

Soviet Influence on the Music of Socialist Republics



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From the 1930s to Stalin's death in 1953, the government of the Soviet Union controlled and transformed the musical cultures of its republics. The Soviet state sought to simultaneously Russianize, socialize, and modernize the music of its nation and its republics, but this effort was never streamlined or well organized. Instead, a conglomeration of contradictory music policies resulted from Soviet efforts. Nevertheless, significant change occurred in the music of the Soviet republics. From 1932 to 1956, the Soviet Committee on Artistic Affairs, Soviet Composers' Union, and Stalin himself enforced three methods of control to produce a unique genre of Soviet music. These Soviet policy makers punished "Western" sounding music, promoted "socialist realist" music, and utilized opera as the new voice of the proletariat.

Soviet control over music and the arts did not begin immediately following the creation of the Soviet State. Stalin and the Soviet leadership were preoccupied by the Civil War from 1918 to 1920 and the economic challenges associated with nationalization throughout the 1920s.¹ Therefore, 1918 through 1932 marked a time of relative artistic freedom throughout the Soviet Union.

In 1923, the year before Stalin took the reins as leader of the Soviet Union, musicians from Moscow grouped themselves into two camps. One camp, embodied in the Association of Contemporary Music (ASM), constituted progressive musicians. Members of the ASM included Dmitri Shostakovich, Alexander Mosolov, and its founder Nikolai Roslavets: a Ukrainian Soviet Modernist composer. ASM Composers and members promoted modernist music in the Soviet Union and especially revered the avant-guard music of Alexander Scriabin (1872-1915), whose increasingly modernist music "dispensed with tonality."² A classic example of Scriabin's unique musical language is his work for piano "Vers la Flamme," in which the listener feels lost in the

¹ J. Burkholder, Donald Grout, and Claude Palisca, *A History of Western Music*, 8th edition. (New York: WW Norton and Company, 2010), 888.

² Burkholder, *A History of Western Music*, 803.

music due to the lack of pulse or melody.³ Members of the ASM also invited composers from the West such as Paul Hindemith (Germany) and Erik Satie (France) to perform in the USSR.⁴

Another quite different music organization, the Association of Proletarian Musicians (RAPM), formed in 1923 as well. In contrast to the ASM, the RAPM sought to solely encourage the composition of music of the “oppressed and exploited classes,” as stated by its 1929 manifesto.⁵ In its manifesto, the RAPM explained the historical significance of its mission: “music of the past evolved along two main paths: on the one hand the music of the toilers...(the so-called folk music), on the other hand the feudal bourgeois music, which comprises virtually the entire bulk of written ‘cultured’ music.”⁶ This document makes it clear that members of the RAPM saw an irrevocable divide between folk music, which they analyzed to be proletarian, and bourgeois, Western-influenced music. Thus, its members sought to “establish the hegemony of the proletariat” in music.⁷

Leading members of the RAPM organization included David Chernomordikov, and older communist musicologist, and Lev Lebedinski, a nineteen-year old socialist training at the Moscow Conservatory in 1923.⁸ Such members believed that music should be written by composers from working-class backgrounds. They worked to create greater opportunities for working-class musicians to thrive in both conservatories and local musical groups. Ironically, though, most of the members of RAPM hailed from the middle class or intelligentsia. RAPM

³ Alexander Scriabin, *Vers La Flamme*, Op. 72. Accessed 4/30/2015. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=WlqGkVc29Gw>.

⁴ Neil Edmunds, *Soviet Music and Society under Lenin and Stalin* (New York: Routledge, 2004), 11.

⁵ Russian Association of Proletarian Musicians, “1929 Manifesto,” in *Music in the Western World: A History in Documents*, 2nd edition, ed. Piero Weiss and Richard Taruskin (Belmont, CA: Thomson Schirmer, 2008), 419.

⁶ Russian Association of Proletarian Musicians “1929 Manifesto,” 420.

⁷ Russian Association of Proletarian Musicians “1929 Manifesto,” 420.

⁸ Amy Nelson, “The Struggle for Proletarian Music: RAPM and the Cultural Revolution,” *Slavic Review* Vol. 59, No. 1 (2000): 106, accessed April 30, 2015, http://www.jstor.org/stable/2696906?seq=6#page_scan_tab_contents.

also rejected musical sounds deemed to be Western or decadent.⁹ Members of the organization accused the modernist Association of Contemporary Music ASM of ‘muddying’ the ears of Soviet citizens and specifically accused Scriabin of holding a “corrupting influence on the artistic sensibilities of the proletariat.”¹⁰

Both of these musical organizations coexisted in the USSR from the years 1923 to 1932. However, the RAPM’s accusations against ‘bourgeois music’ and the ASM caught the attention of The Central Committee of the Soviet party. The time of relative artistic freedom came to a close in 1932 when the Central Committee of the Soviet party passed a resolution which disbanded all existing musical organizations, replacing them with a centrally-controlled Composers’ Union.¹¹ The Committee also mandated the creation of composer’s unions in the Soviet republics. Oftentimes, Russian musicians from the Conservatories of Moscow and Leningrad aided in the forming of these Unions. The republics of Armenia (1932), Georgia (1932), Ukraine (1932), Azerbaijan (1934), Belorussia (1938), and Uzbekistan (1938) all had their own Composers’ Unions.¹² The 1932 Resolution also declared socialist realism to be the primary artistic ideology of Soviet music.¹³

Additionally, the Soviet regime established the All-USSR Committee on Artistic Affairs (VKI) in 1936. This committee was tasked with monitoring the creation and performance of all Soviet music. The VKI “oversaw the country’s many performance institutions, including

⁹ Edmunds, *Soviet Music and Society*, 12.

¹⁰ Nelson, “The Struggle: RAPM,” 107.

