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Shostakovich Reconsidered



Synopsis

Dmitry Shostakovich's memoirs, *Testimony*, 'related to and edited by Solomon Volkov', have been the subject of fierce debate since their publication in 1979. Was *Testimony* a forgery, made up by an impudent impostor, or was it the deathbed confession of a bent, but unbroken, man? Even now, years after the fall of the communist regime, a coterie of well-placed Western musicologists have regularly raised objections to *Testimony*, hoping with each attack to undermine the picture of Shostakovich presented in his memoirs that of a man of enormous moral stature, bitterly disillusioned with the Soviet system. Here, Allan Ho and Dmitry Feofanov systematically address all of the accusations levelled at *Testimony* and Solomon Volkov, Shostakovich's amanuensis, amassing an enormous amount of material about Shostakovich and his position in Soviet society and burying forever the picture of Shostakovich as a willing participant in the communist charade.

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Customer Reviews

Please read the excellent reviews of St John, ultrarunner, Prosser and A Customer, written before this review. Because of these previous writers, I can take a different path. First of all, this book offers little analysis of the music of Shostakovich. No surprise: Shostakovich believed there was no need to explain the meaning of his music -- "Those who have ears will understand," he said on many occasions. He did write explanations for officials, who apparently did not "have ears", and those explanations have apparently misled Fay, Taruskin and others. To the many, Russians and others, who did then and do now understand, it seems incredible that anyone could mistake Shostakovich's

intent. It's possible that authoritarians, as defined by the post WWII studies, can see only black or white and must have simple explanations; they do not tolerate complexity -- and most great works of art are complex, with many levels of meaning. Secondly, the first part of this 728 page work is a laborious -- and yes, ultimately tedious -- absolutely convincing refutation of Fay and total vindication of Testimony. Combined with listening to all the symphonies, quartets, concertos and chamber music, there can be no mistaking Shostakovich's basic intent. Thirdly, the rest of the book turns out to be a dissection of the man Shostakovich. Outside of an interview with Kondrashin and one or two other short articles, the rest of Shostakovich Revisited reminded me of Rembrandt's painting "The Anatomy Lesson of Dr. Nicolaes Tulp". (You don't need to know the painting to get the allusion: the cadaver is stretched out for all to see, students crowded about hanging on the words of the lecturer.) After a while I became uncomfortable with this intimacy.

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