
Letters to the Editor

From Julian Graffy

Ian MacDonald 'rejects' both the praise and the blame I have offered to *The New Shostakovich*. I remain of the opinion that to have provided such a detailed survey of Shostakovich's work and such a full contextualizing of his career is an important achievement, and that readers will find the book's chronological appendix especially useful.

To turn to specific points. Mr MacDonald seems to have misunderstood the purpose of my reference to Zamyatin's contribution to the libretto of *The Nose*. In *Testimony*, Shostakovich is consistently dismissive both of Zamyatin as a man and of his contribution to *The Nose* (as he is of several other figures). Following *Testimony*, Mr MacDonald speaks (page 52, note 1) of 'a breakdown in communications' between the two men. But Mikhail Goldshtein, whose conversations with Shostakovich took place considerably earlier (and whose memoirs appeared in Russian in 1983) quotes Shostakovich as remembering Zamyatin in a very different, much more positive light. It is useful, when reading *Testimony*, to remember that these are the reflections of a (justifiably) embittered old man.

I apologize to Mr MacDonald for misconstruing his footnote reference to Eikhenbaum and taking the word 'minion' to refer directly to the critic. The fact remains, however, that this footnote, one of only two references to Eikhenbaum in *The New Shostakovich*, casually refers to his 'seminal character-assassination' of Akhmatova of 1923. To spell things out: in his pioneering and justly admired study of Akhmatova's early poetry *Anna Akhmatova. An Attempt at an Analysis*, Eikhenbaum wrote, of the heroine of the poems of the collection *Rosary*, 'Here we begin to form an image, paradoxical in its duality (more precisely, its oxymoronic quality) of the heroine as not quite a "whore", with stormy passions, not quite a poor nun, who can obtain God's pardon.' Eikhenbaum is writing about the protagonist(s) of a collection of poems, and later in the book he reminds his readers that the use of biographical details by poets is an artistic device. In 1946, at

the very time of Zhdanov's attack on Akhmatova, Eikhenbaum, who remained an ardent admirer of her poetry, visited her in order to discuss two public lectures he was to give on her poetry, writing in his diary on 4 March 1946: 'She is an extraordinary woman – like Russia. And not a single poet, of course, is worth anything in comparison with her – above all as a person.' When the campaign of denigration turned to literary criticism, Eikhenbaum himself fell victim, but reacted with stoic bravery. Perhaps it is now clear why I objected to Mr MacDonald's slighting reference and singled it out among the errors in the book's literary background.

Finally, Mr MacDonald objects to my quotation of extracts from his book. I had hoped to have indicated in my review that I consider *The New Shostakovich's* major shortcoming to be the matter of tone. By giving examples of how Mr MacDonald addresses questions both of musicology and of historiography, I wished to suggest that in *The New Shostakovich* rhetoric often gets the better of sober assessment.

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From Christopher Shaw

I met Luigi Dallapiccola a few times when he came to London in the early 1950s. Shortly before one of these visits, there had been mention in the press of a String Quartet by Giacinto Scelsi (*Tempo 176*), which had caused rather a sensation at an international festival, though I forgot which one. 'Who is Scelsi? What is he?' we all wanted to know, so I asked Dallapiccola. '*Mauvais amateur!*' he snapped, and that was the end of that topic of conversation.

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