

Right to Reply (1)

Shostakovich and the The Testimony Affair

by Allan B. Ho and Dmitry Feofanov

On 4th October 1997, we re-opened the debate on the authenticity of the Shostakovich memoirs with a paper titled “Shostakovich and the ‘Testimony Affair’” (Chicago, Midwest Chapter of the American Musicological Society). This paper was based on our forthcoming book, *Shostakovich Reconsidered* (London, Toccata Press).

In this twenty-minute presentation, we called attention to a number of previously overlooked, or unknown, pieces of evidence bearing on the authenticity of *Testimony* and on the reception these memoirs have received in academic circles. For the first time at an AMS meeting, we presented evidence on the following topics: (1) Shostakovich’s anti-communist views, expressed privately in letters to his friends, as they related to, and confirmed, *Testimony*; (2) Shostakovich’s repeated thoughts of emigration, which can be traced back to as early as 1928; (3) Flora Litvinova’s corroboration of the genesis of *Testimony* based on what Shostakovich himself told her in the last years of his life; (4) Galina Shostakovich’s recent unequivocal endorsement of both *Testimony* and Volkov; and (5) two specific examples of academic cover-up in Shostakovich research involving, first, the aforementioned statement by Litvinova, and, second, the significance of Shostakovich’s signature at the beginning of Chapter 1 of *Testimony*, which includes one of the most embittered statements in the book. We also distributed two handouts: “A Primer for Musicologists,” outlining rule-of-the-thumb methods for deciphering Shostakovich’s Aesopian language, and materials pertaining to standard book contracts. The latter were provided in anticipation of Malcolm Hamrick Brown’s oft-repeated charge that Volkov refuses to publish *Testimony* in Russian. It demonstrated the standard practice in the publishing industry of vesting copyright in the name of the author,

but granting publication rights (and, consequently, decisions) to the publisher.

The post-presentation reaction of the anti-*Testimony* clique was as unambiguous as it was predictable. For a while, the Internet was buzzing with messages describing various offenses committed by Ho and Feofanov. Malcolm Hamrick Brown, who was present at the AMS meeting, described the abstract for our paper as “fraudulent” (while admitting he had not read it), and wished for “appropriate actions.” Subsequent submissions followed up on Brown’s wish by proposing that we be sentenced to the academic equivalent of Siberia—a 3 to 5 year ban on presenting papers at the AMS meetings. Finally, the detractors of *Testimony* argued that our paper had no “new evidence,” a claim contradicted by none other than Brown himself who, in the post-meeting Internet discussion, acknowledged being unaware of Litvinova’s statement, even though it has been in print for almost a year.

Although the intent of our presentation was clear to those “with ears to hear,” one member of the audience appeared to be unable or unwilling to listen. He claimed that our paper had no thesis. In fact, our thesis was clear: that *Testimony* is authentic, and that the critics of these memoirs, such as Laurel Fay, Richard Taruskin, and Malcolm Brown, have participated in rampant misrepresentation of the facts for nearly two decades. After we spelled it out for him, the same fellow then claimed we had not proved our case. This, of course, was not our intent. To think that the complexities of the “*Testimony* Affair” could be resolved in a twenty-minute paper is naive in the extreme. Were that possible, we would not have spent five years working on an 800-page book. Finally, the same fellow claimed that our paper was a “publicity stunt” to sell the book. In fact, our paper called attention to important new information, as mentioned above. We were also prepared to demonstrate, with overhead transparencies, numerous additional examples of “selective scholarship,” but

(1) Editor’s Note: In deciding to print Dmitri Feofanov and Allan Ho’s article under a special rubric, *Right to Reply*, the DSCH Journal wishes to demonstrate its continued willingness to offer a platform for those who consider that the opportunity to express specific points of view had previously been denied - for any number of reasons or circumstances, both within and without the Journal’s pages. It does not however correspond to submissions of the kind received for *Arena* where the concept of written exchanges on various themes offers, by definition, an inherent possibility of response.

As with all submissions made to the Journal, their inclusion does not imply Editorial concurrence.