¹¹ Kiril Tomoff. *Creative Union: The Professional Organization of Soviet Composers, 1939-1953*. (New York: Cornell University Press, 2006), 13.

¹² Tomoff, *Creative Union*, 21.

¹³ Simmo Mikkonen, “Muddle instead of music” in 1936: cataclysm of musical administration,” in *Shostakovich Studies 2*, ed. by P. Fairclough, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010), pp. 231-248.
Pressmusicaladministrationhttp://www.academia.edu/528166/_Muddle_instead_of_music_in_1936_cataclysm_of_musical_administration.

philharmonics, choirs, and opera and ballet theatres.”¹⁴ The Committee on Artistic Affairs paired with the Soviet Composers’ Union made it clear that the Soviet leadership was now paying closer attention to the music in its jurisdiction. This greater attention to the arts led to increased scrutiny and control.

Stalin took the next step to display the dominance of the USSR’s control. On the 28th of January in 1936, the Russian newspaper *Pravda* published an article which heavily criticized the opera *Lady Macbeth of Mtsensk* by Dmitrii Shostakovich. The article claimed that “from the very first minute listeners are flabbergasted in the opera by the deliberately dissonant, chaotic flood of sounds.”¹⁵ The article goes on to criticize the opera for being impossible to understand because of the “ultra-left deformity” which stems from “petty-bourgeois ‘innovation.’”¹⁶ Shostakovich wrote *Lady Macbeth of Mtsensk* in 1932, four years before the *Pravda* article so vehemently criticized it. It had enjoyed several highly acclaimed performances in the years between 1932 and 1936. The only particularly unusual aspect of the opera’s January 1936 performance was Stalin’s attendance. Therefore, it is generally assumed by scholars that Stalin wrote the article following his attendance of the opera.¹⁷

The dissonance to which Stalin alludes permeates the entire opera. From the opening scene the listener hears chords crunching against each other. The agony of the main character, Katerina, abused throughout the play by various male leads, is initially heard in Act I Scene I. She writhes on a bed lamenting her misfortune to have such an uncaring husband and doomed

¹⁴ Kiril Tomoff, “Uzbek Music’s Separate Path: Interpreting ‘Anticosmopolitanism’ in Stalinist Central Asia, 1949-52,” *The Russian Review* 63 (2004): 215. Accessed March 3, 2015. doi: 10.1111/j.1467-9434.2004.00314.x.

¹⁵ “Pravda Editorial Criticizes Shostakovich’s Opera and Modernism” in *Documents of Soviet History, Foundations of Stalinsim, 1935-1937*, ed. Alex G. Cummins (Gulf Breeze: Academic International Press, 2006), 157.

¹⁶ “Pravda Editorial,” 157.

¹⁷ “Pravda Editorial,” 156.

love life.¹⁸ As she sings, minor seconds with an oboe in the accompaniment signal discontent and frustration.¹⁹ The melancholy sound of the oboe is often used in programmatic music to signal sadness or foreshadow bad events. Tensions escalate quickly. In Act I, Scene III Katerina is nearly raped by another man when her husband is away.²⁰ Shostakovich sets the scene by dissonant brass playing against chromatic, dramatic strings.²¹

The *Pravda* “Muddle Instead of Music” article exemplifies the first method the Soviet political apparatus used to influence the musical cultures of its citizens—fear. The punishment of music that sounded Western was its most drastic and overt effort at Soviet musical reform. In his memoir, Shostakovich remembered how reading the article in *Pravda* “changed his entire existence.”²² He forthrightly accused Stalin of writing the article and decried the fact that “from that moment on [he] was stuck with the label ‘enemy of the people.’”²³

The “Muddle Instead of Music” article signaled a change that transcended Shostakovich’s own life as well. Shostakovich’s contemporaries were unwilling to defend him. The article was written as a warning to all composers rather than a single criticism of Shostakovich. As a result, beginning in 1936, “meetings were called at all chapters of the Composers’ Union, discussions were initiated, statements were issued, and in general the future of Soviet music was charted.”²⁴ Composers would now have to avoid writing Western, bourgeois sounding music at all costs.

¹⁸ Alexander Preys, *Lady Macbeth of Mtsensk*. Libretto. Accessed 3/25/ 2015.

http://www.impresario.ch/libretto/libschlad_e.htm.

¹⁹ Dmitri Shostakovich, *Lady Macbeth of Mtsensk*. Act I, Scene I. Minute 1:19. Accessed 3/30/ 2015.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=2SS1h1SVVaw>.

²⁰ Preys, *Lady Macbeth*.

²¹ Dmitri Shostakovich, *Lady Macbeth of Mtsensk*. Act I, Scene III. Minute 0:26. Accessed 3/30/ 2015.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=S9F4M3xbidw>.

²² Dmitri Shostakovich. *Testimonies: The Memoires of Dmitri Shostakovich* (New York: Harper and Row, 1979), 113.

²³ Shostakovich, *Testimonies*, 115.

²⁴ Boris Schwartz. *Music and Musical Life in Soviet Russia* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1983), 124.

However, the definition of Western, bourgeois music was ambiguous. Soviet composers had no clear way of differentiating between Western-influenced music and strictly Russian-inspired music. Many of the most famous early-twentieth century Russian composers such as Mikhail Glinka, Dmitri Shostakovich, and Sergei Prokofiev, had traveled to the West. Their music had been enriched by their experiences abroad and it would have been detrimental for them to suddenly extract the Western elements naturally infused in their compositional styles. For example, Prokofiev, born in eastern Ukraine and trained at the Moscow Conservatory, immigrated to the United States during the Russian revolution. From 1918 until 1927, he lived in Chicago, Paris, and a town in the Bavarian Alps of Germany. His life was a whirlwind of composing and connecting with composers from around the world.

