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Introduction. Talking about eggs: musicology and Shostakovich

DAVID FANNING

What is a musicologist? Shostakovich offered his definition over breakfast: ‘What’s a musicologist? I’ll tell you. Our cook, Pasha, prepared the scrambled eggs for us and we are eating them. Now imagine a person who did not cook the eggs and does not eat them, but talks about them – *that* is a musicologist.’¹ No doubt many would agree. Yet it should not be forgotten that among Shostakovich’s closest friends and confidants was Ivan Sollertinsky – man of many parts, but primarily a musicologist – who probably did more than any other individual to shape Shostakovich’s tastes and sharpen his intellect in his formative years; and his most extensive and revealing correspondence after Sollertinsky’s death in 1944 was with Isaak Glikman, who, as a theatre historian, must count as another professional egg-talker.² There are even occasional words of praise for musicologists to be found in Shostakovich’s writings, the most apparently sincere of them reserved for Lev (now Leo) Mazel, whose work on Shostakovich draws tribute from two contributors to the present volume.

¹ The joke was apparently passed on to him by his conservatoire piano teacher, Leonid Nikolayev. See Nikolai Malko, *A Certain Art* (New York, 1966), 180.

² Sollertinsky’s writings have not been translated into English, with the exception of an extract of his 1932 Mahler book and his 1941 essay ‘Historical types of symphonic dramaturgy’, in Eric Roseberry, *Ideology, Style, Content, and Thematic Process in the Symphonies, Cello Concertos, and String Quartets of Shostakovich* (New York and London, 1989). A selection in German may be found in Iwan Sollertinski, *Von Mozart bis Schostakowitsch* (Leipzig, 1979). Extracts from the important correspondence between Shostakovich and Sollertinsky are published in Lyudmila Mikheyeva, ‘Istoriya odnoy druzhbi’ [The story of a friendship], *Sovetskaya Muzika* (9/1986 and 9/1987); Mikheyeva (Sollertinsky’s daughter-in-law) is currently seeking funds to publish a more comprehensive selection. Shostakovich’s letters to Glikman, much referred to in the present volume, are in *Pis’ma k drugu* [Letters to a Friend] (Moscow and St Petersburg, 1993); French translation, with truncated editorial commentaries (Paris, 1994).

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But on the whole it remains true that Shostakovich had a low opinion of musicologists, not just because of their seemingly redundant and parasitical sphere of activity, but also because of the cowardice, even malice, he detected in some of them (above all in the doyen of Soviet musicology, Boris Asaf'yev).³ Maybe, then, he would have been happy to know that musicologists outside the former Soviet Union have tended to shy away from his music: and maybe he would have looked with intense suspicion at the line-up of musicologists in this volume of *Shostakovich Studies*. Certainly, given the extent and significance of extramusical issues associated with Shostakovich, the value of traditional musicological commentary is questionable. This fact alone merits a longer than usual editorial preamble.

Recent published work on Shostakovich has been dominated by performers, personal friends or pupils of the composer, and the odd enthusiast.⁴ I stress that none of those words carries a sneer, certainly not the kind of sneer that the shrillest of these recent publications reserves for musicologists.⁵ But the kind of commentary these writers have favoured – anti-musicological, revisionist and casual in its ascribing of programmatic, usually subversive meaning – would probably have been no more to Shostakovich's taste than 'straight' musicology, as Richard Taruskin points out in his keynote contribution to the present volume, quoting the composer: 'When a critic . . . writes that in such-and-such a symphony Soviet civil servants are represented by the oboe and the clarinet, and Red Army men by the brass section, you want to scream!'

Taruskin's main project is to elucidate the background to and reception of the Fifth Symphony, the most significant watershed in Shostakovich's output and one of the most extensively and contradictorily commented works in the history of music. Taruskin dubs it 'a richly coded utterance, but one whose meaning can never be wholly encompassed or definitively

³ For details see Krzysztof Meyer, *Dimitri Chostakovitch* (Paris, 1994), 99–101, and Elizabeth Wilson, *Shostakovich: A Life Remembered* (London, 1994), 112, 209, 304.