Shostakovich and the The Testimony Affair

were unable to do so when Malcolm Hamrick Brown usurped the remainder of question and answer period for his response. We reaffirm that our purpose was and is to stand up for academic integrity: a reporting of the whole truth, in proper context. If the aforementioned fellow will allow himself to be identified, we will be happy to send him a copy of our book, *gratis*.

As we were preparing to take questions from the audience, Malcolm Hamrick Brown made his way to the microphone, responding to us with a nine-page handout, a verbal rebuttal, and a public insult of Volkov, whom he again called a liar. Due to time constraints, we were not allowed to demonstrate how Brown's points are invalid and, in fact, are additional examples of selective scholarship. In the interest of setting the record straight, we report on what Malcolm Hamrick Brown said and, even more importantly, what he did not say. This rebuttal information, and much more, is elaborated upon, and fully documented in, the forthcoming *Shostakovich Reconsidered*:

What Brown said:

1. In a personal conversation that took place in California (February 1996), Irina Shostakovich claimed that Shostakovich and Volkov met only two or three times.

What Brown did not say:

- a. Irina is on record in 1979 stating that Shostakovich and Volkov met three or four times, not two or three, and possibly briefly on still other occasions. Her 1996 statement is contradicted not only by her own earlier statement, but also by Shostakovich's statement to Flora Litvinova that he was "meet[ing] constantly" (not just two or three times!) with a "brilliant young Leningrad musicologist" (whom Litvinova identified as Volkov), to "tell him everything I remember about my works and myself";
- b. Irina has no firsthand knowledge of the meetings between Shostakovich and Volkov;
- c. Irina is not a musician and, in fact, knew Shostakovich for only a relatively brief period. Moreover, according to Maxim Shostakovich, his father did not reveal to her all of his confidences (probably to protect her from the authorities).

What Brown said:

2. Boris Tishchenko was at meetings (plural) between Shostakovich and Volkov. Brown wrote: "Meanwhile, let me quote an earlier statement of his [Tishchenko], commenting about the meetings between Shostakovich and Volkov, during which

Tishchenko says he was personally present."

What Brown did not say:

a. In the quotation cited by Brown from *Sovetskaya Kul'tura* (15th October 1988), Tishchenko only claims to have been at one meeting: "I happened to be at the meeting [actually, "conversation"] between Shostakovich and the author of the book." In paraphrasing this part of Tishchenko's statement, Brown has increased Tishchenko's presence at the Volkov-Shostakovich meetings from one to more than one, while simultaneously, with Irina's 1996 *testimony*, decreasing the total number of meetings. This allows him to imply that if, as Irina states, there were only two or three meetings, and if Tishchenko was present at meetings (plural), Tishchenko must have heard nearly everything.

b. Tishchenko, in fact, was only present at the first of dozens of meetings between Volkov and Shostakovich ("we now meet constantly," the composer told Litvinova). This would, if necessary, account for why Tishchenko claims not to know how a 400-page book could have resulted, if indeed Tishchenko can be trusted in saying this. (In *Shostakovich Reconsidered* we give several reasons for doubting him.)

What Brown said:

3. Irina Shostakovich and Boris Tishchenko remain strong critics of *Testimony* and Volkov, and consider the book "not what it pretends to be" (Irina) and a "falsification" (Tishchenko).

What Brown did not say:

- a. Irina married the composer only in 1962 and, thus, has no firsthand knowledge with which to verify the material in *Testimony*, most of which concerns Shostakovich's life in the 1930s-50s. Far more reliable are Galina and Maxim Shostakovich, who, born in the 1930s, are witnesses to their father's travails during this period, and now endorse *Testimony*;
- b. Irina, according to the transcript of a meeting in VAAP (the Soviet Copyright Agency) in 1978 (preserved in the archives of the Central Committee of the CPSU), admitted knowing all about *Testimony* even before it was published;
- c. Neither Irina nor VAAP initially claimed that *Testimony* was a forgery. As Erwin A. Glikes of Harper & Row reported in September 1979, the Soviets "did not protest [*Testimony*'s] authenticity," but claimed that the book "belonged to Mrs. Shostakovich." A 1978 memorandum in the archives of the Department of Culture of the Central Committee also reveals that the "anti-Soviet forgery" charge was, in fact, a carefully orchestrated