In Paris in 1920, Prokofiev met the French impressionist composer he so admired, Maurice Ravel. In fact, Prokofiev comically remembered his introduction to Ravel by none other than Igor Stravinsky. He recalls that “a small man with a tanned face entered...Stravinsky reacted excitedly and introduced us: Prokofiev—Ravel.”²⁵ Prokofiev also spoke of attending an “old Italian opera directed by [Sergei Diaghilev],” another Russian-born composer who had immigrated to the West.²⁶ In 1927, Prokofiev returned to the Soviet Union with apprehension. On Saturday, January 15, he boarded a train that would take him back into Soviet state. In his diary, he admitted, that while still in Paris “various thoughts passed through my mind: should I forget the whole thing and stay here? Can I count on coming back [to the West] or will [the Soviets] stop me?”²⁷

²⁵ Sergei Prokofiev, *Sergei Prokofiev Behind the Mask: Diaries 1915-1923* (New York: Cornell University Press, 2008), 509.

²⁶ Prokofiev, *Behind the Mask*, 508.

²⁷ Sergei Prokofiev, *Sergei Prokofiev: Soviet Diary 1927 and other Writings* (Boston: Northeastern University Press, 1991), 8.

Furthermore, Prokofiev, Shostakovich, and Glinka grew up listening to the music of composers from the seventeenth century school of Russian music, particularly Peter Tchaikovsky, Alexander Borodin, Modest Musorgsky, and Rimsky-Korsakov. Like their successors, these seventeenth century composers were deeply influenced by communication with composers in England, Germany, Britain, and the United States. Borodin revered the music of the German neo-classicist, Felix Mendelssohn.²⁸ Both Borodin's Russian background and Western influence can be heard in the opening statement of his Symphony No. 2 in B Minor. The first theme is built on a unison staccato motif in the strings that makes use of alternating D-sharps and D-naturals. This motif sounds quintessentially Russian.²⁹ The harmonic development of the second theme, in contrast, makes use of common Western V-I cadences.³⁰

Stalin's criticism of bourgeois music left room for interpretation regarding what exactly composers could do with their art. Thus, Composers had to first decide what "Western" music sounded like and estimate the limits to which they were safe composing as they desired. After the publishing of the 1936 *Pravda* article, Russian composers grouped their music into two categories in order to claim separateness from the West: socialist realism and Russian nationalism. Socialist realism corresponded to Bolshevik demands that all music must glorify the proletariat. Therefore, this kind of music was automatically safe. Russian nationalist music promoted Russo-centricism, and so was likewise an acceptable form of music. Musicians in the republics outside of Soviet Russia made use of these two categories of music as well.

The idea of socialist realism was first applied to literature in the Soviet Union. In 1934, the writers' congress of the Soviet Union established socialist realism as the model for Soviet

²⁸ Burkholder, *A History of Western Music*, 755.

²⁹ Alexander Borodin, *Symphony No. 2, Mvt. I Allegro*, Minute 0:00-1:00. Accessed 5/01/ 2015. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=FmUsL6biVro>.

³⁰ Borodin, *Symphony No. 2*, Minute 2:00. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=FmUsL6biVro>.

literature. By 1936, the Union of Soviet Composers sought to create music that used a realistic style, concentrating on simple melodies and folk tunes, to represent the heroes of the Bolshevik state. Such music was meant to “mirror” the harmonious aspects of proletarian life while simultaneously promoting a future vision of life thriving through Bolshevik control.³¹ This presented an ironic dichotomy. Art had to be realist, even if the reality was far from perfect, while presenting a romanticized view of Bolshevik power. In all the arts, including music, Soviet artists were supposed to “depict the world as it was seen through ‘partiynost’ (Party consciousness), with a view to the “glorious future.”³²

It could be tricky; however, to achieve socialist realism in music, especially instrumental music which contained no words. Composers overcame this issue in interesting ways. In 1945, Lubov Keefer, a Russian-born musician who immigrated to the United States and served as a long-time music professor at Johns Hopkins University, published the article “Opera in the Soviet.” Keefer was born in Nikolaev, a city in southern Ukraine, and moved to the United States with her family following the decimation of Nikolaev during WWI.³³ Her knowledge of Russian and Soviet music stemmed from her time studying music at the Petrograd Conservatory under the tutelage of Alexander Glazunov.

In “Opera in the Soviet,” she said that “‘social realism’ as applied to music may mean that the accent is placed on melodiousness, directness, and clarity. Since modern dissonance presupposes a certain intellectual bias, conservatism and consonance become a corollary of Soviet realistic

³¹ Burkholder, *A History of Western Music*, 888.

³² Marina Frolova-Walker, *Russian Music and Nationalism* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2007), 312.

³³ Maryland Historical Society, “Lubov Breit Keefer Papers.” <http://www.mdhs.org/findingaid/lubov-breit-kefer-papers-ms-2859>.

music. Dissonance *per se* is taboo.”³⁴ Therefore, in 1945 Keefer suggested that socialist realist music was music that was pleasant to the ears, not too complicated, and not overly intellectual.

Frolova-Walker’s modern assessment of socialist realism in music focuses more on ideology, rather than actual musical elements. She asserts that composers made use of Stalin’s slogan “national in form, socialist in content” and simply replaced the term “national” with “realist.”³⁵ Within these confines, the definition of socialist realist music became linked with national music. In the republics, this translated into folk music due to the fact that folk music, unaltered melodies passed down through generations, was the music of peasants and later the proletariat.³⁶ Soviet ideology now exalted the proletariat as a model—solidifying the logic of socialist realism even more.