⁴ Among performers see Vladimir Ashkenazy, 'Shostakovich was not an enigma', *DSCH Journal*, no. 20 (Spring 1992), 4–14; Rudolf Barshai, 'On ne boyalsya Stalina' [He was not afraid of Stalin], *Sovetskaya Muzika* (9/1989); Semyon Bychkov, interviewed in *DSCH Journal*, no. 19 (Autumn 1991), 15–19. For personal acquaintances and pupils see the statements collected in *Melos* (Stockholm), 1/4–5 (Summer 1993). For an eloquent and ideologically committed enthusiast, see Ian MacDonald, *The New Shostakovich* (London, 1990). The finest recent substantial contributions are from Elizabeth Wilson (primarily a cellist) and Krzysztof Meyer (primarily a composer) – see note 3.

⁵ Ian MacDonald, *The New Shostakovich*, *passim*.

paraphrased', and he conducts his search for that meaning with as passionate an abhorrence for vulgarised programmatic commentary as the composer's quoted above. It has seemed to me right to let his polemical tone and content stand, even when they involve assertions I cannot personally endorse, because these assertions are founded on a scholarly grasp of Russian music in all its aspects which is unrivalled outside Russia (and possibly within Russia too). No one is better placed single-handedly to turn back the 'torrent of romantically revisionary, sentimental nonsense' which Taruskin finds characteristic of writing on Shostakovich in the eras of *glasnost*' and post-Communism.

It is not difficult to see how the urge for revisionism could have arisen. For Russians it is part of an ongoing process of de-mythologising their own history; more specifically it is an acknowledgment that Shostakovich's music provided an emotional safety-valve for tragic experiences which for decades could not be written about – indeed they could hardly even be talked about. In the West it is perhaps more a case of being tempted to make Shostakovich into the kind of hero we would like him to be, and in particular the mirror-image of the kind of hero former socialist-orientated commentators would have liked him to be. In both cases the risk is of replacing one mythology with another and still bringing us no closer to the experience of the music itself. As each provocative voice spawns new claims and counter-claims, and as anti-revisionism is added to the morass of conflicting opinions, Shostakovich commentators begin to seem rather like libel lawyers, with a vested interest in continuing controversy. And with such a profusion of 'evidence' on all sides there is every prospect of an endless cycle of appeals, new submissions and retrials.

Whether or not one agrees with Taruskin that the view of Shostakovich as dissident in the 1930s is 'a self-gratifying anachronism' (he urges us, in effect, to distinguish between dissidence and non-conformism), now at least there is an immensely scholarly and authoritative voice setting forth this view and supplanting such pioneer anti-revisionist efforts as Christopher Norris's.⁶ It is a view that western writings on Shostakovich would do well to heed, especially if they seek to put an ideological slant on reception history⁷ or analysis.⁸

⁶ See his 'Shostakovich: politics and musical language', in the symposium edited by him, *Shostakovich: the Man and his Music* (London, 1982), 163–87.

⁷ Günter Wolter, *Dmitrij Schostakowitsch, eine sowjetische Tragödie: Rezeptionsgeschichte* (Frankfurt am Main and New York, 1991).

⁸ Karen Kopp, *Form und Gehalt der Symphonien des Dmitrij Schostakowitsch* (Bonn, 1990).

