



Shostakovich: A Life Remembered

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Shostakovich: A Life Remembered is a unique study of the great composer Dmitri Shostakovich, based on reminiscences from his contemporaries: family members, friends, fellow musicians and other prominent figures of the time. Elizabeth Wilson covers the composer's life from his early successes to his struggles under the Stalinist regime, and his international recognition as one of the leading composers of the 20th century. She builds up a detailed picture of Shostakovich's creative processes, how he was perceived by contemporaries and of the increased contrast between his private life and public image as his fame increased.

This revised edition, produced to coincide with the centenary of Shostakovich's birth, draws on many new writings on the composer. This provides both a more detailed and focused image of Shostakovich's life, and a wider view of his cultural background. A particular aspect of Shostakovich which is revealed in this new edition is his sardonic and witty sense of humour, displayed in many of his letters to close friends.

Shostakovich: A Life Remembered provides fascinating insight into the complex personality and the musical life of this great composer, and examines his position as one of the major figures of cultural life in 20th century Russia.

Shostakovich: A Life Remembered Details

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Neal Hines says

I was fascinated by this book, being an inside glimpse into the life of DDS. There are some personal stories that are memorable. Many good interviews, pictures, and stories.

The 8th Symphony ... "if you only knew how much blood that C-major cost me."

Poem "Music" by Anna A.

Marius says

This is for sure the best biography of a composer that I have ever read. The author uses interviews, articles and reports with people that knew Shostakovich providing you with an incredibly vivid picture of him. His life, his personality, his compositions, the controversy around his ideological stand but also his time in general gets to life through these reports. This book is an incredible collection of sources and knowledge about Shostakovich, taking you so close to him that at the end it feels like saying goodbye to a life-long friend.

Elizabeth Hopkins says

An incredibly insightful compilation of reminiscences that tells the story of Dmitri Shostakovich's life, this book is an enlightening nonfiction page-turner.

Vintner says

A somewhat distant account of the composer's life and work, constantly interrupted with (well deserved!) indictments of the USSR's despicable policies toward arts and letters. In so depressing a milieu Shostakovich's music inevitably conveys sombre and bitter tones, yet occasionally sparkles with brilliant jollity and wit. Ms. Wilson's account does much to explain these seeming anomalies.

John says

This book is constructed in such a unique style through its incredible wealth of anecdotes, personal recollections within a chronological framework of his life and works. Shostakovich was such a famously enigmatic composer yet i find whenever i dip into this book i come away with a more personal sense of the man with all his complexities; his friendships,loyalties, strengths, and inner torments. Its a really invaluable reference.

Avempace says

Dmitri Shostakovich is one of the most celebrated composers of the 20th century, and the arc of his life has a lot to teach us in the present and future. In the decades since his death, his memory has passed through three curious incarnations. First he was labeled a Soviet hack, a poisonous accusation straight out of cold war animosities. Then, as the Soviet Union disintegrated and the cold war came to a close, he was repackaged as a dissident martyr oppressed by a tyrannical regime, befitting the geopolitical shifts of the time. A third incarnation may well be upon us, in which Shostakovich emerges as the genius of a composer that he was; his music informed by his time and experiences but transcending them into the universal. Neither a hack nor a dissident martyr, but a revolutionary composer and a profound humanist with wrinkles and all.

Shostakovich, a Life Remembered, offers a Rashomon-like take on the composer and the man. Snippets of reminiscences by friends, colleagues, acquaintances and others flow in a continuous stream of consciousness-like manner to build a composite picture of the man and his times, in all of his and their complexities. Wilson is an accomplished cellist, a trainee of the great Russian cellist Mislav Rostropovich, himself a student of Shostakovich (in composition) and the dedicatee of Shostakovich's First and Second Cello Concerti. Shostakovich's music, while not deeply probed or analyzed, is ever present in the background, providing milestones to a brilliant and turbulent life. Deeply satisfying and informative, and recommended for all those interested in the man, his music and times.

Renée says

If you like Shostakovich, then this book is essential. It consists pretty much entirely of memories and account by people who knew Shostakovich, which makes it reliable and a great read. Elizabeth Wilson is more editor than writer, as her words are usually only there to situate a quote in a certain situation/time period, but I think this is a very positive thing (not because she's a bad writer, but because it helps with the general feel of the book). I know have an idea of what Shostakovich was like as a person, as a friend, and I love that.

Genni says

A wonderful compilation of testimonies by just about every contemporary of Shostakovich imaginable. Loved it.

Just a personal side note:

I have been immersed in Shostakovich's for almost two months now. Even after reading several books on the man and his music, I am still at a bit of a loss as to why I find his music so compelling. I have always been drawn to the beautiful melodies of the Romantic composers. Melodies were definitely not Shostakovich's forte and I don't think that bothered him a bit. But there is something there...something forceful that demands to be heard (Shostakovich probably would have hated how melodramatic that sounds lol).

Anyway, on to Laurel Fey's work for a balance in perspective.

