpretation of the composer's music by imposing "closure" on its meaning, but a continuously ongoing effort to draw closer to understanding it by focusing on its creator's context in order to better grasp his probable intentions. If any approach to Shostakovich can be said to be prescriptively restrictive it is that of anti-revisionism in seeking to limit speculations of a contextual nature, to avoid any probabilistic narrowing of interpretive focus, to downgrade the worth of works which can be shown to possess specific meaning, and (most significantly) to "quash" the alleged "fantasy" that the composer's outlook was dissident.

The culture of dissidence

The argument that revisionism seeks to expand understanding by narrowing the range of possible interpretation to something more probable (or realistic) may seem, at first sight, paradoxical. How can less produce more? There are two, complementary, answers to this: the first theoretical, the second practical.

The theoretical answer is that artistic universality derives from human and local specificity - from the lives and societies of artists and the "dramatic" content of the works they create. The most obviously dramatic art involves the investigation of *character and situation*, real or imagined, in novels, plays, ballets, portrait painting, certain types of poetry, and, of course, opera -- all these idioms being of proven interest to Shostakovich, whose work, even in the fields of symphonic and chamber music, is arguably dramatic in essence. In this sense, Shostakovich's music may be said to be [universal because specific](#), its specificity manifesting either as imaginative drama or as drama elaborated from, or allegorically mirroring, real events and actual people. Without the blood of such dramatic specificity, artistic universality is at best anaemically generalised or true only in a philosophical sense; at worst, merely didactic. A classic example of didactically fabricated pseudo-universality is Socialist Realism, which avoided psychological examination and character-based conflict ("vulgar realism") in order to portray society ideally ("in its revolutionary development") as if looking at the present from a future Communist Golden Age.

The second, practical, answer fulfills the theoretical one: dissidence in the USSR represented truthfulness, unexpurgated reality and ethical values -- as against the fantasy reality of Socialist Realism and the pervasive falseness of Soviet public discourse with its concerted negation of traditional morality (an explicitly-stated, indeed fundamental, ingredient in the Soviet regime's forwarding of "revolutionary development"). From 1917 to 1991, there was an inner war going on in Soviet society -- a war between freedom of thought and political conformism, between common decency and the total moral

expediency of "Party-mindedness" (*partiinosť*). This war was carried on partly in secret, partly in public, according to circumstances and the requirements of those in power. Huge numbers on the dissident side perished, but the struggle -- what Igor Shafarevich has called (with reference to Shostakovich) "the Russian resistance to Communism" -- was continuous, even during times (e.g., 1946-53) when conditions were severe enough to discourage the most oblique expression of dissent. As such, Soviet intellectual life was a sustained manifestation of tension between polarised outlooks: official culture and dissident culture.

"Shostakovich," wrote Richard Taruskin in 1995 ("Who Was Shostakovich", *The Atlantic Monthly*) "was the one and only Soviet artist to be claimed equally by the official culture and the dissident culture." In terms of exclusiveness -- the thesis that Shostakovich was the only artist claimed by both cultures -- Taruskin's assertion is false. For example, even the most "official" writers (such as the poet Mayakovsky, posthumously nominated by Stalin as "the best, the most talented") were, more often than not, privately sceptical about the Soviet regime and known to be so within the dissident culture. It is, indeed, rare to find Russian writers under Soviet rule, however officially sanctioned or ostensibly conformist, who did not, at one time or other, voice a critical outlook on "Soviet reality". Because of the inescapably public nature of his calling, Shostakovich was unusually prominent in the struggle between official and dissident culture. He was also, revisionism contends, uniquely active in forwarding dissident values in his work (an enterprise substantially protected by the deniability inherent in non-verbal dissidence). But he was in no sense alone in privately maintaining a dissenting outlook on Soviet life whilst, at the same time, necessarily giving a contrary public impression of conformism. This, as Czeslaw Milosz eloquently explains in his classic study *The Captive Mind*, was the very essence of "the game" in the countries of the Soviet bloc.

Some readers will be surprised to hear Shostakovich described so unequivocally as a dissident. So as to keep this exposition as clear as possible, evidence for the dissident conception of the composer is examined separately: in [The Case for Dissidence](#) and the "small 't' testimony" of the [Witness Statements](#). The present text will confine itself to examining the general issues raised by the question of dissidence and answering relevant anti-revisionist objections.

Does the "dissident" conception trivialise Shostakovich?

Knowing little about the inner workings of life in the Soviet Union, Western listeners naturally tend to interpret the concept of dissidence as a political activity in opposition to a particular ideology in power: Soviet Communism. As we have seen, this political (or "ideological") interpretation of the question of dissidence is fundamentally misconceived.

The principles behind almost all dissidence in the Soviet Union after 1922 were either moral or revolved around issues of truth and reality (the latter impelling much non-Party avant-garde art during the 1920s). The principles of dissidence, as it became known under Soviet rule, are timelessly universal; indeed, the core values of dissidence -- moral and intellectual resistance to thought-controlling despotism -- also existed in the culture of the 19th century intelligentsia, along with a form of paradigmatic dissidence whereby revolutionaries spelled out their political programs in public, risking imprisonment (though rarely death). However, there is a considerable difference between the intelligentsia under the Tsars and the intelligentsia under Soviet rule. (See Part 2: [Dissident or *intelligent*?](#))

The actual term "dissidence" did not become current until after Khrushchev's "secret speech" denouncing Stalin in 1956, whereupon verbally explicit public dissent in the Soviet Union began to be a practical (if enduringly perilous) possibility. However, paradigmatic dissidence -- the public form of dissent known in the 1960s and 1970s -- did not spring from thin air upon Khrushchev's "signal". It had been there in "secret", "silent", or "hidden" form -- a form of wide extent and considerable elaboration -- throughout the previous years of Soviet rule. In identifying dissidence as "the unifying, integral feature of [Shostakovich's] entire artistic output", the musicologist [Mark Aranovsky](#) notes that "the history of 'dissidence' among the Soviet intelligentsia finds its roots decades ago, and in fact began long before the time when this term itself appeared". To insist on restricting the extent of dissidence to after 1956 purely on lexicographical grounds is to be damagingly literal-minded.

The idea that it trivialises Shostakovich's music to treat it as an expression of dissidence is, in fact, based on a serious misunderstanding. Dissidence (in spirit, if not in name) unites the otherwise very different projects of the Russian intelligentsia before and after 1917. While many of the 19th century *intelligenty* (including, of course, Lenin) were frankly totalitarian, others were fired chiefly by a longing for freedom: freedom of thought, expression, and association. What links the two great phases of Russian dissidence is an intensity of experience and thought foreign to the more pragmatic life of the West. During both of these phases, the question of morality came to the fore with an urgency unknown to the more or less democratic societies of Europe and America. The moral critique aimed at 19th century radicals like Chernyshevsky, Dobrolyubov, and Pisarev by such writers as Leskov, Turgenev, and Dostoyevsky (the literary tradition espoused by the young Shostakovich) was, in essence, sustained by post-Revolutionary writers in the dissident culture: Zamyatin, Bulgakov, Akhmatova, Tsvetaeva, Osip Mandelstam, Zoshchenko, and the various individualists and Formalists of 1920s Leningrad -- a modern tradition again espoused (and hardly coincidentally) by Shostakovich. This speaks for itself.

The dissident experience

The *moral tension* of life under authoritarian or totalitarian rule is vastly greater than in a democracy where everyone is free, within legislated limits, to think and do as they wish. Under punitively repressive conditions, almost every word or act becomes charged with moral significance. In a system which seeks to control the very nature of reality, truth and memory become hugely meaningful commodities. Correspondingly, social situations which lack such tensions are inevitably flabbier by comparison -- even "decadent", as the West notoriously appeared to the dissident Alexander Solzhenitsyn during his exile.

What makes the Russian/Soviet "dissident experience" of the last two centuries so especially significant and potentially rich in lessons for Westerners is that it existed within arguably the most vibrant aesthetic culture of modern times -- a culture, moreover, similar enough to ours to permit relatively easy access to its conventions of form and expression. (This is not the case, for example, with China, whose culture is as deep and intricate as that of the West, yet largely impenetrable to occidentals.) Because Russian culture is so similar to ours, we are able, if we look and listen, to understand the moral-aesthetic hothouse conditions under which, until recently, it existed -- and to see these heightened and sharpened conditions as providing a living ethical and perceptual lesson to our slacker, less vital, more cynically relativistic ethos. Solzhenitsyn, like many other dissidents, sees Russia's experience of repressive rule, especially under the ultra-severe dispensation inaugurated by Lenin, as a kind of cultural crucifixion -- Russia, as it were, "dying" on the cross of godless rationalism for the sins of its cousin cultures in the West.

Whether or not we take seriously the Russian mythos of destiny, sacrifice, and redemption, it should be clear that to interpret Shostakovich's music as part of the dissident culture in Russia, far from trivialising it, places it in a context of enormously heightened significance compared to that of Western art in the same period. If anything is trivial in this perspective, it is our own democratic culture, whose aesthetic values and moral reflections are limp and even degenerate by comparison. When we listen to a piece of dissident music, we are hearing not a local and temporary political protest but an expression of moral-aesthetic life lived at a pitch of vigour and meaning which we should properly find humbling, inspiring, and revivifying. The supercharged values inherent in art like Shostakovich's are, potentially, of immense importance to Western culture in its present phase of extreme individualism, relativism, and materialism. To refuse to recognise the dissident component of Shostakovich's music is to refuse to recognise a significant measure of its greatness.

It is no coincidence that recent anti-revisionist assaults on the dissident conception of Shostakovich focus on denigrating his personal stature. Western anti-revisionists wish to claim Shostakovich's music as great while denying the greatness of the man who wrote it -- a confused temporary position which may preface an academic reassessment of the

music as not that great after all. This seems to be the general sense of the criticism of chief anti-revisionist Richard Taruskin, whose objections to the "dissident" conception we now turn.

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THE SHOSTAKOVICH DEBATE

The Case for Dissidence

Maturity (1937-75)

UNDER CONSTRUCTION

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THE SHOSTAKOVICH DEBATE

The Question of Dissidence (2)

To be read in conjunction with the [Chronology of the Debate](#).

Anti-revisionism versus the "dissident" conception

With the exception of Laurel Fay's 1980 essay in *The Russian Review* (querying the integrity of *Testimony* and Solomon Volkov), very little was written about Shostakovich from the "anti-revisionist" side during the ten years after the publication of *Testimony* in 1979. (The term "anti-revisionist" was not coined until 1994.) The first substantial anti-revisionist statement bearing on the question of dissidence was made by the American scholar Richard Taruskin, a musicologist at Berkeley. An expert on 19th century Russian music, Taruskin is the author of acclaimed book-length studies of Mussorgsky and of Stravinsky's Russian period, along with two collections of essays, *Text and Act* (1995) and *Defining Russia Musically* (1997). In 1989, his special knowledge of Russian opera and disapproval of Tony Palmer's film of *Testimony* (1987) combined to form the basis of his first venture into Shostakovich studies, an essay on *Lady Macbeth of Mtsensk* entitled "The Opera and the Dictator: the peculiar martyrdom of Dmitri Shostakovich", published in *New Republic* (2nd March).

Referring his readers to Laurel Fay's 1980 challenge to the authenticity of *Testimony*, Taruskin contrasted the "maudlin sanctimony" of Palmer's film with his own interpretation of *Lady Macbeth* as a work deliberately aligning itself with the class-warfare ideology invoked in Stalin's attack on so-called "rich peasants" (*kulaki*) during the rural collectivisation of 1930-1. Explicitly describing *Lady Macbeth* as a "defense of the lawless extermination of the kulaks", Taruskin analysed Shostakovich's opera as the product of "a hideous moral inversion", accusing its author of "dehumanizing" most of his characters: "Its chilling treatment of the victims amounts to a *justification of genocide* [emphasis added]." Such a "profoundly inhumane work of art", urged Taruskin, "should be seen and heard with an awareness of history, with open eyes and ears, and with hearts on guard" (a view echoed on 25th August 1996 when he attacked Valery Gergiev in *The*

New York Times for mounting a concert revival of Prokofiev's *Cantata for the 20th Anniversary of the October Revolution*).

