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## Letters to the Editor

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From Ian MacDonald

Julian Graffy's review (*Tempo* 175, pp.29–30) of my book *The New Shostakovich* contains some praise and no little blame. In the interest of truth, I'd like to reject both.

First, the praise. Mr Graffy assumes that I am 'justly proud' of my 'exhaustive' researches into the background of Shostakovich's music. Not really. Of course I think the book worth buying in that it's true and apt compared with other writings on Shostakovich, which have mostly been false or inept. However, far from taking pride in the book's alleged exhaustiveness, I see it as exactly what I've called it: 'a preliminary study - nothing more'. As such, it's thorough enough; I believe in value for money. But to claim that it exhausts anything about its topic would be absurd. When the definitive Shostakovich biography is written (probably in about ten years), it'll make *The New Shostakovich* look like an index card. For now, in the absence of anything better in English apart from *Testimony*, it'll do. (I should perhaps point out that Maxim Shostakovich has 'highly' recommended it as 'one of the best books about Dmitri Shostakovich that I have ever read'.)

Now the blame. Mr Graffy finds my low estimation of Western familiarity with the Soviet context preposterous, claiming that I'm waging an old war against this and consequently exaggerating the newness of my own position. Anyone who can say this without choking on his tongue has either gained his knowledge of the subject rather recently or simply has no idea what he is talking about. Suffice to say that Andrie Navrozov, who probably knows more about Stalinist culture than anyone now living in the West, has described my book as 'a formal lesson to Western writers on post-1917 Russia, whether their subject is music or life itself'. Clearly Mr Navrozov considers such a 'lesson' necessary. As for the dismal historical record itself, it is there for anyone to read.

The most disappointing aspect of Mr Graffy's review is that, rather than join issue with any of my arguments, he contents himself with a vaguely scornful recital of a few isolated excerpts, advising readers to draw their own conclusions. That this is partly a reflection of Mr Graffy's own intellectual uncertainty is

indicated by his assertion that I 'underplay' Zamyatin's contribution to *The Nose*. In fact, I neither underplay it nor overplay it; I simply present the facts as they were available to me at the time of writing. Had I known of Mikhail Goldshtein's book (published, without fanfares, in France while I was finishing mine in England) I would obviously have used it. The point is that, since one of my intentions was to show that the young Shostakovich was unlikely ever to have been a Communist, I could have had no sensible motive for 'underplaying' his closeness to the overtly anti-Communist Zamyatin. As for Mr Graffy's remarks concerning my footnote on the pedigree of Zhdanov's 'half-nun, half-harlot' slur against Akhmatova, no-one who reads this passage with care could deduce from it that I imagine Eikhensbaum to have been one of Zhdanov's minions. (The process by which Eikhensbaum's remark became assimilated into mainstream Soviet cultural theory is, in fact, standard knowledge.)

Finally, Mr Graffy implies that my 'crusade' to set everything Shostakovich wrote in politico-cultural context is self-defeating. As it happens, some of the fruits of this approach have become available since I finished my book in October 1989. For example, Maxim Shostakovich, who has in conversation approved my 'thoroughness' and 'precision', elsewhere states that the Fourth Symphony is 'dedicated to [evidently meaning a portrayal of] the policies and apocalypses of the Soviet regime' (*DSCH*, Volume XIV; translator's parenthesis), so corroborating the account of the work given in *The New Shostakovich*, (pp.109–17). Similarly, Lev Lebedinsky, writing in *Novy Mir* (1990, No.3), confirms that the Seventh Symphony's infamous march was composed with Stalin in mind (*The New Shostakovich*, pp.159–60); that, similarly, the Eleventh Symphony concerns the Hungarian Uprising (*ibid*, pp.214–18); that the Eighth Quartet was directly linked to the composer's enforced joining of the Communist Party in 1960 (*ibid*, pp.221–4); and that the Twelfth Symphony is a compromised 'criticism of Lenin' (*ibid*, pp.224–7). To borrow Julian Graffy's words, readers will judge for themselves how helpful my approach is.

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