Composers began to promote the creation of national music both within Russia and the Soviet republics. This endeavor differed in execution depending on location. In Russia, the promotion of Russian national music focused on the creation of a “Russian musical language.”³⁷ In order to build such a language, composers looked to revered Russian composers of the past, especially Mikhail Glinka. Glinka served as figurehead of distinctly Russian music for later Soviet composers such as Khachaturian. Glinka’s 1836 opera, *A Life for the Tsar*, incorporated distinctly Russian musical features including Russian modal scales and Russian folk songs.³⁸ It would be later adapted into Stalin’s favorite opera, *Ivan Susannin*.

One venerated component of Glinka’s music was the avoidance of a Western-sounding four-part texture. Whereas Western harmony rules suggest that the composer write compositions

³⁴ Keefer Lubov, “Opera in the Soviet,” *Notes, Second Series* 2 (1945), 112-113, accessed March 3, 2015, <http://jstor.org/stable/890387>.

³⁵ Frolova-Walker, *Russian Music and Nationalism*, 313.

³⁶ Frolova-Walker, *Russian Music and Nationalism*, 313.

³⁷ Marina Frolova-Walker, “National in Form, Socialist in Content: Musical Nation-Building in the Soviet Republics,” *Journal of the American Musicological Society* 51 (1998): 343, accessed February 28, 2015, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/831980>.

³⁸ Burkholder, *A History of Western Music*, 680.

for four voices—soprano, alto, tenor, bass—Glinka began a tradition of a three-part texture. His *Reisleid* from a book of 20 lieder for cello and piano serves as an example.³⁹ Another component of Glinka's music which Soviet composers readily copied is his tendency to write harmonies "articulated around IV" chord preceding the tonic pitch at the piece.⁴⁰ This contrasts to Western music in which harmony pivots around the relationship between the I and V cadence.⁴¹ By examining the work of Glinka, Soviet musicologists and composers such as Viktor Tsukkerman, professor of Musical Theory at the Moscow Conservatory from 1926-1939, compiled a list of musical traits that could either be labeled as Western or Russian. Western traits included "common modulations into new keys, chromaticism, and the use of a leading tone in the minor mode."⁴² In contrast, Russian traits included "3-part textures with two parts in parallel 3rds or 6ths, modal diatonicism, parallel 5ths, and a lack of transition between keys and modal centers."⁴³

One such example of a Russian piece of music containing quintessentially Russian elements is Khachaturian's *Waltz*, written in 1941 as incidental music for the play "Masquerade." The opening passage demonstrates the fundamental three-part structure of the piece. The left hand provides one part while the right hand ascends in a modal pattern. At minute 0:36, the melody descends chromatically, making use of the leading tone in the minor mode, like

³⁹ Mikhail Glinka, *20 Duets for Violin and Piano*, No. 14, http://conquest.imslp.info/files/imglnks/usimg/9/9c/IMSLP108529-PMLP220729-Glinka_-_14_Ihr_ruht_ihr_blauen_Wogen_Barcarole__Kusnetzoff__for_cello_and_piano.pdf

⁴⁰ Frolova-Walker, "National in Form," 344.

⁴¹ Stefan Kostka and Dorothy Payne, *Tonal Harmony* (New York: McGraw-Hill, 2009), 47.

⁴² Frolova-Walker, "National in Form," 345.

⁴³ Frolova-Walker, "National in Form," 345.

described above.⁴⁴ Frolova-Walker points out that Khachaturian was known for purposefully, and gladly, following the standards set by Soviet music policy-makers.⁴⁵

In contrast, Sergei Prokofiev's "Overture Russe" was criticized for its clear allusions to the music of Igor Stravinsky—a modernist, avant-garde Russian composer.⁴⁶ In the very opening of the piece, the violins have a bright, articulated ascending scale to B-flat which then resolves to C.⁴⁷ This shifting of keys as well as the heavy articulation parallels a similar technique used by Stravinsky in "Rite of Spring."⁴⁸ Despite Prokofiev's patriotic title, he could not escape the fact that Stravinsky represented a pre-revolutionary, chaotic Russia. Israel Nestyev, head researcher at the Institute of History of Arts in Moscow in the 1930s, criticized Prokofiev's "Overture" by pointing out the elements that reminded him of pre-Russian revolution paintings.⁴⁹ In 1941, he wrote in the Russian composer's magazine, *Sovetskaya muzika*, that "the thunderous roar of the brass seems an unnecessary and out-of-date illustration of the stereotypical Russian *shirokaya natura* [heart-on-sleeve nature]."⁵⁰ In the opinion of Nestyev, Prokofiev's "Overture" did not sound modern or Soviet enough to acceptably symbolize the Bolshevik state.

On the other hand, Shostakovich, who had earlier been demoralized by the "Muddle Instead of Music" *Pravda* article, received the approval of Stalin and the Soviet party by writing his Fifth Symphony in 1938. Elizabeth Wilson, a biographer of Shostakovich, analyzes the Symphony's positive reception as an official "vindication" from the Soviet party and notes that "the authorities were, on the whole, willing to accept the Symphony as Shostakovich's offering

⁴⁴ Aram Khachaturian, "Waltz" from Masquerade, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=6Ri3EK2jqEE&list=RD6Ri3EK2jqEE#t=17>.

⁴⁵ Frolova-Walker, *Russian Music and Nationalism*, 337.

⁴⁶ Frolova Walker, *Russian Music and Nationalism*, 342.

⁴⁷ Sergei, Prokofiev, "Ouverture Russe, Op.72." Paris: Editions Russes de Musique, 1937. Accessed February 18, 2015. [http://imslp.org/wiki/Ouverture_russe,_Op.72_\(Prokofiev,_Sergey\)](http://imslp.org/wiki/Ouverture_russe,_Op.72_(Prokofiev,_Sergey)).