Taruskin's extremely serious charge -- that Shostakovich sought to ingratiate himself with the Soviet authorities, if not Stalin personally, by penning an operatic apologia for genocide in the Ukraine -- is founded on his assumption that, during the early 1930s, the young composer was "perhaps Soviet Russia's most loyal musical son". The word "perhaps" is merely an academic convention. For Shostakovich to have publicly applauded the destruction of several million peasants would have required a level of loyalty to the Soviet regime far in excess of that of many of the *apparatchiki* who actually administered Stalin's policy in the Ukraine (and were profoundly stricken by what they witnessed). "It could," Taruskin conceded, "be argued that the work's martyrdom [in 1936] humanized its creator." His own view, however, remained cynical: "That this unhappy man [Shostakovich] nevertheless continued to function as an artist and a citizen has lent his career a heroic luster... a[n heroic] light made garish by Volkov, Palmer, and others." Indeed, Taruskin made it clear that he viewed Shostakovich in anything but heroic terms: "A great deal of evidence suggests that in his later years Shostakovich became desperately obsessed with his historical image, and with the theme of self-justification. For he did have *a history of collaboration* to live down [emphasis added]." (The "great deal of evidence" to which Taruskin refers has never since been specified by him.)

Did the Soviets know that Shostakovich was a dissident?

With his "genocide" theory of *Lady Macbeth of Mtsensk* -- and its accompanying accusations that Shostakovich had not only been no hero but "perhaps" also "Soviet Russia's most loyal musical son" with "a history of collaboration to live down" -- Richard Taruskin threw down a gauntlet to what, within a year of his article appearing, began to take shape as the revisionist position on Shostakovich. Returning to the fray three years later in 1992, he dismissed Ian MacDonald's *The New Shostakovich* as "a counter-caricature of Shostakovich, asserted in the teeth of the old official view (itself a transparent political fabrication and long recognised as such) that cast the composer as an unwavering apostle of Soviet patriotism and established ideology. Instead, we are now bade to believe, he was an unremitting subversive who used his music as a means of Aesopian truth-telling in a society built on falsehood[...]. The new view is as simpleminded and unrealistically one-dimensional as the old. The very ease with which the author proves his case undoes it; for if any fool can see 'the new Shostakovich' for what he was, then any informer or commissar might as easily have caught him out in the evil days of yore."

As a specialist in 19th century Russian music and culture, Taruskin cannot fairly be

expected to have read widely in the enormous historical literature on the Soviet period. Even so, his assumption that, in order to have endured through most of his life, Shostakovich's dissident outlook would have to have remained unknown to Soviet officialdom is, in his own phrase, "simpleminded and unrealistically one-dimensional". On the contrary, there can be no doubt whatever that Soviet officialdom knew exactly what it was dealing with in Shostakovich, as it did with many other great artists of similar outlook who were allowed to continue living and even produce work which occasionally went before the Soviet public.

"Do not touch this cloud-dweller," wrote Stalin, famously, on an NKVD report about Pasternak which confirmed what the dictator knew from conversation with the poet (as if he needed to verify as much by speaking to him) -- i.e., that Pasternak belonged to the culture of dissidence. There are various standard speculations as to why Stalin allowed major figures like Pasternak, Akhmatova, Bulgakov, Zamyatin, Zoshchenko, Shostakovich, and many others to live, despite the fact that their views were transparently in contradiction with those of the regime. The simplest answer is: precisely because they were major figures who could not be "liquidated" without causing foreign uproar of the kind the Soviet regime is known to have been particularly sensitive about. Only major figures who effectively challenged the regime (Meyerhold), knew too much about the inner workings of the terror apparatus (Isaak Babel), or directly insulted Stalin (Osip Mandelstam) were definitively eliminated (killed). In the case of Shostakovich, Stalin had other reasons to relent: the young composer had great propaganda value if handled adroitly (the usual mix of menace and reward), as well as being one of the USSR's most apt composers for the key medium of film.

If Shostakovich's secret dissidence had not been an issue for the *apparat*, he would not have been publicly censured twice, along with composers of similar views, in 1936 and 1948 -- nor forced, after the second occasion, to toe the line so tightly that, for five years, almost no work of a personally authentic kind was countenanced from him. Beginning with the Cultural Revolution (1928-32) and continuing until the Thirteenth Symphony (1962), the Soviet cultural *apparat* had Shostakovich marked down as an obvious "problem" which, from time to time, it devoted special attention to solving, even if temporarily. That Shostakovich was viewed as a prominent figure within the dissident culture is obvious from the fact that the Stalinist campaign against "formalism" (i.e., the Leningrad intelligentsia), which proceeded throughout 1936, was initiated by two attacks on the composer in *Pravda* (see The Case for Dissidence [Part 2](#)).

While the secret police files on Shostakovich have not yet come to light, it was standard in the USSR that all major figures in the dissident culture were surrounded by informers and provocateurs, not to mention bugged and spied on. Shostakovich's dissidence was secret not in being hidden from the Soviet *apparat* but in being, perforce, undeclared *as such* to the Soviet public. The composer's attitude was nonetheless well established among those in the know, both in the *apparat* and the musical "culture of dissidence", as illustrated, for

example, by anecdotes in Rostislav Dubinsky's *Stormy Applause*, and by the fact that Richard Taruskin and Laurel Fay both heard many stories circulating in Russian music circles during the 1970s which were subsequently preserved in *Testimony*. (Fay: "*Testimony* does reflect the kinds of stories and anecdotes that were floating around the musical community in Russia." -- *The Guardian*, 7th January 2000; Taruskin: "Many of the stories in *Testimony* circulated in oral tradition long before Volkov published them. I heard many of them myself as an exchange student in Moscow in 1971-72. I believed many of them at the time, and I still do." -- *Commentary*, November 1999.)

In short, the idea that Shostakovich could not have been a dissident before 1956 because, if he had been, he would have been identified as such and purged, is extremely naive.

The concept of "secret dissidence"

Not all anti-revisionists entirely reject the proposition that Shostakovich was a secret dissident, even if the admission of such a possibility is never conceded without the harshest reservations. For example, Malcolm H. Brown, attacking MacDonald's *The New Shostakovich* in *Notes* in March 1993, wrote: "As more of Shostakovich's contemporaries speak out and as reliable documentary information becomes available, the 'real' Shostakovich is likely to emerge as both a sometime closet dissident and a sometime collaborator." Brown's hope that Shostakovich's contemporaries would, as time went by, confirm him as "a sometime collaborator" has, thus far, been unfulfilled. On the contrary, the overwhelming trend of testimony from Shostakovich's contemporaries continues to be that he was, in Brown's phrase, "a closet dissident". Brown's charge of "collaboration" -- echoing Taruskin's accusation of 1989 -- has never been further elaborated by its author, despite requests to do so. (For a discussion of the concept of "collaboration" in the USSR see [Witnesses for the Defence](#).)

Malcolm H. Brown's concession that Shostakovich was a "closet dissident" -- even if only now and then or perhaps once for a limited time (owing to Brown's disinclination to amplify, the word "sometime" remains opaque) -- was curtly repudiated by Richard Taruskin in his essay on the reception of Shostakovich's Fifth Symphony in David Fanning's symposium *Shostakovich Studies* in 1995:

If we claim to find defiant ridicule in the Fifth Symphony, we necessarily adjudge its composer, at this point in his career, to have been a "dissident". That characterization has got to be rejected as a self-gratifying anachronism. There were no dissidents in Stalin's Russia. There were old opponents, to be sure, but by late 1937 they were all dead or behind bars. There were the forlorn and malcontented, but they were silent. Public dissent or even

principled criticism were simply unknown... Dissidence resulted from the loosening of controls, not the other way around. It began very mildly, under Khrushchev... It is natural that latter-day dissidents would like [Shostakovich] for an ancestor. It is also understandable, should it ever turn out that Shostakovich was the author of *Testimony*, that he, who though mercilessly threatened never suffered a dissident's trials, should have wished, late in life, to portray himself in another light. The self-loathing of the formerly silent and the formerly deluded has long been a salient feature of Soviet intellectual life. ["Public Lies and Unspeakable Truth: interpreting Shostakovich's Fifth Symphony", op. cit., pp. 46-7.]

Taruskin here proposes three definitions of dissidence: (1) as an expression of "defiant ridicule"; (2) as an expression of public dissent or principled criticism; (3) as a phenomenon which began under Khrushchev. We have seen that the phenomenon of dissidence, although labeled as such only after 1956, was a continuous feature of intelligentsia life throughout the history of the Soviet Union. The special distinguishing feature of dissidence in the 1960s and 1970s was that it was a *verbally explicit* public activity: open confronting of state power. As such, as Taruskin correctly states, such "paradigmatic dissidence" would have been impossible under earlier Soviet dispensations; indeed, the dissidents of the 1960s and 1970s were severely persecuted for their bravery in standing up to, in Vladimir Bukovsky's words, "this regime of utter scum" (*To Build A Castle*, p. 342). Most of them went to prison or the Gulag for many years. Some were tortured or strait-jacketed in mental asylums, their minds assaulted by powerful hallucinatory drugs. By 1980, the dissident movement in the USSR had been destroyed by the KGB. The heroic struggle of these hugely courageous men and women was, as Bukovsky claims, "a desperate war... against the most monstrous machinery of oppression in the entire world" -- a war few in any society would be brave enough to wage. In other words, even under the rules of Khrushchev and Brezhnev, dissent in the USSR was a perilous calling.

When Richard Taruskin writes ("Who Was Shostakovich?", *The Atlantic Monthly*, February 1995) that "in the failing Soviet Union [Shostakovich] was cast as a 'dissident' of a sort that simply did not exist during the better (or, rather, the worse) part of his lifetime", he is -- aside from disputing the testimony of several dozen Russian intellectuals who lived in the Soviet Union through the period under discussion -- logically conceding the possibility that there were other "sorts" of Soviet dissident alive, if not well, during the part of Shostakovich's lifetime which preceded Khrushchev's denunciation of Stalin in 1956. Indeed, there were -- and very many of them. These were what Nadezhda Mandelstam called "the secret intelligentsia": those who retained a dissenting cast of mind from the accession of Lenin onwards. People of this outlook were not public (or, at least, verbally explicit) in expressing their dissidence. Between 1928 and 1953/6, paradigmatic

dissidence did not exist for the simple reason that such a phenomenon would have been strangled at birth. What instead existed during that time was what Solomon Volkov calls "hidden dissidence", what Ian MacDonald refers to as "secret dissidence", and what the musicologist Joachim Braun has described, with reference to *From Jewish Folk Poetry*, as "concealed dissidence" -- a phenomenon encompassing "a 'secret language' of dissent" or "hidden language of resistance" (known to Russians as "Aesopian" language in homage to the subversive doubletalk concealed in Aesop's fables).

Not that such secretly (as opposed to publicly explicit) dissident language has ever been confined in time or place, whether to ancient Greece or modern Russia. Discussing the phenomenon with reference to the Iranian word *ketman*, Czeslaw Milosz identifies it as a form of Sufi doubletalk traditionally used by secret freethinkers in Islamic countries. Another critic (himself Iranian) employs the Arabic word *tashbih*, referring to it as a means, oblique and often involving recognised code, of expressing dissent under the restraints of Asian autocracies. *Ketman* and *tashbih*, while not quite identical, drink at the same spring. In Russia, there is a similar overlap between the Aesopian language of secret dissidence and the more stylised practice of *yurodstvo* (conventionally involving the pretence of an unbalanced mind). Nor, need it be said, is such doubletalk restricted to authoritarian cultures, though the device is ideally suited to such purposes, as Terry Teachout has pointed out (*Commentary*, 1995):

The concept of "secret dissidence" did not suddenly enter the annals of 20th-century music with the publication of Volkov's *Testimony*. It was the stock-in-trade of innumerable European musicians accused of collaboration with the Nazis. The wartime records of such otherwise distinguished artists as Richard Strauss, Wilhelm Furtwängler, Willem Mengelberg, and Alfred Cortot continue to raise hackles in musical circles, with defenders of these men typically claiming that they privately opposed Hitler and did what they could to help Jewish friends and colleagues escape the Holocaust. Unlike the musicians of the Third Reich, Shostakovich was never in a position to flee his captors.