Shostakovich and the The Testimony Affair

back-up plan in case the copyright claim failed;

d. Irina's credibility as a witness against *Testimony* is further compromised by her financial conflicts of interest. Prevented from claiming *Testimony* as her property, and having never shared in the royalties from half a million copies of *Testimony* printed in some 20 languages, she now hopes to publish her own day-by-day chronicle of Shostakovich's life, to serve in place of the "real" memoirs;

e. Galina Drubachevskaya, a journalist at *Sovetskaya Muzyka* while *Testimony* was in progress, confirmed that she not only knew about the Volkov-Shostakovich meetings as they were taking place, but read chapters of the manuscript after they had been reviewed by Shostakovich. She found them "impregnated with the smell of death not only of a man, but of an era, an era with which, before departure, he decided to clear up the most important relations";

f. Flora Litvinova, in her memoirs of Shostakovich, written at the request of Elizabeth Wilson, unequivocally corroborated the genesis of *Testimony*, based on what Shostakovich himself told her in the last years of his life;

g. Numerous other former Soviets have independently endorsed *Testimony*. Those include Shostakovich's children, Vladimir Ashkenazy, Rudolf Barshai, Andrey Bitov, Semyon Bychkov, Galina Drubachevskaya, Yevgeny Yevtushenko, Emil Gilels, Mariss Jansons, Giya Kancheli, Kiril Kondrashin, Gidon Kremer, Lev Lebedinsky, Mark Lubotsky, Leo Mazel', Il'ya Musin, Sviatoslav Richter, Mstislav Rostropovich, Kurt Sanderling (who worked in Leningrad for several decades), Rodion Shchedrin, and Daniil Zhitomirsky.

h. Tishchenko, despite his public posture, attempted to reconcile with Volkov in 1992. Unfortunately, the complete report on the Volkov-Tishchenko relationship and Tishchenko's reasons for denouncing *Testimony* cannot be written at this time;

i. At present, Tishchenko has ample personal reasons for attacking Volkov, who revealed Tishchenko's Soviet-era conformism in his book *St. Petersburg: A Cultural History* (1995).

What Brown said:

4. Few people have seen the Shostakovich signatures on the first page of each chapter of *Testimony*;
5. Shostakovich's signatures are abbreviated, "D. Sh." (only two letters in Russian), making authentication more difficult.

What Brown did not say:

a. All eight of the signatures in *Testimony* are reproduced in the German and Finnish editions, for everyone to see.

b. One of the signatures has been in print since 1979;

c. Brown knew the translator of the Finnish edition personally; they met in Bloomington, Indiana, in 1992, just three years after the signatures were reproduced. If Brown and Co. are truly "interested first of all in establishing the truth, in so far as possible, about how *Testimony* was put together" (letter from Brown to the authors), he had a perfect opportunity to investigate, and would have learned, just as we did, everything there is to know not only about the signatures, but also about the original manuscript, which was used in preparing the Finnish edition.

d. In fact, Shostakovich's signatures are not abbreviated. Moreover, all articles discussing this issue state that the signatures are complete.

In the post-meeting Internet discussion, Brown characterized the signatures as "purported."

He also claimed that he did not know about the signatures reproduced in the German and Finnish editions, a claim very difficult to believe in view of his personal acquaintance with the translator of the Finnish edition. Most likely, the inconvenient evidence was covered up, just like the testimony of Antonina W. Bouis, who translated *Testimony* into English. According to Bouis, Brown called her and asked whether she considered Volkov an honest man, to which she replied "yes." Brown ignored it.

What Brown said:

6. Maxim Shostakovich's "public statements over the years about *Testimony* have been remarkably consistent." As an example, Brown then quoted one statement by Maxim from May 1991: "...it's a book about my father, not by him" (from *Gramophone*). In the post-meeting Internet discussion, Brown referred to two more similar statements of Maxim, one from 1981, and another from 1989.