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At the moment Taruskin's post-revisionism is a minority voice in writings on Shostakovich, but it finds echoes in other exasperated post-*glasnost*' Russian writings on the arts: 'The exposure of myths of the past threatens to grow into another mythology. The "Personality Cult" has much in common with "The Cult of Denunciation of the Personality Cult".'⁹ In fact the richness of Taruskin's commentary consists not so much in its de-mythologising of Shostakovich as in its de-mythologising of musicology. For his deep soundings into the murky waters of Soviet criticism offer a timely reminder that identifying subtexts and ambiguities in Shostakovich's music is actually nothing new. Such insights, such unspeakable truths', were grasped, at least partially, in the first instance by those Soviet critics whose aim was to denounce the music. The same line was then adopted in more subtle fashion by post-Thaw Soviet musicologists, still well before westerners independently latched on to it and, encouraged by the appearance in 1979 of that arch-revisionist document, Solomon Volkov's *Testimony*,¹⁰ all too often trivialised it.

There cannot be too many books on twentieth-century composers that have sold half a million copies, as Volkov claims.¹¹ There is no gainsaying *Testimony*'s influence on the public perception of Shostakovich's music – since the appearance of its curious mixture of rumour, fact and slanted reminiscence there is hardly a book, an article, a review, a programme note or a liner note on a major Shostakovich work which could truthfully claim not to have been influenced by it, at least outside Russia.¹²

It should be remembered that Volkov's well-known dishonesty about the provenance of the book says nothing about the truth or falsehood of its content. But whatever its status as a representation of the composer's views, it may be worth remembering that *Testimony* the book contains one of the best stories against testimony with a small 't'. It concerns Berg's visit to Leningrad in 1927 to conduct *Wozzeck*:

⁹ Andrey Shemyakin, 'Malen'kaya pol'za' [Little use], *Seans*, no. 3 (1991). The article reviews S. Aranovich's film, *I was in Stalin's Apparatus*, or *The Songs of Oligarchs*.

¹⁰ Solomon Volkov (ed.), *Testimony: the Memoirs of Dmitri Shostakovich* (London and New York, 1979).

¹¹ 'Here a man was burned down', interview with Galina Drībachevsky, in *Sovetskaya Muzika* (3/1992), 10. Volkov candidly admits that, 'In fact there's much we don't know about Shostakovich' (*ibid.*, p. 5).

¹² The fraudulence of *Testimony* is documented by Laurel Fay, 'Shostakovich versus Volkov: whose *Testimony*?' *Russian Review*, 39 (1980), 484–93. The debate surrounding *Testimony* and Shostakovich's ideology has comparatively recently spread to the former Soviet Union. For a substantially pro-Volkov line see, for example, Lev Lebedinsky, 'O nekotorykh muzikalnikh tsitatakh v proizvedeniyakh D. Shostakovicha' [On some musical quotations

Berg left two legends behind. The source of one legend was a critic and fan of Scriabin. Berg supposedly told him that he owed everything as a composer to Scriabin. The other legend came from a critic who didn't care for Scriabin. Supposedly Berg told *him* that he had never heard a note by Scriabin. Over forty years have passed, but both men still repeat with a thrill what Berg said to them. So much for eyewitness accounts.¹³

No doubt fascination with the question of Shostakovich's ideological standpoints will go on and on, and there is much to learn from the recent tide of reminiscences, correspondence and investigations into ideology, or Soviet cultural history, or any of the other recently aired biographical issues such as Shostakovich's relationships with literary figures, with fellow-musicians, and not least with women.¹⁴ It is vital for our understanding of Shostakovich the man that much more Russian material should be available in translation and properly commented on by writers sensitive to the way Russian minds work. Furthermore, even the most intellectually disreputable commentaries may be of value if written with passion and genuine empathy, because they are a fact of reception history. What will do damage, however, is allowing Shostakovich's work to become no more than an arena for ideological mud-slinging.