Teachout's comparison between secret dissidence in Stalin's USSR and Hitler's Germany is essentially valid, even if the German resistance to Nazism was, by and large, a phenomenon of individual conscience complicated by questions of German nationalism. By contrast, the dissidence of the Russian intelligentsia during the Red Terror, NEP, and Stalin's dictatorship was both pervasive and fundamental. Aside from some doctrinaire survivors of the Proletkult/RAPM, it is difficult to nominate with any certainty Soviet composers or musicians who did not, behind a mask of conformism or a Party card, distance themselves from the regime in ways varying from reflexive distaste to frank contempt. Among musicians, Leonid Kogan was sufficiently unusual in his sincere orthodoxy to be ironically described by Shostakovich (letter to [Isaak Glikman](#), 30th April 1960) as "the violinist-communist". More representative in this respect were dissidents

like Mariya Yudina, Vladimir Sofronitsky, Sviatoslav Richter, David Oistrakh, Mstislav Rostropovich, Galina Vishnevskaya, Vladimir Ashkenazy, Valery Afanassiev, and Andrei Gavrilov. By comparison, *Entartetemusik* under Nazism, although similar in its moral thrust, was relatively circumscribed.

In 1940, Pastor Dietrich Bonhoeffer was obliged to give the Nazi salute to conceal the fact that he was a member of the German resistance. This gesture parallels the public obeisance obligatory for Soviet dissidents, such as the strict requirement for composers under Stalin to finish works in "optimistic" major keys. Elsewhere, the German resistance to Nazism matched the extent of Soviet dissidence only in the young people (the "Edelweiss Pirates") who opposed the Hitler Youth or rebelled against Nazi cultural dictatorship by living the "decadent" life and listening to jazz (the so-called Swing Youth). Similar youth resistance permeated Russian universities during NEP and represented a major target of the "proletarian"-led Cultural Revolution (see Brovkin, *Russia After Lenin: Politics, Culture & Society*, pp. 108-133). It is worth recalling that Shostakovich himself was only 22 when the Cultural Revolution started.

Dissident or *intelligent*?

Having dismissed the idea that Shostakovich was not a dissident because he did not speak plainly in public in the style of the paradigmatic dissidents of the 1960s and 1970s (a charge which might equally be leveled against the classic "secret dissident" Nadezhda Mandelstam), Richard Taruskin goes on to propose a model to counter what he sees as an invidious and phantasmagorical conception:

The mature Shostakovich was not a dissident... The mature Shostakovich was an *intelligent* (pronounced, Russian-style, with hard "g"). He was heir to a noble tradition of artistic and social thought -- one that abhorred injustice and political repression, but also one that valued social commitment, participation in one's community, and solidarity with people. Shostakovich's mature idea of art, in contrast to the egoistic traditions of Western modernism, was based not on alienation but on service. He found a way of maintaining public service and personal integrity under unimaginably hard conditions. In this way he remained, in the time-honored Russian, if not exactly the Soviet sense of the word, a "civic" artist. ["Who Was Shostakovich?", *The Atlantic Monthly*, February 1975. This article is recycled as part of the chapter "Shostakovich and the Inhuman: Shostakovich and Us" in *Defining Russia Musically* [1997] -- specifically, p. 496.]

Coming from a specialist in 19th century Russian culture, Taruskin's proposed definition of the Russian *intelligent* betrays a surprising lack of awareness of social and political affairs. Coined in the 1850s, the word *intelligentsiya* did not mean what it later came to mean in its English borrowing. Rather than signifying the educated or intellectual classes *per se*, it stood instead for the self-styled politically enlightened: those whose essentially revolutionary analysis of Tsarist society proved them to be "intelligent" (as distinct from the "dark people" of inferior understanding or social vested interest). To be an *intelligent* during the late 19th century meant to be endowed with a special consciousness, to be a new kind of man or woman who, self-taught in radicalism and revolutionary literature, understood "the situation" and was prepared to be "active" in order to change it. The 19th century *intelligent*, quite to the contrary of Richard Taruskin's concept, was a subversive who schemed to bring down the existing social structure and replace it with a new type of society (of a sort defined by whichever radical sect a given *intelligent* belonged to).

Born of reforms in the Tsarist education system, the Russian *intelligentsiya*, as classically defined, was nonetheless more a state of mind than a class, its ranks embracing many who, compared to the country's academic, administrative, and "technical" sectors, were at best semi-educated. During the later decades of the 19th century, the revolutionary acts of the "intelligentsia" were often extreme enough to alienate conventionally educated Russians. Only after 1905 did widespread disgust with Tsarism, allied with a new bourgeois dread of an uprising of the unruly masses, begin to break down the distinction between the two broad sorts of Russian intellectual. While almost every educated person in the country outside monarchist circles shared the longing for freedom, former *intelligent* supporters of revolutionary activists and terrorists backpedaled into the intellectual mainstream, recoiling from direct violence to a vaguer idealism. Meanwhile, hardcore revolutionaries -- the original *intelligenty* -- remained a discrete extremist component of what, by 1917, had developed into an expanded "intelligentsia". At this point, the word's original definition dissolved. Seizing power, Lenin brought the tiny "Bolshevik intelligentsia" to centre stage, simultaneously moving to eliminate his rivals among the former classic *intelligenty* (e.g., the Mensheviks, the Socialist Revolutionaries, the Anarchists, the Popular Socialists) and to intimidate the mainstream educated circles: the academic, administrative, and "technical" sectors, not to mention most of Russia's artistic community. These, initially classified by Lenin as the "bourgeois intelligentsia" (or "rotten intelligentsia"), soon became known simply as the intelligentsia, completing a 180-degree turn in popular usage.

Shostakovich's family, which was from the "technical" (scientific/engineering) sector, included a classic *intelligent* in the form of his aunt's husband Maxim Kostykin, a Bolshevik activist. Apart from that, the Shostakovich family was relatively conservative in its mainstream intelligentsia democratism -- the sort of people Lenin contemptuously referred to as "close to the Kadets" (the Constitutional Democratic Party, founded in 1905). Significantly, in a letter written to his Aunt Nazdezhda in April 1918, Shostakovich lists among recent works a funeral march for Kadet leaders Shingarev and Kokoshkin,

then recently murdered by Bolsheviks in Petrograd (see [The Case for Dissidence Part 1](#)). When Shostakovich's father came home after the February 1917 revolution shouting "Children, freedom!", he did so as a member of the comparatively new "expanded intelligentsia" rather than as a revolutionary *intelligent*. As for the "civic" *intelligenty* described by Richard Taruskin, they never existed, being, by the original definition, a contradiction in terms. The civic-minded bourgeois of the 19th century, to whom Taruskin appears to refer, did not become members of the *intelligenty* until the definition changed. By then, their civic-mindedness had been radicalised into scepticism, forming a variegated constituency which, while sizable (80% of the educated populace, in Solzhenitsyn's estimate), was united only by a desire for democracy thwarted by Lenin's coup. The redefined intelligentsia of 1917-1928 resisted Bolshevik totalitarianism from the start.

So consistently did this reformulated intelligentsia resist the imposition of the new Soviet dictatorship (see Brovkin, op. cit.) that, by 1928, Stalin had to consolidate the 1917 coup by means of a massive disciplinary crackdown on Russia's non-Party educated sectors: the so-called Cultural Revolution (1928-32). Shostakovich -- who, as a young man, cleaved decisively to the non-Party intelligentsia, worshipped Dostoyevsky's *The Devils*, set the texts of Gogol and Leskov, and preferred the free outlook of writers like Zamyatin, Bulgakov, Ehrenburg, and the Leningrad *Oberiuty* -- was himself a conspicuous victim of the Cultural Revolution (see [The Case for Dissidence Part 2](#)). In other words, Richard Taruskin's claim that Shostakovich was a "civic" *intelligent* with a viewpoint "based not on alienation but on service" is both conceptually awry and contradicted by the evidential record. Like the majority of the redefined intelligentsia after 1917, Shostakovich resisted the Soviet dictatorship. He "served" the Soviet state, as Elizabeth Wilson makes clear, only when he could not avoid doing so. Any other interpretation is irreconcilable with the facts established in *Shostakovich: A Life Remembered* and similar "witness" sources.

Anti-revisionism as anti-contextualism

As will be understood from the accompanying pages presented as [The Case for Dissidence](#), the evidence for considering Shostakovich to have belonged to the Soviet culture of dissidence is sufficiently strong to call seriously into question the anti-revisionist refusal to consider it. There is only one sequence of the composer's life in which the record remains ambiguous enough to warrant a degree of legitimate disagreement: 1927-1934 -- the era of the Cultural Revolution and the initial period of the so-called "second NEP", during which Shostakovich's biography and the existing "witness" sources are, at present, insufficiently detailed to allow a completely dependable picture. Having said this, there is already enough background data to reconstruct the context for Shostakovich's otherwise somewhat opaque manoeuvrings during the Cultural Revolution (MacDonald, *The New Shostakovich*, pp. 32-78), while recent

documentary research (Brovkin, op. cit.) confirms that this period, crucial to our understanding of the development of the post-1917 intelligentsia, must be considered fundamentally formative for the composer's later life and career.

Ian MacDonald's assertion [1990] of the importance of the Cultural Revolution for Shostakovich was concurred with by Elizabeth Wilson during a discussion at Bantry House, West Cork, in April 2000 (where she also spoke of Shostakovich's music of the late 1920s as a parallel to the dissident satirical literature of Zamyatin, Bulgakov, and Zoshchenko). A similar opinion was expressed by Moscow musicologist Inna Barsova at the Michigan University conference in January 1994, where she argued that Shostakovich became creatively alienated from the Soviet regime during the late 1920s. Aside from a brief sketch of the Cultural Revolution in Richard Taruskin's polemical essay on the reception of the Fifth Symphony (in Fanning, *Shostakovich Studies* [1995]) and a passing allusion in Laurel Fay's [Shostakovich: A Life](#), anti-revisionism has barely mentioned this era of radical disruption, let alone addressed it, instead focusing entirely on Shostakovich's significantly variable music of this period at the expense of the highly charged background which arguably elucidates its contradictions.

This lack of attention to context is the hallmark of anti-revisionism. (Fay's biography contains almost no contextual references at all.) Since it is by contextual investigation that we come to a closer understanding of an artist's work -- and since, as Taruskin's solecism concerning the *intelligenty* shows, the importance of contextual understanding is paramount in this subject area -- it is extraordinary that, twenty years after *Testimony*, leading academic specialists in the study of Soviet music should still wish to play down the role of context in arriving at an understanding of Shostakovich's music. Such is the consistency of this drive to play down context -- more or less ignoring material of the sort adduced in the attached [Case for Dissidence](#); attempting to suggest that no statements emanating from the former USSR can be trusted; screening [Fay, op. cit., p. 3] "witness" testimony as (for unstated reasons) unreliable -- that it becomes fair to call it a form of psychological denial: an adoption of the "blind eye" to a mass of evidence which normal scholarship would take account of and at least critique. No such critique occurs in Fay's biography, while Richard Taruskin is content, without confronting any of the evidence, to describe the dissident conception of Shostakovich as a "childish fantasy" irresponsibly promulgated by a "cult" (*The New York Times*, 5th March 2000; cf. Tamara Bernstein's allegations of "fanatical hysteria" surrounding the "Shostakovich-as-dissident cult", *National Post*, 15th March 2000). Such *ab initio* denial, an unusual phenomenon in academia, deserves closer examination.

[Part 3](#)

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THE SHOSTAKOVICH DEBATE

The Question of Dissidence (3)

To be read in conjunction with the [Chronology of the Debate](#).

Rejecting the dissident conception: simple denial

Two types of rejection are commonly entailed in the anti-revisionist approach: general and specific, the latter concerning the interpretation of individual compositions (so far as possible) without reference to context. In practice, most anti-revisionism consists of wholly ignoring evidence and simply pouring scorn on both *Testimony* and the dissident conception. For example, the opera critic Bernard Holland: "In all those quartets and symphonies, weren't those secret messages [Shostakovich] was sending? Do we read between the conformist lines and find rebellion? They weren't. We don't." (*The New York Times*, 9th March 2000.) Plain *ab initio* denial at its purest, Holland's fundamentalist anti-revisionism is echoed by CBC broadcaster Tamara Bernstein, descending to heated language in an effort to convince her readers of the monstrosity of the views she affects to summarise. Reviewing Ho and Feofanov's *Shostakovich Reconsidered* in *National Post* on 2nd November 1998, Bernstein described the book as "a scurrilous volume" portraying Shostakovich as "a rabid dissenter" and employing "the tried and true [sic] techniques of Stalinism to silence those who dare to see things differently". Or, again, in *National Post* (15th March 2000), Bernstein reports: "[Fay's] long-awaited *Shostakovich: A Life* has triggered drearily predictable howls of protest from a cult of fanatics who insist that Shostakovich was a lifelong dissident." Fay herself has likewise used blanket denial, claiming that "these people [her revisionist critics] aren't interested in Shostakovich at all" (*The Guardian*, 7th January 2000).