⁴⁸ Igor Stravinsky, *The Rite of Spring*, minute 3:48. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Ceglu9msRbo>.

⁴⁹ Frolova Walker, *Russian Music and Nationalism*, 342.

⁵⁰ I. Nest'yev, "Sergey Prokof'yev," *Sovetskaya muzika*, no. 4 (April 1941), 59-70 (69) as translated by Marina Frolova-Walker in *Russian Music and Nationalism*, 342.

to the shrine of socialist-realism.”⁵¹ Wilson’s use of the word ‘shrine,’ though, seems to imply a musical sacrifice on the part of Shostakovich in writing the symphony. In fact, Shostakovich admitted to his friend Boris Khaikin, conductor of the Leningrad Opera, that he wondered how his critics would have responded had he ended the Symphony in a minor key and extremely soft dynamic.⁵² Shostakovich; however, did not take that chance. Instead, his final movement, *Finale: Allegro non troppo*, vigorously expresses musical symbols of victory and success the Soviet Committee on Artistic Affairs promoted.⁵³ In the final minute, trumpets break through the rising sound of the strings, the timpani pounds V-I chords, and “the music explodes into a triumphant major key.”⁵⁴

In the republics of the Soviet Union, the process through which music adhered to socialist realism was more complicated than simply making music sound Russian. The music of these republics was often incompatible with Western music traditions. In order for music to be considered socialist-realist, musicians of the republics first had to alter their musical folk traditions. Not only was folk music representative of the proletariat—Stalin directly encouraged its promotion as well.

In 1935, Stalin attended a celebration of folk music at the Bolshoi Theater in Moscow. The celebration was organized in order to celebrate the events of the October Revolution and showcase the ways in which Russia and the republics had successfully created a unified state. In a *Pravda* article written by Stalin and released on November 6th in 1935, Stalin wrote that “all the growing interest in folk dance and folk song in amateur performance is a healthy and vital

⁵¹ Elizabeth Wilson, *Shostakovich: A Life Remembered*, 2nd edition (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2006), 152.

⁵² Wilson, *Shostakovich: A Life Remembered*, 152.

⁵³ Dmitri Shostakovich, *Symphony V, Finale: Allegro non troppo*, minute 9:00-10:34. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=YarFI7r2shY>

⁵⁴ David Hurwitz, *Shostakovich Symphonies and Concertos: An Owner’s Manual* (Pompton Plains, NJ: Amadeus Press, 2006), 33.

occurrence. This is the correct path for all of social musical art.”⁵⁵ It would seem from Stalin’s proclamation that the folk music of each republic would be enough to satisfy the Soviet government. This was not the case.

Soviet arts policy did strive to promote folk music, but it had a greater “civilizing mission” in its republics, especially the ones in Central Asia.⁵⁶ In reality, the Committee on Artistic Affairs often focused more on changing the sound of folk music, rather than promoting it. The Soviet goal was to manufacture a kind of quasi-folk music that could pass for indigenous sound while showcasing the progress of each republic due to its relation with the Bolshevik state.

In Azerbaijan, this transformation of folk music foremost affected the tradition of *mugham*. Broadly defined, mugham is “a modal system serving as the foundation for diverse types of Azerbaijanian music.”⁵⁷ Essentially, it is a monodic (one-voice) method of singing which includes nasal voice placement and the use of semi-tones also found in Turkish and Arabic music. The singer recites words in a kind of hum-chant vocal production.⁵⁸ Mugham makes use of a single voice, although it can be accompanied by instruments.

Mugham represented an old way of culture and therefore presented a challenge to composers tasked with modernizing the music of Azerbaijan. In line with the Committee on Artistic Affairs’ agenda to civilize what they saw as a backward republic, mugham needed updating. The first way in which this occurred was to harmonize mugham.

No harmony accompanied traditional mugham. Although monody simply meant the lack of harmony or accompaniment, it was considered a mark of backward, underdeveloped music.

⁵⁵ “Folk Culture Celebrated by Stalin at the Bolshoi Theater, Pravda Article,” in *Documents of Soviet History, Foundations of Stalinsim, 1935-1937*, ed. Alex G. Cummins (Gulf Breeze: Academic International Press, 2006) 125.

⁵⁶ Jane Burbank and Frederick Cooper, *Empires in World History: The Power and the Politics of Difference* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2010), 435.

⁵⁷ Inna Naroditskaya, *Song from the Land of Fire: Continuity and Change in Azerbaijanian Mugham* (New York: Routledge, 2002), 3.

⁵⁸ Kamile Nebiyeva, Vocal mugham, <http://www.mugham.net/vocal-mugham>.

Additionally, mugham was transferred to each new generation through an oral tradition. It was not traditionally transcribed on scores. This increased the challenge for musicians who wished to record mugham in a way that mirrored Russian or Western musical scores.

In attempting to harmonize mugham, composers ran into yet another problem. The practice of harmonization assumes that the composer is devoted to a certain scale and will harmonize a piece using the rules of that specific scale. Western music, as well as Russian music, is based on a 12-tone scale system.⁵⁹ A piece of music pivots around the first tone in the system and harmonies either gravitate toward the fifth or fourth scale degrees.

In contrast, mugham makes use of various, shifting musical scales (or modes). Mugham can be based on scales ranging from nine to twelve pitches.⁶⁰ Traditionally, “the accompaniment to vocal mugham does not provide a harmonic basis but rather repeats and echoes the melody without creating a harmonic or polyphonic texture.”⁶¹ Therefore, Russian harmonies and methods of music analysis were incompatible with Azerbaijani music.

