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# St Petersburg: A Cultural History

*Solomon Volkov*
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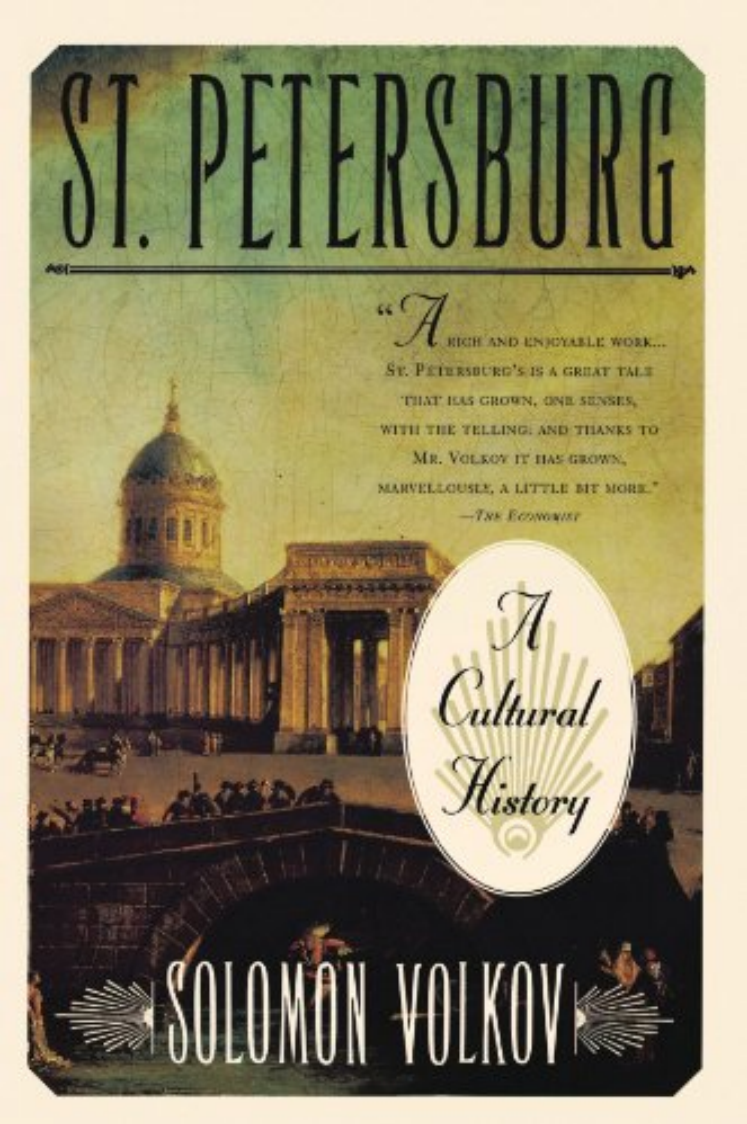


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**Solomon Volkov : St Petersburg: A Cultural History** before purchasing it in order to gage whether or not it would be worth my time, and all praised St Petersburg: A Cultural History:

0 of 0 people found the following review helpful. An Important Cultural CenterBy Greg PolanskyIn this extremely detailed cultural history of St. Petersburg Volkov succeeds in filling what he sees as a deficiency in histories written

about the world's great cities. And by exploring St Petersburg's cultural history, Volkov has also written a history of Russia over the past three centuries. The book focuses mainly on literature, music, theater, and ballet. And in doing so, Volkov shows how the arts in St. Petersburg affected all of Russia and in turn, at least during the pre-Soviet period, the rest of Europe and then affected the United States later on during the Soviet period.This book rewards those who already have some familiarity with Russian history. And there are even more rewards if you have read a lot of the authors discussed and listened to a lot of the classical music composers the author discussed as well. It's a good idea, for the music anyway, to listen to some of the pieces while reading the book.The book is quite long and extremely dense. Know what you're getting into when picking up this book.2 of 2 people found the following review helpful. important bookBy NillaAnyone interested in Russian culture or urban culture in general will find this book rewarding. Petersburg is an interesting city in its own right but its impact on literature and music cannot be underestimated. The author is remarkably knowledgable and deeply serious about his subject as well as articulate and engaging. I really learned a lot from this book and highly recommend it.0 of 0 people found the following review helpful. Five StarsBy Anil C.Great Book

A compelling portrait of a city and its transcendent artistic and spiritual legacy-written by a cultural historian who has known some of the greatest figures of modern St. Petersburg, including Balanchine, Shostakovich, Akhmatova, and Brodsky. "A rich and enjoyable work". -"The Economist". of photos.

