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1945-1957

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For Greg, Tristan, and Maggie

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ABSTRACT

This dissertation explores the composition and censorship of art music in the Soviet Union in the first decade after World War II, primarily during the late-Stalinist repression of the intelligentsia known as the *zhdanovshchina*, named for Central Committee Secretary Andrei Zhdanov. After relatively lax oversight during the war, the late-Stalinist government aggressively reasserted its authority over the arts in the early postwar years through a series of highly publicized resolutions condemning missteps in literature, theater, film, and music and levying harsh penalties against those held responsible. With these decrees, the Central committee put creative workers, arts institutions, and censors on notice that a new standard was required, and serious consequences awaited those who created or sanctioned works found in transgression.

This dissertation interrogates how Soviet composers, alongside other members of the Soviet musical community, including musicologists, critics, opera theaters, and censors, worked with and against each other to comprehend and satisfy the state's heightened musical demands. In the course of this inquiry, it investigates key questions of creative autonomy, collaborative authorship, and censorship. Further, rejecting the standard state-versus-artist paradigm as a remnant of Cold War thinking, this dissertation introduces a more complex framework for understanding Soviet art music censorship and authorship as collaborative processes, drawing on censors and composers alike.

By analyzing official directives and aesthetic discussions, state and Party censorship agencies' dealings with each other and with composers, and composers' interactions within their Union, this dissertation demonstrates the deep dysfunction inherent in the Soviet art music censorship system in this period and its significant impact on composers and their music. This dissertation argues that the state's requirement that composers conform to the official Soviet

aesthetic of Socialist Realism, which lacked a clear application to music, paired with its policy of holding them collectively responsible for individual musical missteps, led composers to take a coercive stance toward one another within the professional space of the Composers' Union. In addition, it demonstrates that while composers developed often-successful strategies for navigating their interactions with official censorship agencies, these agencies' internal dysfunctionality and the consequent personalization of censorship functions further undermined the system, ultimately robbing composers of agency by leaving them dependent on individual censors' whims. Further, this dissertation establishes that new works were so profoundly shaped by the mandatory collaborative process of critique and revision that the colleagues and censors involved are best understood not merely as advisors and regulators, but as co-authors of the final product. With case studies of successful and failed musical works as illustration, this dissertation argues that in the absence of clearly defined aesthetic standards and the presence of high-stakes consequences for transgression, Soviet composers resorted to collective professional group self-censorship, which proved far more effective at controlling their creative production than the state could have achieved alone.

NOTE ON TRANSLATION AND TRANSLITERATION

All translations from Russian in this dissertation are my own, unless otherwise noted. In transliterating Cyrillic text, I use the Library of Congress system, except in the cases of well-known names, such as Gorky, Prokofiev, or the Bolshoi Theater. Translation of Russian titles and authors in the bibliography and footnotes follow the Library of Congress system.

LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

Agitprop/OKhLI	Otdel propagandy i agitatsii/Otdel khudozhestvennoi literatury i iskusstv Central Committee Department of Agitation and Propaganda, later Division of Artistic Literature and the Arts
ASM	Assotsiatsiia sovremennoi muzyki Association for Contemporary Music
GABT	Gosudarstvennyi akademicheskii bol'shoi teatr State Academic Bolshoi Theater
Glavrepertkom	Glavnoe upravlenie po kontroliu za repertuarom i zrelishchami Main Administration for Control over Repertoire and Performances (a subsidiary of KDI)
Goszakaz	Gosudarstvennyi zakaz State commission
GTsMMK	Gosudarstvennoe Tsentral'noe Muzei Muzykal'noe Kul'tury im. Glinki Glinka State Central Museum of Musical Culture
GUMU	Glavnoe upravlenie muzykal'nykh uchrezhdenii Main Administration for Musical Institutions (a subsidiary of KDI)
KDI	Vsesoiuznyi Komitet po delam iskusstv All-Union Committee on Arts Affairs, later Ministry of Culture
Khudsovet	Khudozhestvennyi sovet Artistic council
Kolkhoz	Kollektivnoe khoziaistvo Collective farm
Malegot	Leningradskii akademicheskii malyi opernyi teatr Leningrad Academic Malyi Opera Theater
Muzfond	Muzykal'nyi fond Musical Fund, the Union of Soviet Composers' funding agency
Muzgiz	Muzykal'noe gosudarstvennoe izdatel'stvo Musical State Publishing House
NEP	Novaia ekonomicheskaiia politika New Economic Policy