Azerbaijani musicians tackled this problem by inventing a systematic method of harmonization. The Azerbaijani composer Uzeir Hajibekov asserted that Azerbaijani music could be harmonized through “the combination of logically constructed independent melodies.”⁶² His sample harmonizations of the Azerbaijani folk song showcase two different methods of harmonization. The “strict” style ironically mirrored Western harmonization practices. This style made use of chords built on thirds and leading tones before the final conclusion of cadences.⁶³ Hajibekov’s celebrated “folk” style used Russian elements of harmonization—parallel fourths in the base, the absence of leading tones to the tonic, and parallel motion driving the harmonic

⁵⁹ Kostka, *Tonal Harmony*, 7.

⁶⁰ Naroditskaya, *Song from the Land of Fire*, 53.

⁶¹ Naroditskaya, *Song from the Land of Fire*, 144.

⁶² Frolova-Walker, “National in Form,” 348.

⁶³ Frolova-Walker, “National in Form,” 349.

rhythm. In Gajibekov one sees a clear example of both Soviet imperialism and cultural change. Cultural imperialism drove his need to harmonize mugham in the first place. As a result, he used Russian musical language to rewrite Azerbaijani music.

The problem experienced by Gajibekov also puzzled Hajibeyov, an Azerbaijani composer of opera. Hajibeyov tasked himself with composing an opera from Azerbaijani melodies. He too had to significantly change traditional Azerbaijani musical practices in order to make the music compatible with opera. First, Hajibeyov had to find a way to transfer Azerbaijani music to the piano. Like Western scales, the piano is based on a system of twelve pitches. However, the traditional Azerbaijani instrument, the tar, uses a more flexible scale. Depending on the song, 13, 17, or 19 pitches can be utilized.⁶⁴ Therefore, Azerbaijani musicians altered the physical composition of the tar to produce sounds only on 12 notes.

After the alteration of the tar, composers still faced a challenge in Azerbaijani melodies. Just like the tar, such melodies often used more than the twelve notes found in Western and Russian music. If a melody used a semitone, a pitch that falls between two notes on a traditional Western musical scale, the composer had to choose which “Western” pitch he would assign the note’s value to. For example, an Azerbaijani song may require a pitch between F and F-sharp on the Russian keyboard. Instead of altering the Russian keyboard, the Azerbaijani composer had to either pick the note F or F-sharp when transcribing the music on paper. Thus, Azerbaijani musicians frequently felt pressure to compromise the melodies of the native folk songs.

For example, in the overture from the opera *Keroglu*, Hajibeyov incorporated a folk theme, as well as characteristics of mugham, into a piece written for a symphony orchestra. The

⁶⁴ Frolova-Walker, *Russian Music and Nationalism*, 333.

first theme is a quick rhythmic pattern based on triplets played by the strings.⁶⁵ The opening shifts between B-flat and C allude to the semi-tones of the original folk melody, yet the scales are adapted to accommodate the limitations of violins.⁶⁶ Naroditskaya points out that Hajibeyov did not base the second theme, the love song, on an existing Azerbaijani folk melody.

Nonetheless, Hajibeyov wrote the theme in such a way that elements of mugham play a prevalent role.⁶⁷ An ostinato dotted-quarter eighth figure as well as a “wavy melodic line encircling G” played between the violins and cellos are “emblematic of mugham.”⁶⁸ Despite all the elements of Azerbaijani music incorporated in the overture, Hajibeyov wrote the piece in a traditional Western sonata form. The musical change brought about by Soviet influence can clearly be heard throughout the piece.

Another republic in which Soviet music imperialism played a role in changing musical cultures was Uzbekistan. The story of Uzbek musical transformation followed a different trajectory than that of Azerbaijani mugham. The first method through which the Soviet state sought to change the musical culture of Uzbekistan was through the creation of a School of Music in Tashkent, Uzbekistan in 1934. In 1936, several musicians who had graduated from the Moscow Conservatory moved to Tashkent to teach at the School of Music. It thus became the official Conservatory of Uzbekistan.⁶⁹ However, this change came with consequences. It was not until the arrival of Russian-trained musicians that the Uzbek school of music was considered for conservatory status. It is clear that members of the USSR Committee on Artistic Affairs did not

⁶⁵ Uzeyir Hajibeyov, *Keroglu Overture*, minute 0:03-1:12, accessed 5/01/2015. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=BK6-T5TTKRo>.

⁶⁶ Naroditskaya, *Song from the Land of Fire*, 107.

⁶⁷ Uzeyir Hajibeyov, *Keroglu Overture*, minute 1:13-1:30, accessed 5/01/2015. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=BK6-T5TTKRo>.

⁶⁸ Naroditskaya, *Song from the Land of Fire*, 106.

⁶⁹ Tomoff, “Uzbek Music’s Separate Path,” 219.

consider the Uzbek composers advanced enough to pursue such an endeavor on their own. As in Azerbaijan, the Soviet musical mission was a “civilizing,” imperial mission.

Alongside the creation of the conservatory, Stalin supported music festivals, *dekada*, each year in Moscow during which composers from various republics could showcase their music. Although Stalin did not require the republics to participate in such festivals, many republican musicians used the festival to “achieve official recognition outside the Uzbek republic.”⁷⁰ In 1936, the same year of the founding of the Tashkent Conservatory, Uzbek musicians won prizes at the music festival.⁷¹ The folk festivals also benefitted Soviet policy makers by providing a public venue in which to reward Uzbek musicians who complied with this Soviet vision. As with the Azerbaijani tar, Uzbek musicians altered Uzbek folk instruments so they could play traditionally Western scales, and thus Russian music. This only underscored the irony that the Soviet Union promoted a policy of disdain for the West, but used Western standards in order to alter the cultures of its republics.