Fortunately there is a strand of recent published work which is already taking a much more balanced view of the ideology question. Krzysztof Meyer's life-and-works study, originally published in Polish and German, was always one of the saner and more authoritative appreciations of Shostakovich; it has now appeared in French, updated and with many changes of emphasis from passages which were previously affected by (self-)censorship; and Elizabeth Wilson's documentary biography has gathered together a wealth of Russian reminiscence and epistolary material which provides a more finely nuanced, complementary version of the *Testimony* story (see note 3 above).

in the works of D. Shostakovich], *Noviy mir* (3/1990), 262–7, and Daniil Zhitomirsky, 'Shostakovich ofitsial'niy i podlinniy' [Shostakovich: official and authentic], *Daugava* (3–4/1990), 88–100; both Lebedinsky and Zhitomirsky were apostates of the proletarian line which was highly critical of Shostakovich's work around 1930. For an anti-Volkov riposte see Yuriy Levitin, 'Fal'shivaya nota' [A wrong note], in *Pravda* (11 November 1990), p. 3; Levitin was one of Shostakovich's first Leningrad pupils from 1937. For an attempt to mediate and point to a more fruitful way ahead, see Lev Mazel', 'K sporam o Shostakoviche' [On the Shostakovich controversy], *Sovetskaya Muzika* (5/1991), 30–5; as noted above, Mazel' is one of the few musicologists whose work drew praise from Shostakovich.

¹³ Volkov, *Testimony*, 32.

¹⁴ For the last see Sof'ya Khentova, 'Zhenshchiny v ego zhizni' [The women of his life], in her book *Udivitel'niy Shostakovich* [The Surprising Shostakovich], (St Petersburg, 1993), 89–170.

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The appearance of these books is one reason why Taruskin's is the only article in the present volume which tackles the ideology issue head-on, though most of the other authors touch on it to a greater or lesser extent. But another more vital reason may be inferred from Taruskin's article itself, or rather from his original conclusion, amended by him without my suggestion but so pertinent that I want to take the liberty of citing it. Developing his approval of Liana Genina's remarks on cheap ideological inversionism he commented:

She would like to see some attention paid to the music again, not in the spirit of the old escapist musicology, which practised analytical formalism as a way of evading risk, but in simple acknowledgment of the fact that Shostakovich was after all an artist, a composer. We might do well to heed her call, remembering that Albert Camus ended 'The artist and his time', the essay that more than any other proclaimed his commitment to political engagement, with a reminder that 'if we are not artists in our language first of all, what sort of artists are we?'¹⁵

All this is indeed a timely reminder. The bravest, the most subversive, the most socio-politically challenged, or the most politically correct composer, never gained immortality on those counts alone – witness the many unsuccessful attempts by western composers to commemorate the victims of the Nazi holocaust or the atom bomb. After all, Shostakovich's music speaks to listeners who have never heard of Stalin's Great Terror or read *Testimony*. And if the sources of that communication – in personality, experience and history – are undoubtedly an important concern, the very nature of music demands that the means of communication – the musical language itself – receives equal attention.

What the precise relationship is between the message and the language of music will always remain an elusive and fascinating question, and probably the best anyone working in this area can hope for is to examine its various facets one by one and leave the synthesis to the reader/listener. Such examinations must stand or fall by their own merits. But surely there is no more proper place for them than a scholarly series such as Cambridge's *Studies*. That is why two chapters in this book are predominantly theoretical (Carpenter and Kholopov) and two more predominantly analytical (McCreless and Fanning). The remaining five are more historical in emphasis. Two are single-work source-studies (focusing on primary sources in Laurel Fay's essay on the versions of *The*

¹⁵ The Camus citation is from *The Myth of Sisyphus and Other Essays*, trans. Justin O'Brien (New York, 1955), 150.

Lady Macbeth of Mtsensk District, and on secondary ones in Manashir Yakubov's re-emphasis of the reception history of *The Golden Age*). Two are discussions of Shostakovich's relationship with his most significant contemporaries (Britten in Eric Roseberry's essay, Schnittke in Alexander Ivashkin's). And Dorothea Redepenning tackles broad issues of meaning and style in her discussion of the song-cycles.