What Brown did not say:

a. Maxim's statements about *Testimony* have, in fact, changed more radically than those of any other member of Shostakovich's immediate family. Moving from outright dismissal of *Testimony* in 1979 (under the watchful eye of the Deputy Chief of the KGB Disinformation Department, V. Sitnikov), Maxim gradually endorsed it, recommended that people read it, praised Solomon Volkov, and finally, in a recent book, vouched for the authenticity of many of its most controversial passages;

b. The statement quoted from *Gramophone* (and all other ones cited by Brown) preceded the fall of the

Shostakovich and the The Testimony Affair

Soviet Union, *i.e.*, when Maxim could not speak freely without jeopardizing the members of his family in the USSR;

c. Brown's misrepresentation of the truth was pointed out to him in print. Ian MacDonald's replies to Brown (1993-94) contained a detailed summary of Maxim's changing views. The fact that Brown keeps repeating his old canard indicates that he prefers to cover up the inconvenient truth.

d. Maxim, contrary to Brown, now states: "I am a supporter of *Testimony* and Volkov." Maxim's assessment is similar to Galina's: "I am an admirer of Solomon Volkov. There is nothing false there [in *Testimony*]. Definitely the style of speech is Shostakovich's—not only the choice of words, but the way they are put together."

What Brown said:

7. In a post-meeting Internet discussion, Brown asserted that Maxim was not "familiar with Volkov during [his] father's lifetime or aware of meetings between the two."

What Brown did not say:

a. Maxim confirms that his father told him about meetings with a young Leningrad musicologist, "who knows my music extremely well" (compare with the virtually identical description Shostakovich gave to Flora Litvinova.)

b. Maxim confirms that he knew about meetings between his father and Volkov.

c. Maxim lives in the United States. If Brown is as interested in the truth about *Testimony* as he claims, nothing prevents Malcolm Hamrick Brown from picking up the phone and asking Maxim about it, just as we did. But then, of course, Brown would not have had an option of repeating his old falsehood, *i.e.*, that Maxim's statements "have been remarkably consistent."

What Brown said:

8. Volkov admits receiving many proposals to publish *Testimony* in Russian, but refuses to allow this to happen;

9. If *Testimony* were published in Russia, "it would immediately become apparent which texts in it are genuine and which are not" (Brown quoting Manashir Yakubov);

10. If it were published in Russia, "it would be laughed at there" (Brown quoting Irina Shostakovich).

What Brown did not say:

a. While Volkov holds the copyright to *Testimony*, the publication rights, including foreign publication rights, belong to Volkov's publisher, Harper & Row

(now HarperCollins). This is a standard practice in the book publishing industry.

b. No formal offers have ever been received by Harper & Row or HarperCollins to publish *Testimony* in Russian;

c. Manashir Yakubov, prior to his appointment as curator of the Shostakovich archive, held an important government, party-affiliated, post. At the time of his appointment, his entire body of work on Shostakovich consisted of liner notes for one Melodiya recording and an unidentified "something." In fact, Volkov accuses Yakubov of being connected with the Soviet security organs point-blank; he also accuses Yakubov of preventing the publication of the excerpts of *Testimony* in a Russian magazine.

d. Some fifty figures fluent in Russian have examined the Russian text. Among these are Maxim and Galina Shostakovich, Rudolf Barshai, Galina Drubachevskaya, Mark Lubotsky, Yury Lyubimov, Il'ya Musin, Mstislav Rostropovich, Rodion Shchedrin, Seppo Heikinheimo, and Antonina W. Bouis, all of whom believe it to be authentic;

e. The above-named figures actually have endorsed *Testimony* even more strongly after reading the Russian text. If they laugh at all, it is not at *Testimony*, but at those Western musicologists who continue to believe Soviet propaganda.

What Brown said:

11. It is "beyond plausibility" that, in his conversations with Volkov, Shostakovich could have repeated passages from his earlier articles.

