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How Volkov Faked *Testimony*

This hoax, exposed as early as 1980, is a fake "autobiography" (a la "Hitler's Diaries") created by embittered defector Solomon Volkov. While *Testimony*, the supposed "Memoir" of Dmitri Shostakovich, has been long discredited, it continues to poison the legitimacy of Shostakovich study and remains an object of faith in certain cultish internet backwaters where neither evidence nor logic carry much weight. More regrettably, some of the less erudite limners of liner notes (or those eager to pander to western prejudices) still cite its false claims in apparent ignorance of their tainted source- a proven fraud and forgery perpetrated by Volkov. Apologists at great length publish pandering anecdotal "reconsiderations" to the effect that Volkov's hoax was, er, a very *clever* one.

Huge discrepancies were seen immediately upon the book's rather suspicious and secretive publication:

Irina Shostakovich, the late composer's wife, points out that Shostakovich only met Volkov *briefly* 3 or 4 times, certainly not, as she says, enough to have obtained information for a book. (Volkov claims not only to have obtained all the material in the book through long talks with Shostakovich, but to have also gone over the entire thing, section by section, *twice* with Shostakovich for approval.) Also of note is how Volkov carefully never creates a situation that includes a living (as of 1979) person that might come forward and say, "This didn't happen." Volkov refuses to submit any of the authenticating materials he has claimed to have to independent examination.

The book was declared a fraud, invented by Solomon Volkov, that "has nothing in common with the true reminiscences of D. D. Shostakovich" by a panel of six prominent former Soviet composers-students and friends of Shostakovich- Basner, Karnev, Karen Khachaturian, Levitin, Tishchenko, and Vainberg.

Final devastation of Volkov's claims came with the proof a forgery. As documented by Shostakovich scholar Dr. Laurel E. Fay, the signatures at the beginning of the seven chapters that Volkov claimed as "proof" of authenticity were all simply taken from articles previously published by the Soviets. Volkov forged Shostakovich's signature onto the beginning of seven of the chapters of "Testimony" by attaching a page from one of these old articles to the beginning of one of his chapters. Volkov would use the first page only (which often only comes to a few paragraphs in the published book) from a copy of one of these already published, non-controversial Soviet documents which Shostakovich had signed as "read". Then, discarding the rest of the article written by Shostakovich, Volkov would attach his own continuation. The rest of the book is pure Volkov.

This is all documented beautifully by Fay. It can even be seen where Volkov deleted a few phrases from the documents to obscure the dates or other information that too obviously conflicted with the invented material. But you can still see a few of these discrepancies for yourself. For example:

Look at the chapter that begins on page 154. Read the entire paragraph (actual Shostakovich, cribbed direct by Volkov from an article by DS published in the "Literaturnaia Gazeta," 12/21/65) that begins, "I wrote my Seventh Symphony...". Then on the next page (pure Volkov) read the whole paragraph that begins, "The Seventh Symphony had been planned...".

The only seven bits of actual DS material in the book can be found on pages 32, 77, 106, 154, 178, 226, and 245. All are from previously published Soviet articles. The oldest is p.106, from the 10/16/32 *Sovetskoe iskusstvo*. The most recent is p. 77, from 1974 *Sovetskaia muzyka* 1974 no.3.

There is no evidence whatever that Shostakovich gave Volkov any other material, or that he ever had any idea that Volkov planned to write a biography, much less a fake autobiography to be published "after his death" (with no apparent concern for his wife and child still living in the U.S.S.R.- a strange surprise to leave them considering the fear *Testimony* claims they all lived under).

The Western scholar that first completely documented all this was Laurel Fay in a paper delivered to the American Musicological Society at Columbus, Ohio, April 12, 1980. This was later expanded and published as:

Laurel Fay: "Shostakovich versus Volkov: Whose Testimony?", *The Russian Review*, vol.39, no.4, October 1980, pp.484-493

For further testimony re the misbegetting of *Testimony* see Richard Taruskin's article, "The Opera and the Dictator" in *The New Republic*, 3/20/89.

A lot of people had a lot of egg on their faces. Indeed, collections of embarrassing *Testimonials* are still maintained on the web by the childlike faith of Old Believers, who consider the exposure of Volkov as some huge conspiracy by western musicologists who are all secret Stalinists.

Volkov has consistently refused to discuss the cribbed articles, the signatures or other discrepancies. If his claims were even partially true he could easily have proved them by simply producing this manuscript he's supposed to have mysteriously smuggled out of the Soviet Union. It could be determined when (and probably where) it was typed. But as it was no doubt typed between 1976 and 1979 in the United States, Volkov won't do that. Nor can he produce any of the notes and letters from Shostakovich that (in *Testimony*) he claims to have.

Which calls to mind another question that Fay noted. In 1976 Volkov, as he says, "came to New York, determined to have this book published." Instead, he quietly gets a day job as research associate at the Columbia U. Russian Institute. Why sit on the manuscript for three years? The obvious answer is that it took him that much time to *write* it!

The proof is in Volkov's hands, unless he's burned or shredded it. That he fails to produce it is the most damning thing of all.

A few who had gone too far out on this limb to retreat, or were simply still too devoted to their fantasies of Shostakovich as a secret dissident, take the position that, while Volkov undoubtedly lied, the book still has "true feeling" and is an "accurate reflection".

Of course, the purpose of a fraud is to be believed, and Volkov is no fool. He wrote exactly what the West wanted (and unreconstructed cold warriors still want) to hear. But the problem is that nothing in *Testimony* can be believed unless it is proven elsewhere. So as history it is useless, except as another example of a famous fraud in the tradition of the "Zinoviev Letter", *The Hand That Signed the Paper*, *Protocols of the Elders of Zion*, and *Report from Iron Mountain*.

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