One strand in Taruskin's essay provides an intellectual and critical context for the theoretical chapters. Writing apropos Shostakovich's post-Fifth Symphony works he asserts that:

The changes wrought in him by his ordeals lent his voice a moral authority perhaps unmatched in all of twentieth-century music. But the impulse to communicate urgently in an atmosphere of threat did lead, at times, to an over-reliance on extroversive reference as bearer of essential meaning, and a correspondingly debased level of musical discourse.

'Extroversive' and its complementary opposite 'introversive' are terms common in literary theory and they apply here to fundamental areas of musical meaning – involving, respectively, references outside the musical work (to other musical works or to the world at large) and relationships within the work (the tensions and interconnections of its constituent elements). The distinction can be differently formulated – as semantic/syntactic, heteronomous/autonomous, or, as Patrick McCreless chooses in his chapter, extrinsic/immanent. Whatever the favoured terminology, it is the introversive side which has been so singularly neglected in recent writings on Shostakovich, and it is this neglect which it is one of this book's main aims to redress.

Not that there is no analytical literature whatsoever on Shostakovich. There is a vast amount of it in Russian, albeit mostly deficient in rigour and depth. And between them the non-Russian studies have a fair amount to say about formal design in the large-scale works and about thematic transformation.¹⁶ This is not work to be sneezed at – large-scale

¹⁶ A useful listing of Russian studies is in Laurel Fay's bibliography to the Shostakovich chapter in Gerald Abraham *et al.*, *The New Grove Russian Masters 2* (London, 1980). See also Ellon Carpenter, 'The theory of music in Russia and the Soviet Union, ca. 1650–1950', Ph.D. diss. (University of Pennsylvania, 1988), iii, 1369–92. Two extensive British Ph.D. dissertations in this field are Richard Longman, *Expression and Structure: Processes of Integration in the Large-Scale Instrumental Music of Dmitri Shostakovich* (New York and London, 1989), and Eric Roseberry, *Ideology, Style, Content* (see note 2 above). See also Laurel Fay, 'The last quartets of Dmitrii Shostakovich: a stylistic investigation', Ph.D. diss. (Cornell University, 1978), and Karen Kopp, *Form und Gehalt*.

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form is after all the arena for Shostakovich's musical dramas, and thematic transformation is in many instances the powerhouse. But for discussions of this kind to enhance the reader's experience of the music they need to strike at least two careful balances: one between the various functioning elements of music, and another between its various temporal dimensions – short-, mid- and long-term.¹⁷ And such discussions would carry fuller conviction if they were founded on a historical perspective. To provide such a perspective is the task that Yuriy Kholopov, the most prominent theoretical musicologist active today in Russia, has set himself. His essay ranges over most of Shostakovich's major works, and places its findings in the context of the pedagogical theory derived from Adolf Bernhard Marx which Shostakovich grew up with. The upshot is a persuasive demonstration of how Shostakovich adapted traditional concepts of form to his own aesthetic ends.

The most crucial lacuna in western understanding of Shostakovich's music concerns harmonic and tonal language. That commentators should have been perplexed in the face of a language which is sometimes tonal, sometimes modal, sometimes somewhere in between, and sometimes outside the bounds of either, is understandable. But the extent of downright false diagnoses in otherwise competent studies is still startling.¹⁸ The stumbling block here usually concerns the question of mode. Fortunately this is an area in which Russian scholars have been active – so prodigiously active, in fact, that it is extremely difficult to distil their findings into a coherent and manageable unit; and the language barrier has further served to hide some valuable work from western view. Ellen Carpenter is the author of a huge dissertation on Russian theorists (see note 16 above) and her essay in the present volume is the fruit of her recent work on theories of mode in Shostakovich in particular. Her comprehensive survey offers for the first time a historical perspective on an important branch of musical theory, as well as an invaluable stimulus to a more accurate analytical understanding of Shostakovich's music.

For the most part Carpenter's essay is synoptic rather than critical, but she does conclude with an important caveat:

¹⁷ This was in fact my main ambition in my study of the Tenth Symphony, *The Breath of the Symphonist: Shostakovich's Tenth*, Royal Musical Association Monographs 4 (London, 1989).