The psychological aspect of such wholesale denial -- the sense in which the commentators express visceral resentment of revisionism (or of the increasing confirmation of revisionist conjectures) -- is evident in the irrationalism of much routine anti-revisionist journalism. For example, [David Gutman](#), writing in *Gramophone* (March 2000), refers to "revisionist orthodoxy" concerning the Eighth Quartet: that the work is "an anti-Communist tract-cum-

suicide note". It is a recurring theme of anti-revisionist polemic that revisionism treats Shostakovich's music as "an anti-Communist tract" -- a political misconception based on unfamiliarity with the moral nature of the culture of dissidence in the USSR. As for the "suicide" motif of the [Eighth Quartet](#), this -- together with its origin in Shostakovich's enforced enrollment into the Communist Party in 1960 -- derives from statements made by Shostakovich himself as well as by his son Maxim and his erstwhile colleagues Isaak Glikman, Lev Lebedinsky, and Rostislav Dubinsky (a conclusion fully accepted by Manashir Yakubov, Elizabeth Wilson, and Richard Taruskin). David Gutman's scepticism, which he presumably knows to be obsolete, appears to represent little more than vexed prejudice.

That there is no discernible ideological component to the viscerally reactive anti-revisionism of writers like Holland, Bernstein, and Gutman makes their prejudice less readily intelligible than that of commentators of a left-wing bias who wish to defend their vision of Shostakovich as an orthodox Communist. Christopher Norris, for example, has suggested, in apparent indifference to the historical record, that no one of consequence endorses *Testimony*, adding that it is immoral to suggest that Shostakovich was not a Communist and that it is merely "fashionable" to maintain such an opinion (BBC Radio 3, *Music Matters*, 15th February 1998). A similar panoramic assumption that Shostakovich was a Communist features in the writings of the critic Robert Matthew-Walker, whose liner-notes, when venturing occasionally into contextual matters, betray a somewhat tentative grasp of Soviet history (e.g., his claim, occurring in annotations to two Shostakovich discs, that the prosecutor of Stalin's post-war cultural purges was "Marshal Zhdanov", a chimerical conflation of Marshal Zhukov and Andrei Zhdanov). Norris, too, is uncertain on historical questions. Attacking MacDonald's *The New Shostakovich* as "Cold War interpretive tactics" (*melos* 4-5, 1993), he ventured that, during NEP, "it might well have seemed that the only alternative was a slide back into some minimally liberalized quasi-Tsarist autocracy". A writer on "cultural politics" should perhaps be aware of the mainstream democratic intelligentsia which, abiding through NEP, became the subject of Stalin's pressing attention in the Cultural Revolution.

Even anti-revisionists comparatively better-informed than Christopher Norris appear concerned above all to slam the lid down on revisionism rather than to contend with it reasonably on the evidential questions. For example, Richard Taruskin, in dismissing the proposal that Shostakovich was a dissident on the sweeping basis that "there were no dissidents in Stalin's Russia", argues that "that characterization [of the composer] *has got to be rejected*" (Fanning, op. cit., p. 46), adding that "*it is important to quash* the image of Shostakovich as a dissident" (*The New York Times*, 5th March 2000) [emphasis added]. All the more ironic that Taruskin accuses revisionists of attempting to impose a "cult of personality" upon Shostakovich comparable with that invoked around Stalin: "Like the one around Stalin, like any such cult, the one around Shostakovich is an instrument of thought control. It fosters orthodoxy, enforces conformism and breeds intolerance of critical thinking." Professor Taruskin's accusations regarding cults of thought-control and

enforced conformism sit oddly with the imperative *rejecting* and *quashing* which seem to constitute his natural idiom.

Rejecting the dissident conception: specific works

While most anti-revisionists are content to deny, *ab initio*, the validity of the dissident conception of Shostakovich, one or two are prepared to argue the contrary on specific issues. Since the revisionist case is that the composer was not only a secret dissident for much of his adult life but also expressed this outlook in the majority of his mature music, it is inevitable that anti-revisionists, in countering the dissident conception, seek to divest certain works of their supposed or potential dissident content. Richard Taruskin's claim that *Lady Macbeth of Mtsensk* represents Shostakovich's "defense of the lawless extermination of the kulaks" is the earliest example of such thinking; not that the opera had, before then (1989), been claimed as an example of the composer's musical dissidence -- although clearly the work is not, as Taruskin suggests, conformist. The innate subversiveness of its police scene, with its "stupidly" aggressive four-note motto (alluded to in the opening movement of Moishei Vainberg's Fifth Symphony), is obvious enough without considering the opera's Siberian finale. Nor can Taruskin's theory be reconciled with the fact that *Lady Macbeth* held lifelong significance for Shostakovich, who not only revised it and supervised a film version of it, but also quoted a key phrase from it in his Eighth Quartet (dedicated to "the victims of Fascism and war").

Reiterating his theory in *The New York Times* (1994), Taruskin altered a phrase which has since achieved a peripheral notoreity: his claim that Shostakovich was "[perhaps Soviet Russia's most loyal musical son](#)". Prefixing this phrase with the words "till then", he presumably wished to introduce the suggestion that Shostakovich's filial loyalty ceased or changed after the *Pravda* attacks in 1936. Yet it remains uncertain how Taruskin conceives the outlook which supposedly replaced the composer's erstwhile loyalty. A chance to clarify this arose with his essay on the Fifth Symphony in Fanning's *Shostakovich Studies* (1995). Unfortunately, this essay is based less on objective examination of the evidence (see Ho and Feofanov, *Shostakovich Reconsidered*, pp. 671-77) than on what appears to be an overriding concern to deny that the work contains any dissidence. So convoluted are the results that it is conceivable that no one but Professor Taruskin fully understands what he meant to say in this piece. For example, he appears to subscribe to Sofiya Khentova's view that the Fifth Symphony paints "a universal portrait" in which "the people of the Thirties recognised themselves, grasping not only the music's explicit content, but also its general feeling". In other words, he construes Khentova (or possibly the Symphony itself) as using "classic 'Aesopian' language" to describe "what was undescrivable: a symphony that spoke the unspeakable". This conclusion drifts close to revisionism; however, Taruskin is careful to quash any idea of a confluence between his

views and those of his revisionist opponents: "If we claim to find defiant ridicule in the Fifth Symphony, we necessarily adjudge its composer, at this point in his career, to have been a 'dissident'. That characterisation... has got to be rejected as a self-gratifying anachronism."

Instead of dissidence, Taruskin finds in the Fifth Symphony only "suppressed grief" (the funerary chant of III) followed by "an escape into the past" which betokens not "defiant ridicule" but "grim passivity" (the allusion to the song "Rebirth" in IV). While he offers sensible exegesis for the "suppressed grief" of the slow movement -- "every member of the symphony's early audiences had lost friends and family members during the black year 1937, loved ones whose deaths they had to endure in numb horror" -- he fails to answer the question this provokes: how did Shostakovich compose a heartfelt funerary chant for those murdered by the Soviet state during the Great Terror, yet harbour no dissenting thoughts and feelings on this account? Taruskin's response in this essay is to assert that Shostakovich could not have harboured such dissident thoughts and feelings because dissidence simply did not exist until Khrushchev revealed Stalin's excesses in 1956: "Dissidence resulted from the loosening of controls, not the other way around." This formulation presumably means that, given permission to exist by Khrushchev's "secret speech", dissident thoughts and feelings thereupon suddenly switched on like a lightbulb in the minds of the Soviet *intelligenty*, rather as if they had hitherto noticed nothing wrong with the picture presented to them by Stalinism as an image of normal life.

The fact that (much as commonsense would lead us to expect) the documentary record conclusively debunks Taruskin's "1956 Lightbulb" theory of dissidence has not since dissuaded him from sticking to it. He has recently conceded that there was some "private grumbling and joking" of a not-quite-dissident kind in the USSR of the 1930s, but nothing more seriously oppositional -- a peculiar state of affairs considering the "numb horror" which he correctly ascribes to early audiences for Shostakovich's Fifth Symphony. "But," he warns (5th March 2000, *New York Times*), "private grumbling and joking are not 'dissidence' as the term is normally used. Dissidence is public." This refuge in semantic tautology is unsophisticated enough to discredit itself, irrespective of the evidence of secret dissidence in the 1930s familiar to students of Soviet history and literature. (For a taste of this, the reader should consult the summary of [Lyubov Shaporina's diary](#).) What is most remarkable about Taruskin's dependence on his strict post-1956 concept of dissidence is that he makes no allowance for the fact that music, while "public", is not verbally explicit. In composing dissident music, Shostakovich was naturally shielded -- not even risking the non-explicit verbal convention of "Aesopian language" used prior to the unequivocal verbal protest later employed in paradigmatic dissidence.

Dissidence or "bearing witness"?

Taruskin's (deliberately?) misdirecting insistence that, to qualify as such, dissidence must be "public" -- meaning public and verbally explicit -- is all the stranger in that, elsewhere, he admits that music, being non-verbal, can, in a different way, be publicly explicit without necessarily incurring risk. In "Who Was Shostakovich?", published almost simultaneously with the essay on the Fifth Symphony in Fanning's *Shostakovich Studies* (1995), Taruskin offers an account of the difference he discerns between dissidence and the expression of "suppressed grief" which he identifies in the Symphony's slow movement:

Like the silenced Akhmatova and the martyred Mandelstam, Shostakovich, as the American Slavist Clare Cavanagh so movingly suggests, managed to bear witness "against the state on behalf of its citizenry". This was perhaps the most honorable civic use to which music has ever been put, a use in which the composer and his silenced audience could reclaim their individual subjectivities from an all-powerful authority. Music was the only art that could serve this purpose publicly. Never was its value more gloriously affirmed.

The Russian convention of "bearing witness" has no innate defining boundaries, covering everything from verbal explicitness to the most allusive symbolism. Taruskin's definition of musical "bearing witness" -- "in which the composer and his silenced audience could reclaim their individual subjectivities from an all-powerful authority" -- appears to mean that Shostakovich's Symphony gave back to those in his audience their individual sense of self, seemingly stolen by the "all-powerful authority". Since this suggestion can hardly be literal (even those severely tortured by the NKVD remembered who they were), Taruskin presumably means that Shostakovich's music allowed his audience to feel their grief for those lost in the Terror which the repressive effects of the Terror had served to suppress. Again, this conclusion is so close to the revisionist interpretation as to seem scarcely worth distinguishing. In fact, Taruskin redrafts this passage in *Defining Russia Musically* as "a use in which the composer and his audience acted in collusion against authority". The distinction between dissidence and "acting in collusion against authority" is hard to fathom. The mere fact that Taruskin tinkers with his definitions in this way -- shifting their boundaries back and forth: now a little closer to dissidence, now a little further away -- suggests conceptual uncertainty; or, less charitably, a wish to seem as secure as he can before scholars in other fields of Soviet studies without conceding anything to those engaged with him in the more limited study of Soviet music and of Shostakovich in particular.

To use Taruskin's phrase (Fanning, op. cit., p. 42), why limit significance? Why insist on a notional line drawn -- and redrawn -- between dissidence and "bearing witness"? Why his inflexible insistence on "grim passivity" but no "defiant ridicule" in the Fifth Symphony? When, in his description, "the brass section, silent throughout the Largo, bursts in upon

and destroys its elegiac mood", why does he not draw the obvious conclusion: that this jolting contrast is designed to reflect a correlation in Soviet life (precisely as he concedes the slow movement does)? Why, especially, does Taruskin not acknowledge Gerard McBurney's discovery that the opening phrase of the Symphony's finale is that of the song "Rebirth" quoted later in the movement: a phrase (corresponding with the words "a barbarian artist") which appears to allude to Stalin or his cultural *apparat*? There is no innate justification for Taruskin's suggested constraints on the expressive scope of the Fifth Symphony (in which "defiant ridicule" is not a rare commodity). It is hard to avoid the conclusion that, having set out his scholarly stall to sell the idea that Shostakovich was no dissident (indeed, a former "loyal son" with "a history of collaboration"), Taruskin cannot concede, without devaluing his academic wares, that a work like the Fifth Symphony does not accord with this deprecatative account. Hence he shifts his flag to the supposedly distinct convention of "bearing witness" so as to extol a glorious affirmation of civic honour without acknowledging (as all post-1991 Russian commentators are happy to do) that Shostakovich's Fifth -- like Akhmatova's contemporary *Requiem*, Chukovskaya's contemporary *Sofiya Petrovna*, and Lyubov Shaporina's contemporary diary -- is a perfectly standard, if artistically great, expression of the Soviet dissident culture.