What Brown did not say:

a. According to members of his inner circle, Shostakovich had a phenomenal, some say photographic memory, that often made the seemingly impossible possible. This allowed him to remember reams of music and text, verbatim, without effort and over many years. Shostakovich's incredible feats of memory are documented in *Shostakovich Reconsidered* and Wilson's *Shostakovich: A Life Remembered*.

b. Shostakovich's family and friends confirm that such quotation and self-quotation was actually typical of the composer, who, throughout his life, was fond of repeating favorite stories, aphorisms, pages from literature, various "canned" responses, and the like during conversations.

c. All of the recycled passages were either published or reprinted in the 1960s-70s, and were available for review by Shostakovich anytime before or even during work on *Testimony*. Two of these, in fact, are exactly contemporaneous with *Testimony*, and it is possible that Shostakovich, having formulated his



Shostakovich and the The Testimony Affair

thoughts for Volkov, simply recycled them in his articles published in 1973 and 1974;

d. When consulted about the recycled passages in *Testimony*, leading psychologists active in human memory research confirm that, given the feats of memory attributed to him, it is entirely possible that Shostakovich repeated his earlier published statements in his meetings with Volkov. Similar abilities are well documented in psychology literature and, as Ulric Neisser of Cornell University states in *Memory Observed* (1982), “literal, verbatim memory does exist,” the “accomplishments [of these memorists] are real,” and their “abilities . . . may not be as unusual as generally believed . . . may not even be very rare.”

What Brown said:

12. In the post-meeting Internet discussion, with his usual brisk confidence, Brown claimed that, contrary to Ho and Feofanov’s paper, “Nowhere in the writings of any of the three of us [Fay, Taruskin, Brown] can be found the assertion that ‘Shostakovich was Soviet Russia’s most loyal musical son.’”

What Brown did not say:

a. In fact, the sources of this statement are well known: Richard Taruskin’s articles “The Opera and the Dictator,” and “A Martyred Opera Reflects Its Abominable Time.” Malcolm Hamrick Brown’s startling unfamiliarity with these articles will probably surprise Richard Taruskin as much as it surprises us.

b. When we supplied Brown with citations to these sources, he decided to skirt the issue of his ignorance of the basic literature pertaining to the “*Testimony* Affair.” He now claims that we quoted Taruskin out of context and questions our “research methodology.” For the convenience of the readers, we reproduce both Taruskin passages below:

[Taruskin talking about *Lady Macbeth* in *The New Republic*] *Thus was Dmitri Shostakovich, perhaps Soviet Russia’s most loyal musical son, and certainly her most talented one, made a sacrificial lamb...*

[Taruskin talking about *Lady Macbeth* in *The New York Times*] *Dmitri Shostakovich, till then perhaps Soviet Russia’s most loyal musical son and certainly her most talented one, had been made a sacrificial lamb...*

The only possible interpretation of these passages is that, according to Taruskin, at least at a certain point Shostakovich was “perhaps Soviet Russia’s most loyal musical son.”

In view of the mountain of evidence to the contrary, this assertion, of course, is hogwash.

In his AMS handout and elsewhere, Brown suggests that, if you cannot trust Solomon Volkov on one point (the provenance of the passages recycled from earlier articles), “it makes ordinary commonsense not to trust” him on other points.

We submit that if you cannot trust Malcolm Hamrick Brown on at least twelve points, it makes even less sense to trust him on one point: that Solomon Volkov is a liar and plagiarist. *Testimony* is exactly what it purports to be: the memoirs of Dmitry Dmitriyevich Shostakovich.

Shostakovich Reconsidered

by Allan Ho and Dmitry Feofanov

due to be published by Toccata Press
(London) in February 1998

Musicologists Allan Ho and Dmitry Feofanov examine the claims and counter-claims regarding *Testimony* and its editor, Solomon Volkov through the statements of numerous “witnesses” who speak out for and against the veraciousness of the *Memoirs*.

In addition to a detailed review of the book, the next edition of the Journal will carry reaction from all “camps”, as well as information of how to obtain *Shostakovich Reconsidered* at a reduced *Subscribers’ Price*.