From Publishers WeeklyFor the city Dostoyevski called "the most abstract and premeditated city in the whole world," artists were crucial to creating an identity and a mythos. In each of six impressive chapters, Volkov focuses on an era and on a typically Petersburgian art form of the time. From Peter the Great's imperial mandate impelling the city from the marshy Baltic coast in 1703, Volkov moves on to Gogol's and Dostoyevski's cynical anti-Petersburg writings; the passionate, European/Russian hybrid of Tchaikovsky and the Mighty Five (Musorgsky, Rimsky-Korsakov, Borodin, Balakirev, Cui); the waxing sense of doom and the concomitant nostalgia of Anna Akhmatova and Alexander Blok; the emigre Petersburg created abroad by Balanchine, Stravinksy and Nabokov; Shostakovitch's city, depleted by the Great Terror and pounded during the Siege of Leningrad; and finally, to the beleaguered postwar city of Joseph Brodsky. This is a complicated strategy involving a tacking back and forth to pick up numerous themes and biographies and there are, perhaps inevitably, redundancies. Also Volkov, a musicologist by training and a devotee of literature by inclination (his previous books include Joseph Brodsky in New York and the controversial Testimony: The Memoirs of Dmitri Shostakovich) is sketchier in his treatment of the visual arts. But this well-researched and deeply personal book gives a complex, subtle view of the city's haughty and tortured history. Photos not seen by PW. Copyright 1995 Reed Business Information, Inc.From Library JournalVolkov, a Russian emigre musicologist, offers an absorbing overview of the traditions and individuals responsible for the great cultural evolution of St. Petersburg (Leningrad) and its ever-shifting mythos?from Pushkin to Chagall, from Gogol to Stravinsky and on to the cultural diaspora of the late 20th century. Particularly noteworthy is Volkov's ability to place culture within a clear historical framework, since St. Petersburg's cultural impulse has been repeatedly assaulted by Russia's tormented history. The reader will be moved by the genius of Akhmatova and Brodsky, Tchaikovsky and Mussorgsky, and the other St. Petersburg icons whose 150-year parade makes strikingly clear that despite floods, famine, wars, and purges, the contributions of one city represent the very core of Russian culture. In contrast to this readable work, Katerina Clark's scholarly Petersburg: Crucible of Cultural Revolution (LJ 8/95) covers a much narrower time period. Highly recommended for most academic and public collections.?Mark R. Yerburgh, Fern Ridge Community Lib., Veneta, Ore.Copyright 1995 Reed Business Information, Inc.From BooklistThe "window to the West," St. Petersburg has attracted many of Russia's greatest artists, from Pushkin to Dostoyevsky to Akhmatova in literature, from Tchaikovsky to Prokofiev to Shostakovich in music, Balanchine in dance, and Repin in painting. After the cultural obliteration of the Communist era, Volkov aims to restore these and dozens of other figures to their rightful places, and this book marks an important initial step in reviving the city's artistic heritage. In their day, names now famous weren't the recipients of unalloyed adulation: an artistic press, relatively free and certainly vibrant, was supported by the abundance of whatever new poem, opera, symphony, or canvas was on offer. Volkov weaves together contemporary critiques and the testimony of the artists themselves in tracing what he calls the city's "conceptual development." He certainly does capture the distinctive personality of the great metropolis as he frames its artists' travails within the political and military storms that lashed them in this century--revolutions, purges, sieges and all. A sweeping embrace, Volkov's review of three centuries should touch Russophils in general and lovers of music and dance in particular. Gilbert Taylor