Rejecting the dissident conception: misrepresentation

Anti-revisionism's attempts to divest specific Shostakovich works of dissident significance almost always falsify or misrepresent the associated facts. For example, Laurel Fay has claimed that *From Jewish Folk Poetry* -- rather than a necessarily veiled and equivocal protest against official Soviet anti-Semitism in the 1940s (as epitomised by the murder of Solomon Mikhoels in January 1948) -- was, on the contrary, merely a farcically misinformed endeavour to fulfill the contemporary *apparat* demands for folk-nationalistic music. This assertion contains so many misconceptions and misinterpretations -- and has consequently been so comprehensively discredited (Ho and Feofanov, pp. 686-720) -- that no other anti-revisionist has endorsed it. (The claim is, inexplicably, recycled by Fay in her declaredly objective "resource", *Shostakovich: A Life*.) Richard Taruskin has used similar misrepresentation to dismiss the conjecture that the Eleventh Symphony was connected with the Soviet suppression of the Hungarian Uprising in 1956 (an event of immense significance to the dissident culture):

Officially dedicated to the memory of the suppressed Russian Revolution of 1905, [the Symphony] was privately interpreted as a protest against the crushing by the Soviets of the recent Hungarian revolt. Whenever asked, Shostakovich denied it; but that made no difference. His audience never asked. For them it was enough to be given the opportunity to sit together in

the concert hall and enjoy an otherwise forbidden solidarity in protest. Like self-styled opera queens, who blithely and charmingly reinvent familiar plots to maximize their pleasure in their favorite divas, Soviet audiences were sophisticated ironists. [*The New York Times*, 5th March 2000.]

Taruskin's claim that Soviet audiences turned Shostakovich's Eleventh Symphony into a dissident work by "opportunistic appropriation" caricatures a popular interpretation which certainly existed. (Lebedinsky, Mazel', and Yakubov all report this.) Just as with his studied neglect of Mikhail Chulaki's testimony concerning the reception of the Fifth Symphony (Ho and Feofanov, pp. 675-7), Taruskin somehow manages to overlook the recollection of Flora Litvinova that Shostakovich was eager for news of events in Budapest during 1956 (Wilson, p. 269). He also ignores Zoya Tomachevskaya's testimony (ibid, p. 320) that Igor Belsky, producer of a ballet on the Eleventh Symphony, confided to her that Shostakovich told him ("in passing"): "Don't forget I wrote that symphony in the aftermath of the Hungarian Uprising." On their own, these facts could be dismissed as inconclusive, and no doubt Taruskin would do so. Awkwardly for him, the composer's third wife Irina has confirmed that Shostakovich had the events of the Hungarian Uprising in 1956 "in mind" when he wrote the Eleventh Symphony (*DSCH Journal* 12, p. 72). As for Taruskin's aside that Shostakovich's audience "never asked", this is hardly the utterance of a responsible scholar. For painfully obvious reasons, no one, whether his audience or close friends, would publicly have asked Shostakovich if his Eleventh Symphony alluded to the Hungarian Uprising -- none of which bears on whether such questions were asked privately. Again, Taruskin's agenda seems to be to "quash" rather than argue.

"Unreliable" evidence -- anti-revisionism attacks witnesses

The most immoderate anti-revisionist initiative against the evidence for the dissident conception relates to the "small 't' testimony" of those who knew or worked with Shostakovich. Since this "witness" evidence consistently supports the dissident conception, often in very vivid and disturbing ways, it has long been a priority for anti-revisionists to deny out of hand that such testimony has any intrinsic validity; or, falling short of this, to contend that, while some of it may be valid, the rest is too flawed by the distortions attending life in the Soviet Union even to be adduced, let alone relied on. Since this protocol is unusual in terms of normal biographical methodology, it is worth examining Laurel Fay's rationale as she explains it in *Shostakovich: A Life*:

Memoirs and interviews have loomed large among the fresh evidence gathered. Glasnost untied the tongues of millions who had been intimidated, or censored, into silence during the Soviet era. Since Shostakovich

symbolized something very important in their lives, and since his presumption to "greatness" seems unassailable, it is not surprising that many have hastened to set down their personal reminiscences of the man. As fascinating and useful as these can be, memoirs furnish a treacherous resource to the historian. Reminiscences *can be* self-serving, vengeful, and distorted by faulty memory, selective amnesia, wishful thinking, and exaggeration. They *can be* rife with gossip and rumor. The temptation to recast the past to suit the present -- especially now, when the victims and survivors of the Soviet "experiment" are grappling with discomfiting issues of complicity and culpability with a shameful past -- *can be* hard to resist. In any case, factual accuracy is not generally one of their most salient features. Memoirs need to be treated with extreme care, evaluated critically, and corroborated by reference to established facts... I have not excluded the evidence of memoirs -- Soviet, ex-Soviet and post-Soviet -- but I have treated it with utmost caution, filtering out false or improbable allegations and screening for bias and hidden agendas [emphasis added; op. cit., pp. 2-3].

Fay's concession that Shostakovich "symbolized something very important" in the lives of his compatriots begs the question of whether the Soviet listeners she refers to (e.g., the witnesses in Elizabeth Wilson's *Shostakovich: A Life Remembered*) were, in hearing his music as embodying the values and experiences of the dissident culture, projecting their own concerns onto an artist who did not share them. While she risks no synoptic judgement in her biography, she so presents her evidence as to give the impression that Shostakovich's dissidence can by no means be taken for granted; was at best intermittent and conditioned by fearful self-preservation; and that his stance is irreducibly ambiguous (if not ambivalent). She has elsewhere (*The Guardian*, 7th January 2000) added that "I don't automatically assume that Shostakovich's 'Soviet' music is ironic. I allow that he might have been serious." In "allowing" that Shostakovich might have been "serious" (for which read: sincerely conformist), Fay reveals that her attitude to the "witness" evidence of memoirs and interviews, almost all of which supports the dissident conception, is necessarily prejudicial, i.e., such material tells her what she is disinclined to agree with (for which read: not prepared to believe).

This calls into serious question her admission that, before presenting her evidence in *Shostakovich: A Life*, she filtered out what she considered to be "improbable allegations" and screened for what she took to be "bias and hidden agendas". How can this methodology be justified in an objective "resource"? Surely the author of such a "resource" -- especially one with an established aversion to revisionism -- is honour-bound to explain what testimony she has rejected and why? Much of the revisionist literature is concerned with such case-by-case examination of the provenance of evidence in the Shostakovich debate -- an examination made in public and with the support of citations. How can academics like Malcolm H. Brown and Richard Taruskin endorse (as they do on

the jacket of Fay's biography) a process of evidence-selection which is not only hidden from public view but justified by an appeal to the fact that "reminiscences *can be* self-serving, vengeful, and distorted by faulty memory, selective amnesia, wishful thinking, and exaggeration [and] rife with gossip and rumor"? No doubt "the temptation to recast the past to suit the present *can be* hard to resist", but where is Fay's evidence for this?

Behind Laurel Fay's inscrutable criteria for sorting reliable from unreliable evidence (the effects of which extend far beyond the question of "witness" testimony) lies the familiar anti-revisionist inclination towards *ab initio* denial of the dissident conception. For instance, Royal S. Brown (*Cineaste*, (24, 2-3 [1999]) claims that "the various witnesses" in Larry Weinstein's film [The War Symphonies](#) "go through great contortions to make their view of history fit the Volkov thesis". He implies that these witnesses (including Ilya Musin, Alisa Shebalina, Mariya Konniskaya, Abram Gozenpud, Natan Perelman, Veniamin Basner, Flora Litvinova, Isaak Glikman, Karen Khachaturian, Mariya Sabinina, Galina Shostakovich, and Dmitri Tolstoy) have falsified their actual memories in order to support Solomon Volkov's supposedly counterfeit representation of a man they all knew. It is unclear whether Royal S. Brown imagines that these ladies and gentlemen, some in their nineties, conspired in this falsification or merely coincided in it owing to a shared enthrallment with Volkov. At least Royal Brown accepts that what such witnesses have to say counts for something, even if he deems it to be false and rejects it as "propaganda". By contrast, Malcolm H. Brown (*Notes*, March 1994) categorically dismisses the notion that anything said by "ex-Soviets" on these issues is credible: "It doesn't really matter how many ex-Soviets believe that *Testimony* is 'essentially accurate'."

Anti-revisionist dismissal of "witness" testimony extends to misrepresentation (e.g., Malcolm H. Brown's long-standing and still recurring claim that Maxim Shostakovich does not endorse *Testimony*) and to implying that revisionists in their turn misrepresent such testimony (e.g., David Fanning's suggestion that Allan Ho and Dmitry Feofanov "exaggerated" in interpreting statements by Maxim Shostakovich so as to make him appear to authenticate *Testimony* [in *BBC Music Magazine*, September 1998, p. 32]).

Curiously, anti-revisionists are not generally prepared to charge as liars the former Soviet citizens who have testified in favour of the dissident conception. The insinuation is there; the flat accusation is lacking. The sharpest illustration of how far the matter of *Testimony* and the question of dissidence are separate is provided by Mstislav Rostropovich and Galina Vishnevskaya, neither of whom supports Volkov but both of whom outspokenly advocate the dissident conception of Shostakovich. They were close friends of his for twenty years. Are anti-revisionists (Richard Taruskin, Laurel Fay, Malcolm H. Brown) prepared to say that they are lying? (We may presume that Royal S. Brown, at least, is ready to do so.) In article after article, anti-revisionists represent Rostropovich and Vishnevskaya as rejecting *Testimony* without conceding that they are strong proponents of "the *Testimony* view" (i.e., the dissident conception). In similar articles, Maxim Shostakovich's minor reservations about *Testimony* are repeatedly parlayed into outright

dismissal of a book whose message he consistently endorses. Meanwhile anti-revisionism proceeds largely by ignoring "witness" testimony, treating the mass of material presented by Elizabeth Wilson as if it does not exist.

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THE SHOSTAKOVICH DEBATE

The Question of Dissidence (4)

To be read in conjunction with the [Chronology of the Debate](#).

Rejecting the dissident conception: motives

Why do anti-revisionist writers so rarely contend against their opponents in a reasonable way, so often resort to denying out of hand that the viewpoint they oppose contains any intrinsic validity, persuasive arguments, or supporting evidence? The belligerence of much anti-revisionist language -- describing the assertions of revisionism as rabid or hysterical, denigrating revisionist arguments as "Stalinist" or "McCarthyite", decrying the dissident conception as a cult -- shows, if nothing else, that strong feelings are in play. Whence do these emotions arise? It is significant that the wrath of anti-revisionism is generally unknown in the musical circles of Russia and continental Europe. Indeed, anti-revisionism in Shostakovich studies is mostly an Anglo-American phenomenon with its academic headquarters chiefly in the USA. As such, there appear to be three main sources of this strongly held outlook: (1) academic reputations based on published views of Shostakovich which conflict with the dissident conception of the composer; (2) uninstructed presumptions about the nature of the Soviet Union and its cultural life; (3) a general feeling that to investigate Shostakovich's music too closely is to deprive it of something ineffable without which, it seems, music cannot properly be considered great.