¹⁸ For examples and discussion see my 'Writing about Shostakovich – performing Shostakovich', paper delivered at the conference *Shostakovich: the Man and his Age*, University of Michigan, February 1994, publication forthcoming.

Modal language in Shostakovich's music has not been addressed in its totality, but only in part. Now that the unfolding of its diatonic basis has been examined, a more processive and all-inclusive approach needs to be applied, in order to reveal each piece's unique modal-tonal embodiment in and contribution to the thematic structure.

Quite. And this is easier said than done, of course. Nor is the modal angle the only theoretical one that merits exploration. It is also interesting to explore how Schenkerian insights and methods of presentation may complement the discussion. In the case of the first movement of the Fifth Symphony, for instance, I believe they can help to define the music's introversive qualities. This is all the more necessary, it seems to me, given that Taruskin's insistence on the necessity for 'interpretation' of this work could lead to the conclusion that it does not 'stand up' autonomously. Even Kholopov, whose focus is precisely on the introversive dimension, finds himself on the brink of extroversive description when it comes to the development section:

And so now begins the most important thing in sonata form, the development. But if all the strongest resources have already been exhausted, on what basis can the development exist when, according to the rules of the form, it should be an order of magnitude higher than the exposition? . . . In Shostakovich's movement if one considers all the harmonies prominently demonstrated in the exposition they will give an almost complete twelve-note chain, and moreover the main props are harmonies which are five steps away on the circle of fifths. Thus there is nothing left for the development.

Shostakovich's new solution as a twentieth-century composer consists of finding new effective means of contrast, an even higher order of dissonance. In the development section he now starts to place contrasted sound-layers one on top of another. The unity of the harmony in the vertical dimension is broken. The layers of poly-harmony dissonantly contradict one another, as if the voices somehow are not listening to one another; in some places they even try to out-shout one another to see who can make the most noise. In places it becomes impossible to sense any tonality whatsoever. Supercharging the discordant mass of sound leads to a huge 'proclamation' at the beginning of the recapitulation, where uncoordinated shouting lines suddenly merge into a mighty unison.

Taruskin's and Kholopov's insights notwithstanding, I feel that at least in the middleground of the structure there are complex introversive forces at work which show a composer in full musical command of his material and which can be effectively presented in a Schenkerian light. The crisis-point in the development section, approaching fig. 30, is

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expressed harmonically rather than thematically – the return of the first subject in the trumpets is unaltered in intervallic and rhythmic structure but is placed in the key of the second subject (E \flat minor, and here Phrygian), while the surrounding ostinati proclaim the first subject's original tonic D minor (Ex. 1.1).

Ex. 1.1 Shostakovich, Symphony No. 5, first movement

This passage is not short of extroversive (specifically, intertextual) dimensions. Apart from those noted by other writers, the D minor bass ostinato is an astonishing, but almost certainly coincidental, recall of the battle-zone of the first movement of Nielsen's Fifth Symphony (Ex. 1.2).¹⁹

Ex. 1.2 Nielsen, Symphony No. 5, first movement

Another intertextual reference, to Beethoven's Ninth Symphony, may be more conscious (this is the very same work which Taruskin mentions in other connections with Shostakovich's Fifth). Compare the opening of Example 1.1 with Beethoven's famous 'Schreckensfanfare' which heralds his finale (Ex. 1.3).

Extroversive though this reference may be, Beethoven's fanfare and Shostakovich's crisis-point share a similar introversive function, namely

¹⁹ There is no mention of Nielsen anywhere in Soviet musicological or critical writings of the 1920s or 1930s, and it is extremely unlikely that Shostakovich knew any of his music at this stage in his life. The Danish conductor Ole Schmidt recalls that in 1975 Shostakovich did claim acquaintance with Nielsen's work (personal communication, 24 February 1993).