Another change to Uzbek music occurred during WWII. During the Siege of Leningrad by the German army from 1941 to 1944, the newly constructed Tashkent Conservatory sheltered musicians from the Music Conservatory of Leningrad. This unusual circumstance provided an unprecedented opportunity for Russian and Uzbek composers to live and work in close quarters. A member of the Uzbek Composers’ Union celebrated the opportunity to work in “creative collaboration” with the Russian composers.⁷²

Composers from Uzbekistan also traveled to Moscow to receive training. The composer Mukhtar Ashrafi, born in Bukhara, Uzbekistan in 1912, studied at both the conservatories of

⁷⁰ Tomoff, “Uzbek Music’s Separate Path,” 218.

⁷¹ Tomoff, “Uzbek Music’s Separate Path,” 218.

⁷² Tomoff, “Uzbek Music’s Separate Path,” 220.

Moscow (1934-1937) and Uzbekistan (1941-1943).⁷³ He co-wrote the first Uzbek opera, *Buron*, with Sergei Vasilenko. Ashrafi represents a composer from the republics who embraced the changes mandated by the Committee on Artistic Affairs. In 1955, he traveled to India with other Soviet musicians to observe the music of India. The musical traditions of India reminded him in many ways of Uzbek music before its Soviet-forced modernization.

Like Azerbaijani and Uzbek music, Indian music was mainly monodic and its scales and instruments did not conform to Western harmonies. Additionally, India lacked what Vasilenko considered to be civilized, standard musical venues and opportunities. He wrote in his biography that the “rich traditions of Indian music cannot hide the fact that in such a big country, there is not one opera theatre, not one permanent symphony orchestra, or any musical training institutions where European classical music or classical theory is taught.”⁷⁴ Nevertheless, he asserted that Indian music held potential to achieve operatic and symphonic greatness, as had the Uzbek republic. He pointed to the polyphonation of Uzbek music, the Uzbek staging of Tchaikovsky’s opera *Pikovaia Dama*, and the Uzbek Philharmonic Orchestra as examples of Uzbek musical achievements under the Soviet Union.⁷⁵ His comments show that he viewed the change in Uzbek music as a desirable, positive accomplishment.

Beyond altering the harmonies and instruments to promote a Russian style of folk music in the republics, the Soviet Committee on Artistic Affairs introduced one more intrusive method into their repertoire of forced musical change—opera. The Soviet Committee on Artistic Affairs

⁷³ Elif Kale-Lostuvali, “Varieties of Musical Nationalism in Soviet Uzbekistan,” *Central Asian Survey* 26 (2007): 540, accessed May 4, 2015, <http://eds.a.ebscohost.com/ehost/pdfviewer/pdfviewer?sid=a71123ed-0f15-40ed-910d-ab94c87e09b6%40sessionmgr4003&vid=0&hid=4203>.

⁷⁴ Mukhtar Ashrafi, “Po Indii,” in *Aleksandr Rybnik*, ed. *Muzyka v moei zhizni: sbornik statei* (Tashkent: Izdatel’stvo Literatury i Iskusstva imeni Gafura Guliyama, 1975), pp 137–149, quoted in Elif Kale-Lostuvali, “Varieties of musical nationalism in Soviet Uzbekistan,” *Central Asian Survey* 26 (2007): 540, accessed May 4, 2015, <http://eds.a.ebscohost.com/ehost/pdfviewer/pdfviewer?sid=a71123ed-0f15-40ed-910d-ab94c87e09b6%40sessionmgr4003&vid=0&hid=4203>.

⁷⁵ Kale-Lostuvali, “Musical Nationalism in Soviet Uzbekistan,” 541.

mandated that each republic should have a fully-function opera by the conclusion of the 1930s. Throughout the Soviet Union and the West alike, opera was seen as the epitome of musical class—the highest achievable art form. If each republic could boast an opera, that republic could be deemed sufficiently modernized. Thus, each republic was charged with the goal of creating a national opera. From the years 1936 to 1939, the republics of Azerbaijan, Armenia, Belorussia, Georgia, Kirghizstan, and Kazakhstan all set to the task.⁷⁶

Alongside the mandate of the Soviet Committee on Artistic Affairs, Stalin's fascination with opera likewise bolstered the importance of the art form in Soviet policy. In his 1991 article, Harlow Robinson states that Stalin's impoverished childhood led to his admiration of the grandeur of opera.⁷⁷ According to Robinson, this admiration drove Stalin to place an emphasis on the reform and creation of opera in the republics. Unlike Lenin, who grew up in an affluent household with access to high art such as opera, Stalin hailed from a poor village in the Caucasus. Robinson argues that Stalin felt both fascination and contempt for the art form that was unavailable to him during his formative years.

Boris Schwartz builds on Robinson's assessment of Stalin to say that opera fundamentally appealed to Stalin because he was attracted to flashy, "pompous spectacles."⁷⁸ Robinson mentions Stalin's regular, almost obsessive, 1937 attendance of the opera *Ivan Susanin* provides an example of Stalin's personal relationship to the art form.⁷⁹ In fact, Schwartz adds that the idea to adapt *A Life for the Tsar* into a modern, socialist opera originated with Stalin

⁷⁶ Frolova-Walker, *Russian Music and Nationalism*, 314.

⁷⁷ Harlow Robinson, "Born That Way: Stalin's tyrannical taste spelled bad news for opera in the U.S.S.R.," *Opera News* 55 (1991): 23, accessed March 1, 2015, <http://tcna.primo.hosted.exlibrisgroup.com/primos>.

⁷⁸ Schwartz, *Music and Musical Life*, 122.

⁷⁹ Roman Brackman, *The Secret File of Joseph Stalin* (London: Frank Cass Publishers, 2002), 331.

himself.⁸⁰ Upon Stalin's request, the opera was infused with patriotism and over-the-top grandeur.