The number of academic reputations at stake on the anti-revisionist side is small. Anti-revisionism consists essentially of the writings of two American scholars: Richard Taruskin and Laurel Fay, only one of whom (Taruskin) is a full-time academic. Malcolm H. Brown, a Prokofiev specialist, has published little on Shostakovich and participates in the debate chiefly as a critic of *Testimony* (although he has expressed general anti-revisionist sentiments in respect of MacDonald's *The New Shostakovich*). Other American anti-revisionists are journalists or broadcasters, e.g., Royal S. Brown, Bernard Holland, Tamara Bernstein, Alex Ross, Paul Mitchinson. Holland has made his affiliation with Taruskin clear; Bernstein has declared similar links with Taruskin and Fay; Ross and

Mitchinson appear to be beholden to Fay for many of their opinions. This media-based outer circle of anti-revisionism is not wholly uncritical of academic anti-revisionism -- Ross, Mitchinson, and Royal S. Brown have minds of their own -- yet such secondary anti-revisionism in America (and in Britain in the case of David Gutman) is nonetheless fundamentally dependent on Fay and Taruskin. (One other academic, the declaredly neutral British scholar David Fanning, has often written to anti-revisionist effect. It remains to be seen how far his article on Shostakovich in the forthcoming update of the *New Grove* assimilates shifts in perception and judgement brought about by revisionism.)

Richard Taruskin, Laurel Fay, Malcolm H. Brown, and to a lesser extent David Fanning may be said to have academic reputations to defend in respect of the Shostakovich debate. There is nothing wrong with defending either a view or a reputation based on comprehensive and mature research. What is illegitimate is to defend a reputation founded on patchy or neglectful research and the vague prejudices which flow from this. Fanning, whose research is secure as far as it goes, ventures few opinions about Shostakovich in relation to the Soviet dissident culture. Accordingly, he is rarely if ever cited by secondary anti-revisionists and hence, unlike Fay and Taruskin, is not continuously in the position of defending his reputation with respect to assertions made in the Shostakovich debate. It is up to readers to assess criticisms of the methods and statements of Richard Taruskin and Laurel Fay which have been advanced in *Shostakovich Reconsidered*, in *DSCH Journal*, and at this website (e.g., review of [Fay's biography](#), "[The Turning Point](#)", "[Centre and pseudo-centre](#)", etc). It is only by examining criticisms of their work at length that any consequential opinion can be formed as to how far they contend responsibly as legitimate scholars and how far, if at all, they seek merely to defend their reputations.

On the subject of (2) uninstructed presumption, it is only to be expected that secondary anti-revisionists -- journalists and broadcasters commissioned to comment on the Shostakovich debate who, having solicited the views of Fay and Taruskin, report hostilely on revisionism -- understand less than they might about the issues. What is more remarkable is the common conviction among such commentators that they know enough about the Soviet politico-cultural context to pass meaningful judgements on those who worked within it. At its simplest, this presumption of understanding can produce strident dismay at the mere suggestion that Shostakovich was a secret dissident. At a more sophisticated level, it results in a misconception of basic ideas and definitions. Alex Ross, for example, claims (*The New Yorker*, 20th March 2000) that Shostakovich wrote "ostensibly socialist realist symphonies" and that the Fifth Symphony "passed muster with socialist-realist [sic] aesthetics" -- a view betraying so complete a misconception of this aesthetic term as to expose the writer's supposed grasp of Soviet cultural affairs. Sadly, Olympia's fine catalogue no longer includes Dudarova's recording with the Moscow Symphony Orchestra of Lev Knipper's Fourth Symphony. A single listen to this brassily populist work -- one of the earliest examples (1933) of a genuine Socialist Realist symphony -- would let media pundits discern at once how different is Shostakovich's idiom.

Even in the simplest of circumstances, inadequate contextual understanding may seriously mislead the newcomer; in the very complex study of Soviet culture, such contextual uncertainty is often crippling. So many and pervasive are the resulting media misconceptions of Shostakovich that it must suffice to produce only one more so as not to unduly impede the progress of the present argument.

Shostakovich in tears

One of Shostakovich's most discussed pieces, the Eighth Quartet has, mainly as a result of "witness" testimony to have emerged since 1990, become recognised as a work of despairing protest against the composer's forced enrollment into the Communist Party at the time it was written in 1960. Shostakovich's friend Lev Lebedinsky disclosed that, "with tears in his eyes", the composer told him a day after completing the Quartet that it was, in effect, a musical suicide-note, reflecting his anguish at being made to join the Party. Isaak Glikman describes Shostakovich as wildly distraught: "I had never seen him in such a state. He was quite hysterical... crying, weeping out loud." The composer's son Maxim recalls that, having bowed to the Party's demands, his father wept in front of his children: "This was sobbing, not just tears, but sobbing." The intensity of Shostakovich's distress is virtually guaranteed to mystify anyone who lacks knowledge of the Soviet context. Why, Westerners will wonder, would anyone be so upset at the prospect of joining a political party -- a party which many secret dissidents joined simply because not to do so would have killed their careers? (E.g., composer Vladislav Uspensky: "I was also a member of the Party. Being so meant absolutely nothing." *DSCH Journal* 12, p. 9.)

In this instance, the natural incomprehension of Westerners was also reflected within the USSR. Many of the younger intellectual generation -- people, born around 1930, lucky enough not to experience the horrors of Stalin's dictatorship as adults -- were puzzled by Shostakovich's acquiescence to a political organisation which they thoroughly despised. This being the case, it is not, after all, so surprising that anti-revisionists, in conceding the code language of dissidence in the Eighth Quartet, simultaneously use the "witness" revelations about it as a means of mocking claims for Shostakovich's courage:

In 1960, by which time his international fame offered him a shield, Shostakovich gave in to pressure and joined the Communist Party. The autobiographical Eighth Quartet, which places his musical monogram in conjunction with a famous prison song, was an act of atonement for this display of weakness[...] Shostakovich's likely motive in dictating whatever portion of *Testimony* proves to be truly his was exculpation for [such] failures of nerve.

This paragraph, from Richard Taruskin's article "Casting A Great Composer As A Fictional Hero" in *The New York Times* on 5th March 2000, is characteristic of anti-revisionist contempt not only for the suggestion that Shostakovich was a secret dissident but also for the view that, in expressing his outlook through his music, he was a "moral beacon" (Joseph Horowitz, *The New York Times*, 6th February 2000). Such contempt logically extends to evaluation of the composer himself, for example Bernard Holland's attack on Shostakovich as "a mediocre human being" who "who toadied and cringed before his Soviet bosses" (*The New York Times*, 9th March 2000). Revealingly, Laurel Fay's vision of Shostakovich encompasses the same contempt: "On the one hand, he resisted and resented some of the things that happened to him [under the communist regime]. On the other hand, he was a wuss." (*National Post*, 15th March 2000.) The fashion for casual sneering at Shostakovich's supposed abjectness before the Soviet *apparatus* has inevitably spread to the critical mainstream: writers whose unfamiliarity with Shostakovich studies does not prevent them pouring scorn on the composer from the safety of middleclass American neighbourhoods a world away from the cold reach of totalitarian terror. For example, Philip Kennicott, a staffer for *The Washington Post*, writes (19th May 2000): "Shostakovich for Dummies begins with this lesson: The composer was either a political milquetoast who caved in to the Soviet establishment (whenever necessary) by writing musical agitprop, or a sibylline character who encoded anti-Soviet messages into his seemingly Stalin-friendly symphonies." Kennicott's mischaracterisation of *Testimony* as "diaries" suggests a less than reliable grasp of this subject.

An adequate case against such ignorant disdain cannot be made in brief. Here, we must encapsulate what should properly occupy an entire volume. The main Western misapprehension about Shostakovich's decision to join the Communist Party is that he was quite safe to have refused. The many assurances by his friends and family that he was then under severe duress and had no choice but to acquiesce are either not taken seriously by anti-revisionists or undermined with insinuations that the composer was merely drunk or confused at the time. Richard Taruskin furnishes a further sceptical variation in claiming that, by 1960, Shostakovich's international fame offered him a shield. Shostakovich himself requested his third wife Irina not to ask him any questions about it: "They blackmailed me." (Manashir Yakubov, LSO 1998 Shostakovich Season book, p. 61.) Naturally, anti-revisionists who let their contempt for Shostakovich shape their thinking will reject this as yet more unseemly self-justification.

Accepting that Shostakovich could not then have been conspicuously harmed by the Soviet authorities -- harmed in such a way as to have caused international consternation -- could anything less public, but no less effectively punitive, have been done to him if he had simply told the Communist Party to go to hell? Certainly there could. Covert

punishment is a protocol built into totalitarian situations, predicated on the inability of those living under such conditions to complain publicly, let alone internationally, about what is done to them.

In 1960, any number of threats could have been brought to bear on Shostakovich behind the scenes. His burgeoning relationship with Irina Antonovna could have been interdicted by removing her to another city. His extended family (which, as Vishnevskaya points out in her autobiography, included faithful retainers) could have been victimised in many devious ways. His meagre privileges (some of which he refused on principle to use) could have been curtailed. His income could have been choked off, his medical requirements threatened, his living conditions jeopardised. None of this need have come to the attention of prying foreigners. (In 1985, footage was screened in the West which purported to show Sakharov in good health, though he had recently been force-fed while on hunger strike.) Worst of all for Shostakovich, as his close friends knew, was anxiety over his beloved children Galina and Maxim, respectively 24 and 22 in 1960 and then setting out on their careers, with their own families to follow. What if, as a result of their father refusing the Party, they had found their progress blocked, their lives (in Akhmatova's phrase) "turned aside" -- wasted, ruined? Taruskin scornfully compares Shostakovich with public dissidents like Sakharov and Solzhenitsyn, neither of whom had an adult son or daughter to worry about. None of this occurs to anti-revisionists, whose condemnation comes too easily.

Why did Shostakovich weep?

The young intellectuals who refused to comprehend Shostakovich's acquiescence during the 1960s have, in maturity, become more understanding. For example, Sofiya Gubaidulina: "I now realise that the circumstances he lived under were unbearably cruel, more than anyone should have to endure... I accept him, for I see him as pain personified, the epitome of the tragedy and terror of our times." (Wilson, *op. cit.*, p. 307.) Others, including not only Gubaidulina's generation but older contemporaries of the composer, reason that if he had not agreed to join the Party he could not have become the First Secretary of the RSFSR Composers' Union (from which position he did so much good for his fellow artists that testimony to this is still coming in). Such arguments, no doubt, were put to him in 1960 not only by his *apparat* masters but by his colleagues in the dissident culture, anxious to prevent him yet again falling foul of the authorities, or taking his own life. (It must also have been pointed out that Party membership and his subsequent official elevation would afford him extra protection, something which he may have exploited in the manoeuvres before the premiere of the Thirteenth Symphony in 1962.) All this, together with whatever "blackmail" was inflicted on him, would rationally explain his acquiescence. What it doesn't explain is the extremity of his anguish prior to giving in --

his repeated lapses into tears and shaking fits, his childlike "running away".

Laurel Fay's view of Shostakovich as "a wuss" (wimp, wet, gutless wonder) -- and the similar opinions of those secondary anti-revisionists who follow her -- reflects distaste for a man seen as not only caving in when, supposedly, there was no pressure to do so, but who also wept and wailed at being made to enrol in an organisation which any mildly cynical secret dissident would have joined at once had the need arisen. The answer is obvious. When Galina Serebryakova, a lifelong diehard Communist, was released from the Gulag in the late 1950s, she was astonished to find that Shostakovich, one of the USSR's most respected artists, did not belong to the Communist Party. Presumably she reasoned that the laws of Soviet careerism should have ensured that no one without a Party card could achieve, let alone maintain, Shostakovich's eminence in his field. Indeed, it is more remarkable that Shostakovich avoided joining the Communist Party until he was 54 than that he succumbed at this very late age. It is the composer's non-membership of the Party between 1917 and 1960 that is the key.

The only sensible rationale for Shostakovich's refusal to join the Party until he was blackmailed into doing so is that he regarded it as the heart of every indigenous evil in the Soviet Union -- the operating centre of a totalitarian terror which had destroyed millions of lives, including those of many people he knew. For him, being able to keep the Party and its loathed officials at arm's length was almost certainly his personal "bottom line". Contrary to the assumptions of anti-revisionism, no one in the Soviet union was free to choose whether to "accommodate" the demands of the state (Fay, p. 173) or to "accept" Party authorship of speeches and writings (Fay, index entry). Refusal to toe the Party line in the USSR before 1956 got you jailed, tortured, and/or shot; refusal thereafter invited reprisals only slightly less draconian (including the novel refinement of conceivably losing your mind in a Soviet mental ward). Shostakovich had no more choice in "accommodating" and "accepting" impositions from the state than anyone else. One acceded or one suffered the consequences.

Shostakovich's convulsive reaction to being made to join the Party in 1960 can be understood as the breaching of a psychological dam which he had maintained throughout every indignity he endured at the hands of those who did Stalin's will from the 1920s onwards. Hypersensitive and hyperintelligent, the composer must have felt his personal humiliations and the grinding fear he shared with his fellow citizens particularly vividly. Unable to suppress his revulsion for those who inflicted these things, he was incapable of cynically joining the Party for career advancement and a degree of protection; on the contrary, as several of Elizabeth Wilson's witnesses attest, he feared and loathed Soviet officialdom. For many secret dissidents, the *apparat* ("them") represented the embodiment of a cold and often vicious amorality built into Leninist doctrine at foundation level. Judging by the testimony of his friends and colleagues, Shostakovich shared this

sentiment. Hence, to be forced to abandon his last-ditch position after all he had endured must have been catastrophic for him.

In this perspective, his misery at being compelled to join the Party is all too readily understood, and doubtless made more volcanically eruptive by the facade of stoical control his fate otherwise required of him (a habit of self-repression into which he rebounded even during the worst moments of the summer of 1960, as witnessed by his dryly ironic description of weeping over his "ideologically unsound" Eighth Quartet in his letter to Glikman of 19th July). It is a measure of Shostakovich's remarkable self-possession that he did not break down completely at this point or plummet into terminal alcoholism, as so many of his colleagues (and even *apparatus* functionaries) did under less stress.

When, referring to Shostakovich's acquiescence to the Party in 1960, Richard Taruskin dismissively describes the Eighth Quartet as "an act of atonement for this display of weakness", he displays both an appalling lack of human empathy and a wholly unscholarly failure of insight into the basic contextual issues in this field. Laurel Fay likewise reveals total contextual incomprehension when she speaks disdainfully of memoir witnesses "grappling with discomfiting issues of complicity and culpability". Only the most morally sensitive people in the USSR, of whom Shostakovich was evidently one, tortured themselves with guilt over being obliged to do what everyone else was obliged to do. Only acts of gross betrayal committed in the absence of unbearable coercion warrant the label "collaboration": there is no record of Shostakovich descending to this. On the contrary, his record behind the scenes is of endless intercession for the victims of Soviet rule, writing to the functionaries he despised in aid of those they had wronged. (Arkady Vaksberg lists Shostakovich first among those who tirelessly petitioned on behalf of Jewish victims of the Soviet system.)

As the accompanying [Case for Dissidence](#) shows, Shostakovich had no affiliation with Communism as a youth, inclined decisively to the non-Party intelligentsia thereafter, was persecuted by totalitarian Leftist from the period of the Cultural Revolution onward, and lost very heavily in friends and relatives to Soviet repression throughout his adult life. The scatological revulsion of his satire *Rayok* should suffice to convey the disgust he understandably felt for those who inflicted all this on him. Those who attempt to shrink the scope of *Rayok* to mere cultural burlesque effectively seek to lower the temperature of Shostakovich's tangibly raging anger. Anti-revisionism cannot countenance an angry, morally resistant idea of the composer without conceding the dissident conception. Resolutely ignored by anti-revisionists, Shostakovich's satirical impulse bears directly on the third basic source of hostility to the dissident view: the feeling that to investigate his music too closely risks depriving it of a supposed "mystery" without which it cannot properly be considered great.

Introspection and the impact of modernity

The highest achievements of Romantic Western art are usually taken to be those associated with introspection. Poets and composers meditate on their inner lives in relation to the great "themes": love, death, the mystery of existence and so on. By being occupied with such "universal" concerns, an artist rises above the merely actual as represented in the more conversational or action-intensive types of play or novel -- or in what is vaguely known as "program music". This is not a golden rule. Many find in opera insights as profound as the supposedly more abstract kind associated with, for example, the late works of Beethoven. In general, though, introspective art is prized above that based on observation of the external world, being thought purer and more essential.

Introspective art allows those who apprehend it to be guided by it into their own inner worlds. It is a gateway to private places of the heart and mind -- places which are doubtless different for all of us (although, judging by mass surveys of common fantasy-patterns, such differences are exaggerated). Until *Testimony* -- and, owing to Bernard Haitink's "introspective" readings of the symphonies, for some time thereafter -- Shostakovich was discussed by critics as a sub-Mahlerian enigma, veering unaccountably between introspective musing and outbursts of ostensibly vulgar blatancy. Reviewers valued the supposedly introspective slow passages of the symphonies and concertos over their other elements; it was conventional to regard the quartets as more serious because they were, supposedly, more "private" and "personal" (i.e., more susceptible to interpretation in Romantic introspective terms). In other words, Western listeners heard Shostakovich as a typical Russian introvert, either trapped in the clamorous external world of Soviet Communism or, somehow, simultaneously genuinely enthusing over this external world in disconcertingly vulgar ways.

So long as the details of life in the context within which Shostakovich lived remained vague, the "enigma" view of him could be sustained without raising serious questions. The common Western leftwing revolutionary-romantic view of Lenin and the state he created was (as it still is) important in maintaining the supposedly insoluble enigma of Shostakovich. Indeed, until around 1990, it was common to ascribe both the tragedy and the violently acerbic anger in his music to Russia's gigantic losses during the war against Hitler. Nowadays, we do not see Shostakovich as solely exercised by fascist oppression -- or rather we understand that fascism comes in red, as well as brown or black, varieties. Nevertheless the reflex assumption among Western intellectuals is that, since Lenin's revolution was declaredly progressive, rational, and humane, no one of Shostakovich's generation could have doubted it. According to this ubiquitous view, the dark side of Soviet Communism only became apparent under Stalin, who supposedly perverted Lenin's

lofty ideals. Such, more or less, is the extent of contextual understanding of Shostakovich's milieu among musicologists and general listeners in the West. Hence, the "enigma" view -- the assumption that we can never know what he really thought or felt -- endures. Coincidentally or not, this essentially romantic concept of Soviet history nourishes the idea of Shostakovich as brooding introvert. Accordingly, Westerners tend to form their own private and personal conceptions of what his music may or may not convey.

When the dissident conception is criticised on the grounds that its contextual aspect produces supposedly over-specific interpretations, what is thereby said to be lost is the music's "mystery", its potential for "infinite" non-specific meaning. In effect, such criticism defends the right to hear Shostakovich in wholly private and personal ways, as if his music reflects the Romantic ethos of introspection. While claims for infinite potential meaning are rhetorical, there is nothing unreasonable in contending that something mysterious resides in Shostakovich's work which can be damaged by interpreting it too precisely. There is always a deep core of subjectivity in any response to art, whether on the part of artist or audience. Nothing in the dissident conception threatens this. There are aspects of Shostakovich's music which, while not beyond verbal paraphrase, will always remain in the realm of the subjective, as personal and private as any Romantic introvert could fairly desire. What, however, must be recognised is that Shostakovich was no Romantic, but a modern realist. Devoted to the satiric observational tradition in 19th century Russian literature, he looked *out* at the external world in his music far more than he turned inward. Rebelling, like his contemporaries, against the culture of Russia's Silver Age (whose stormy introspection is matched by the early symphonies of Myaskovsky), Shostakovich, like Britten, saw himself as a social artist, living and working in the everyday world and, in a variety of styles and moods, reflecting its activities and values. He was not, or not primarily, an introspective Romantic who mused on eternal verities or explored his private and personal inner life.

Beyond introspection: the communal response

Again like Britten (and 20th century Mahler), Shostakovich's creative subject may be said to be the impact of modernity on traditional values. In his case, this impact was brutally immediate: the revolutionary overthrow of a corrupt traditional order involving an unprecedented socio-cultural upheaval and the destruction of millions of lives. When revisionists say that Shostakovich's music is dissident, they do not mean that it is "about politics". They mean that it concerns the universal trials of life (and the varieties of actor on that stage) taken to extremes of nuance and intensity which free democratic societies never experience. Recurrently tragic, often harsh and frightening, frequently blackly funny, Shostakovich's music is a report on experience in the world he knew -- a series of

musical dramas, most of them wordless, based on life under moral and emotional pressures which Western listeners rarely if ever experience at first hand. By reserving the right to project our private meanings on his music, we distance ourselves from the very life-impacts which Shostakovich, far from seeking to evade, met head-on and made the subject of his work. To the extent that we turn art into whatever we want it to mean, we forfeit the chance of being changed by it. Introducing *Testimony*, Solomon Volkov definitively expressed this through his overwhelmed response to the "naturalistic authenticity" of the Eleventh Symphony: "The poetics of shock. For the first time in my life, I left a concert thinking of others instead of myself." There could be no more direct statement of the anti-Romantic, non-introspective, down to earth realism of Shostakovich's creative principles.

No Communist, Shostakovich nevertheless almost certainly inclined to a broadly socialistic vision of a humane society in which individualities are respected and protected without being exalted at the expense of communal cohesion, gross inequity, and simple decency. This being so, he would not have wished his work to have been susceptible, in the Romantic tradition, to overly individualistic (private and personal) interpretation. Given that we cannot help experiencing in our own ways, Shostakovich aimed his work into the communal sphere, trying to unite his audiences in more or less the same response, even the same mental imagery. Within the Soviet Union, and especially within the dissident culture shared by most of the Soviet intelligentsia from 1917 onwards, this communal response was far easier to activate and exploit than it is in the fragmentary culture of the individualistic Western world. Volkov's example, the Eleventh Symphony, uses the unsung texts of Russian songs, alluded to through their melodies, to address Russian audiences with an unusual precision by activating emotional associations which are impossible to reproduce outside that culture.

The modern Western notion that composers write pieces as pure additions to a Platonic corpus of supranational universality misleadingly oversimplifies the truth -- which is that music has many social uses, some of which are locally specific beyond "translation". This is not true of Shostakovich's work, or not entirely true -- yet his mission to address those sharing what might be called "the Soviet experience" often assumes an urgent specificity which, without the exegesis of context, can cause problems of comprehension for non-Russians. At the same time, even for Westerners, the sheer concentration of Shostakovich's idiom rarely fails to produce the intended "communal effect", as the Emerson Quartet have confirmed. Shostakovich in concert can be a unique experience.

By the same token, performed by mere technical virtuosi or by conductors who project the softening light of Romantic introspection on his essentially hard-etched forms and colours, Shostakovich's music loses its dramatic sharpness, its operative tension between tragedy and satire. Herein lies one of the most persuasive arguments for contextual

investigation, for tragedy is universal in the sense that anyone may use their own sorrows to connect with that strain in Shostakovich's work, regardless of whether they comprehend the vast scale of the *communal tragedy* of which he speaks. Satire, on the other hand, is highly specific to time and place. To understand the particular tones of this aspect of Shostakovich's work, interpreters require some familiarity with the warped *mores* of Soviet life, the nuances of Soviet cultural discourse which dissident intellectuals found so ironic and at times so hysterically funny. Shostakovich is often spoken of by critics who do not grasp his idiom as a gloom-merchant with imponderable interludes of crass grandiosity or vulgar raucousness. Like readers of *Nineteen Eighty-Four* who do not distinguish Orwell's mordant jokes about Stalinist customs and practices, such critics fail to see how funny much of Shostakovich's music is, even in ostensibly serious moments. Of course, the humour often verges on the appalling (e.g., the burlesque trumpet-commissar in the third movement of the Eighth Symphony) -- yet it always identifies itself through irony: the irony which the composer's friends insist was his defining trait. While, as always and everywhere in life, over-interpretation remains an abiding danger, such ironic precision calls for reciprocally specific reading. The sharper the mental imagery, the more incisive the expression conveyed by performers. (The trouble with performances like Keith Jarrett's of Opus 87 or Eliahu Inbal in the symphonies is precisely that they are *too unspecific*.)

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THE SHOSTAKOVICH DEBATE

The Question of Dissidence (5)

To be read in conjunction with the [Chronology of the Debate](#).

"Trivial specificity"

In terms of the question of dissidence, the main focuses of discussion have been the Fifth Symphony, *From Jewish Folk Poetry*, and the Eighth Quartet. The latter is now generally accepted as a dissident composition (or, at any rate, in Taruskin's detached phrase "a message in a bottle"). Forced, by this shift in understanding, to acknowledge the contextualism long urged by revisionists, anti-revisionists now typically downgrade the work, deploring its specificity of meaning as something which allegedly diminishes its worth and claiming that it shows its composer as a spineless capitulator to Soviet pressure, wallowing in self-pity. Needless to say, having steadfastly neglected the background for so long, anti-revisionists have not suddenly acquired a deep understanding of Shostakovich's predicament, options, or behaviour in this unhappy context. As with most Western evaluation of Shostakovich's actions and motives, the new anti-revisionist view of the Eighth Quartet and its meaning is, at best, ill-informed, insensitive, and uncomprehending -- at worst, frankly self-serving.