However, Stalin's direct influence on opera did not stop with *Ivan Susanin*. In 1936, he participated in a meeting of Soviet opera specialists during which he laid out a basic framework to which all Soviet opera should comply. According to Stalin, the essential elements of Soviet opera included "a libretto with a Socialist topic, a realistic musical language with stress on a national idiom, and a positive hero typifying the Socialist era."⁸¹

The attention Stalin paid to opera heightened the level of scrutiny to which it was subjected by the State Committee for Artistic Affairs. In 1936, the Committee began the Soviet Opera Project. The primary purpose of the project was to control the themes and forms of newly composed operas as well as adjust the old. *Pravda*'s 'Muddle instead of Music' article, can be seen as the model the Soviet apparatus followed in condemning or supporting later operas.⁸² This larger concern involved the reputation of opera as an art form of the elite. The Soviet Committee on Artistic Affairs had realized the irony inherent in Stalin's promotion of opera. Due to high production costs and cultural habits, the patrons that filled opera houses were normally from the upper echelons of Russian society. It would thus have been contradictory to uphold opera as an example of Soviet cultural achievement while its reputation remained closely tied to the bourgeoisie. Therefore, the Soviet leadership opened opera performances to the lower classes.

This discourse on the role of opera also affected the creation of operas in the Soviet Central Asian Republics. In addition to overcoming the idea that opera was singularly meant for elite audiences, opera composers in the republics also had to contend with the fact that their

⁸⁰ Schwartz, *Music and Musical Life*, 122.

⁸¹ Schwartz, *Music and Musical Life*, 123.

⁸² Philip Ross Bullock, "The Search for Soviet Opera in the 1930s," *Cambridge Opera Journal* 18 (2006): 84, accessed February 28, 2015. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/3878274>.

music was often considered oriental by both Soviets and Western composers. Orientalism refers to the tendency for a “nationalist culture” such as the imperial Soviet Union “to patronize... the peoples within its imperial reach.”⁸³ This method is attained by representing “colonized peoples...through exotic fantasies, most often with stereotypes of femininity, and erotic associations.”⁸⁴ The challenge lay in the fact that Russian musicians often misunderstood the folk music of each republic. Soviet leaders could be unsatisfied if the music of the republic did not sound sufficiently “oriental” enough, regardless of whether the oriental sound was authentic.

One example of a misattributed oriental sound occurred in Azerbaijani music. Russian composers associated the interval of the augmented second with Azerbaijani folk music. The augmented second is a small, dissonant interval found in Western music. Azerbaijani music actually made use of semi-tones, intervals even smaller than the augmented second, which Russians mistook for an augmented second.⁸⁵

Hajibeyov’s opera discussed earlier, *Keroglu*, was at the heart of this augmented-second debate. Although the opera was based on folk tones, Hajibeyov was determined to prove that such Azerbaijani folk tunes did not follow the stereotypes associated with orientalism—primarily the augmented second stereotype. However, Frolova-Walker states that Hajibeyov failed in this regard. She explains that Hajibeyov’s contemporary reviewers compared *Keroglu* to the opera *Prince Igor* written in 1887 by Alexander Borodin. The comparison is important because *Prince Igor* was considered a “touchstone of Russian Orientalism.”⁸⁶ In the section of *Prince Igor* called “Polovstian Dances,” Borodin used an oboe to accompany a unison vocal line sung by a

⁸³ Frolova-Walker, *Russian Music and Nationalism*, 329.

⁸⁴ Frolova-Walker, *Russian Music and Nationalism*, 329.

⁸⁵ Frolova-Walker, *Russian Music and Nationalism*, 334.

⁸⁶ Frolova-Walker, “Russian Music and Nationalism,” 337.

women's chorus.⁸⁷ This doubling of a monodic melody, rather than accompaniment, was a well-known element of mugham. Listeners thus knew that Borodin intended the opera to sound oriental. By associating *Keroglu* with *Prince Igor*, reviewers cemented the idea that *Keroglu*, too, sounded oriental.

Therefore, opera composers in the republics had a decision to make. They could either bow to the forces of orientalism, making their music sound as Russians expected, or they could follow their own musical ideas. If they chose to create original-sounding music, their music would not be identified by Soviet arts policy makers as folk music. They, like Shostakovich, could be labeled as dangerous dissenters attempting to thwart socialist efforts. Composers such as Khachaturian, although he did not write an opera, appeased the Soviet policy makers and wrote music that sounded quintessentially Russian.⁸⁸ For example, the middle section of Khachaturian's famous "Sabre Dance" for Orchestra makes use of oriental-sounding chromaticism.⁸⁹

In conclusion, Soviet musical policies transformed the music of Russia and the republics in three main ways. First, Soviet policy-makers punished composers whose music sounded 'Western.' 'Western' music was loosely defined as chromatic, dissonant, and harsh. Soviet music was supposed to sound melodious and pure in order to promote the success of the Soviet socialist state. Secondly, musicians throughout the USSR were tasked to writing "socialist realist" music. In Russia, "socialist realism" took the form of Russian nationalism. In the republics, "socialist realism" translated into the modernization of folk music through the transformation of instruments and scales. Mugham in Azerbaijan is a clear example of Soviet imperialist policy

⁸⁷ Alexander Borodin, "Polovstian Dances" from *Prince Igor*, minute 1:10. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=gVURal-QYsA>.

⁸⁸ Frolova-Walker, "Russian Music and Nationalism," 330.

⁸⁹ Aram Khachaturian, Sabre Dance, Minute 0:56-1:12. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=mUQHGpxrz-8>.

changing the republic's folk music traditions. Finally, in both Russia and the republics, opera was changed from a pastime of the elite to the musical symbol of the proletariat. Different composers of the republics found ways to incorporate folk traditions into the Russian model of opera. In these ways, the Soviet socialist state significantly changed the music of its republics.

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