Downgrading the Eighth Quartet, Richard Taruskin muses that "maybe incertitude -- irreducible multivalence -- is essential to experiencing it as a work of art. There is more to an art work, one has to think, than there is to a note in a bottle." It is hard to tell whether such determined aesthetic obstinacy -- stubbornly preferring "open" meaning to an engagement with the composer's probable intentions - springs more from a desire to discredit Shostakovich's dissident credentials than from a wish to stay aloof from the specificities of his message in order to preserve the right to "irreducibly multivalent" private responses. When dealing with Shostakovich, Taruskin is intolerant of the sort of contextual detail which casts new light on the works under study, damning the interpretations offered in *The New Shostakovich* for "trivial specificity". The implication -- borne out in his obscurely evasive account of the Fifth Symphony -- is that to pay more

than cursory attention to the context of Shostakovich's music is to tarnish it with purely contingent trivialities. So far as the Fifth Symphony is concerned, this argument is easily seen through. If we followed this logic, we would reject works like Schoenberg's *A Survivor From Warsaw* or Martinu's *Memorial To Lidice* on the *a priori* grounds that their historical specificity trivialises a notional aesthetic compact between artist and audience. One would have thought that 20th century art, in its response to 20th century life, had adequately demonstrated that there is no such aesthetic compact -- and that nothing, however disturbingly specific, is now forbidden.

So intent is Taruskin to preserve private and personal "open" meaning against "trivial specificity" where Shostakovich is concerned that he upbraids Isaak Glikman for attempting to "take possession of the meaning" of the composer's satirical letters to him by elucidating their specific references. Taruskin's insistence that nothing, not even explanatory annotations, should be allowed to come between us and the unmediated purity of the text implies that it is more important to preserve the right to dream up purely private and personal interpretations for the anti-Soviet satire in Shostakovich's letters than to understand what the composer actually meant. Taruskin strives to discourage contextual investigation of Shostakovich -- of the kind he is only too happy to urge in respect of other composers -- because doing so supposedly binds the music to time, place, and circumstance, rather than allowing it to float free of history: "supple, adaptable, ready to serve the future's needs". There is, though, no suggestion in revisionism that understanding the context of a given work pins it forever in its historical place. Were that so, all but the most locally undocumented music would be similarly constrained. What contextualism should create is heightened awareness of a work's dynamic within its original context, the better to apply its meaning in other situations as time goes by. If we hear Shostakovich's Fifth Symphony (as Alex Ross recommends) merely as a traditional Romantic work unfolding "the making of a man", we can "reapply" it only in that way (with all the confusions such a reading bequeathes in respect of the parts of the score which do not accord with it). If, on the other hand, we recognise that the Symphony refers to the experience of Terror in 1937, our scope for reapplying its meaning in our own time becomes clear. Certainly the "future's needs" are paramount, since the past is gone -- but there is a limit on how "supple" or "adaptable" meaning can be before becoming... meaningless.

Alternatives to the dissident conception

First floated (like nearly all anti-revisionist thought) by Richard Taruskin, the claim that "we can never know" what Shostakovich meant to convey in his music is often repeated. The motive for this assertion is clear: it licenses freely subjective listening, private interpretations which, rather than admit context, chiefly reflect inner individual concerns.

"Witness" statements and contextual factors cannot be reconciled with this claim; nor can we know what evidence may yet emerge from Russia regarding the composer's outlook, aims, and intentions. Judging by what we already know, any such evidence will point in the direction so far indicated. Evidence pointing in other directions would be of vital interest to all involved in the debate; however, since it would conflict with present knowledge, it would require to be treated with the same caution legitimately applied by anti-revisionists to *Testimony*. Put simply: we cannot legislate the future, much as Taruskin and his cohorts would like to.

Meanwhile, what of alternative conceptions of Shostakovich? There are three main options: (1) the "pre-*Testimony*" assumption that he sincerely supported Soviet Communist aims and values (an opinion held by Christopher Norris, by Robert Matthew-Walker and -- in her "allowance" that "Shostakovich might have been serious" rather than ironic -- by Laurel Fay); (2) the "collaborationist" concept, whereby Shostakovich, too vacillatingly cowardly to resist a regime which he may or may not have liked and probably did not understand, tried to toady to the authorities with sometimes farcical results (e.g., Taruskin's view of *Lady Macbeth*, Fay's view of *From Jewish Folk Poetry*); (3) the "enigma" theory in which the composer is an imponderable introvert given to bouts of unbecoming blatancy, the latter embodying either token gestures to the public sphere or an innate tastelessness in his personal make-up. Since these options conflict with the "witness" testimony -- or, in order to succeed, require that contextual evidence be distorted, e.g., Fay's redaction of the context of *From Jewish Folk Poetry*, Taruskin's polemical account of the reception of the Fifth Symphony (effectively discredited by Fay's biography) -- there is no sensible reason to allow them equal consideration with the dissident conception. (A fuller discussion may be consulted in the article [Witnesses for the Defence](#).)

Some anti-revisionists maintain a view of Shostakovich compounded of all three of the options outlined above, though it is not strictly legitimate to dilute the first of these. Broadly, anti-revisionism sees Shostakovich as someone who never really knew what he believed and therefore drifted uncomprehendingly in and out of situations he failed to understand, his life a tragi-comic tale of confusion interspersed with unseemly episodes of unnecessary grovelling and distasteful attempts to ingratiate himself. Whether this sorry picture can be reconciled with the music he wrote is, say anti-revisionists, an irreducibly subjective question; all that is clear is that Shostakovich was not a great man, merely "a great composer", and thus we can do no more than return to his scores and analyse them purely in their own self-referential structural terms.

Unfortunately for this general interpretation, the "stupid Shostakovich" it posits is wholly unsupported by the testimony of those who knew him, united as they are in awedly describing his formidable intellectual talents and almost incessant irony. Anti-revisionism has so far been unable to say how a composer so gifted could, in other respects, have been

such a blundering dullard. The proposition that he was a political innocent in any case perishes on the sharp dagger of *Rayok*, arguably the most vituperative satire written in the USSR.

The hagiographical accusation

Revisionism, say anti-revisionists, treats Shostakovich's life in "black-and-white" terms, oversimplifying the issues in an effort to reconcile what must be accepted as essentially irreconcilable. Some anti-revisionists go further, accusing revisionists of idealising Shostakovich -- of making a saint of him:

Cultists... cast Shostakovich as the Soviet dissident supreme: an omnipotent anti-Stalin, able at the height of the Stalinist terror to perform heroic acts of public resistance (absolutely transparent to all his fellow dissidents but absolutely opaque to those in power) such as even Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn did not hazard until he was living abroad. It is important to quash the fantasy image of Shostakovich as a dissident, no matter how much it feeds his popularity, because it dishonors actual dissidents like Mr. Solzhenitsyn or Andrei Sakharov, who took risks and suffered reprisals. Shostakovich did not take risks. Four of the five poems by Yevgeny Yevtushenko that Shostakovich incorporated into his "dissident" 13th Symphony (including "Babi Yar," the famous protest against anti-Semitism) had already appeared in the official Soviet press by the time Shostakovich set them, and the fifth, "Fears," had also been published there by the time the symphony was first performed...

Here Richard Taruskin (*The New York Times*, 5th March 2000) drops his semantic-chronological objection to regarding Shostakovich as a dissident, proposing instead the criterion of heroic risk-taking. In doing so, he resorts, as so often, to caricature, reducing the dissident conception to a cult in which Shostakovich is worshipped as "an omnipotent anti-Stalin" performing "heroic acts of public resistance" in a way "absolutely transparent to all his fellow dissidents but absolutely opaque to those in power". The sheer crudity of this misstatement debunks itself. As for the idea that Shostakovich's dissidence could only have been predicated on the Soviet authorities having "absolutely" no inkling that he was not of their persuasion, it suffices to repeat what is said earlier in this article: such an assumption is extraordinarily naive.

On the subject of heroic risk-taking, Taruskin compares apples and oranges. The conditions under which Solzhenitsyn (from 1967) and Sakharov (from 1968) set out, publicly and openly, to oppose the Soviet regime bore no relationship to those obtaining

under Stalin when such public opposition as was feasible could only be oblique (amounting to discreet Aesopian speech... or music). Since a work like the Thirteenth Symphony -- more grimly outspoken than *A Day In The Life Of Ivan Denisovich*, with which it is contemporary -- predates the open dissidence of Solzhenitsyn, Taruskin attempts to belittle Shostakovich's role in the Symphony, rather as if he sneaked in at the last minute to add music to Yevtushenko's dissident poems in order to steal some unearned kudos. In fact, Yevtushenko's "Babi Yar" caused a violent backlash from neo-Stalinist elements in *Literaturnaya Rossiya* during 1961 -- a backlash which Shostakovich quite deliberately resisted by setting "Babi Yar" on his own initiative, selecting three more of Yevtushenko's most candid poems, and requesting (or inspiring) the poet to write the devastating "Fears". Such was the risk involved in this project that Mravinsky ducked it and two soloists dropped out along the way.

As for the risk involved in works like the Fifth, Sixth, Eighth, Ninth, and Tenth symphonies, no common calculation can be made in comparing them with, say, Solzhenitsyn's open letter against censorship addressed to the Fourth National Congress of Soviet Writers in May 1967 or the *samizdat* publication of Sakharov's *Progress, Co-existence, and Intellectual Freedom* in June 1968. It is robustly arguable that, within its context, Shostakovich's Fifth Symphony was the most heroic artistic statement ever made in the USSR. Furthermore, it was preceded by a work of considerably more explicit dissidence: the Fourth Symphony (which Shostakovich was required to withdraw but which he pointedly left as a gaping hole in his symphony list). Even Taruskin recognises the disturbing subversiveness of the Fourth Symphony, conceding (in his 1995 essay "Who Was Shostakovich?") that "there is indeed something [in the work] that does seem naggingly to foreground the issue of individual integrity and social stress -- namely, the extremes within it of inwardness and extroversion, and the manifestly ironic way in which these extremes are juxtaposed and even thematically interchanged". Recycling this passage in his collection *Defining Russia Musically* (1997), Taruskin ventures a reading of closer specificity:

This music [the last half of the Symphony's finale], which was almost certainly composed postdenunciation, seems palpably to set the inner and the outer, the public and the private, the manic, turbulent collective and the human fate of the bruised individual, in blunt, easily read (indeed, as it turned out, too easily read) opposition. [op. cit., p. 493]

Implying that the Fourth Symphony was effectively quashed by the *apparatchiki* because they suspected its composer of subversive intent, Taruskin here comes close enough to revisionism to be practically indistinguishable from it -- a complete contradiction of his suggestion elsewhere that Shostakovich can only have been a dissident in such a mouselike way that the *apparat* did not notice. Hastening to regain proper doctrinal

distance, he adds that ("of course") he cannot say exactly what Shostakovich's "disquieting" use of juxtaposition and thematic interchange signifies: "I have no ready verbal paraphrase with which to replace it." This critical method -- inaugurate a promising interpretation but, beyond a certain point, refuse to take it further -- is characteristic of anti-revisionism, which amounts to an endeavour to suppress any investigation of Shostakovich which might undermine its presumptions about him. Not to draw any conclusions, whether "black-and-white" or merely circumspectly grey, about what Shostakovich intended in his music leads only to the feeble confusion of Laurel Fay's biography or the tiresome ducking and diving of Richard Taruskin.

Far from turning Shostakovich into a saint, revisionists rationally seek out plausible explanations for those twists and turns in his career which would otherwise remain opaque, attempting to understand his work in such a way as to render it "communally" applicable in future historical situations of a similar kind. In doing so, revisionism endeavours to bridge the gulf of understanding between democratic life and life under authoritarian or totalitarian societies where art is forced to serve instead of the free speech and right of reply which democrats take for granted. Much Western incomprehension of Shostakovich stems from a failure to understand that he had no right to answer back. To equate forced silence with absence of independent thought (as Richard Taruskin does with his sweeping claim that there were no dissidents under Stalin) is grievously to misconstrue Shostakovich and the world he lived and worked in.

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