ORK	Organizatsiia revoliutsionnykh kompozitorov Organization of Revolutionary Composers
RAPM	Russkaia assotsiatsiia proletarskikh muzykantov Russian Association of Proletarian Musicians
RAPP	Russkaia assotsiatsiia proletarskikh pisatelei Russian Association of Proletarian Writers
RGALI	Russkii Gosudarstvennyi Arkhiv Literatury i iskusstv Russian State Archive of Literature and the Arts
SND Theater	Teatr im. Stanislavskogo i Nemirovicha-Danchenko Stanislavskii-Nemirovich-Danchenko Theater
SSK	Soiuz sovetskikh kompozitorov Union of Soviet Composers
TsDK	Tsentral'nyi dom kompozitorov Central House of Composers
TsK VKP(b)/KPSS	Tsentral'nyi Komitet Velikoi Kommunisticheskoi Partii (bol'shevikov)/ Kommunisticheskaia Partii Sovetskogo Soiuza Central Committee of the All-Union Communist Party (Bolshevik), later Communist Party of the Soviet Union
UDI	Upravlenie po delam iskusstv Republic-level Administration of Arts Affairs
VRK	Vsesoiuznyi Komitet po radiofikatsii i radioveshchaniuu All-Union Radio Committee

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Introduction

*“The issue of censorship played a role, but it wasn’t the main thing.”
– Composer Georgii Kreitner¹*

In January 1945, as the Red Army drove boldly toward Berlin and Muscovites began to pick up the pieces of lives profoundly altered by the Great Patriotic War, the All-Union Committee on Arts Affairs (KDI) called a meeting of composers, musicologists, theater workers, arts officials, and censors, many of whom had only recently returned from wartime evacuation. Addressing the meeting’s formal topic, “Creative Work For Constructing New Soviet Operas,” the first rapporteur, a high official in the KDI, sternly admonished that while opera was the “most important type of musical art,” in the official Soviet estimation, it was also currently the “most backward,” and “decisive measures” were needed for its improvement. The rapporteur praised Soviet composers’ evident desire to set in opera “the great feelings, ideas... [and] stirring events of our times.” However, he informed his audience, “We have now reached such a cultural level that we cannot be satisfied with works of less than full artistic value.”² The remainder of his report and the day’s discussion were devoted to discovering the reasons for Soviet opera’s “backwardness” and brainstorming ways to overcome it.

The meeting’s participants suggested a variety of possible solutions, ranging from providing composers with a better education in the specifics of opera composition during their conservatory training, to attracting better librettists, to requiring the major theaters to produce more new Soviet operas, or even creating a special experimental theater to serve as a more flexible “creative laboratory” for new works. As this discussion proceeded, one major theme

¹ RGALI (Russian State Archive of Literature and the Arts), f.2077 (Soiuz sovetskikh kompozitorov), op.1, d.122, l.54.

² RGALI, f.962 (Komitet po delam iskusstv), op.3, d.1379, ll.1-4.

became evident: postwar Soviet society was expected to be newer and better than before, and Soviet music would have to attain a new level of ideology and artistry to be worthy of it.

Indeed, this January 1945 meeting was just one of many such discussions held in the months and years following the war's conclusion, a trend that intensified as the late-Stalinist state turned its far from benevolent attention to the arts the following year. Issues raised in this initial foray into postwar musical discussion frequently recurred at such gatherings: improving composers' ideological and artistic capabilities, ensuring performance of more new Soviet operas, and enumerating steps professional institutions like the conservatories and especially the Union of Soviet Composers must take to improve the overall situation in Soviet music. Another persistent and frustrating theme was Soviet composers' apparent inability to match up to the model of their pre-revolutionary predecessors, Russian "classics" like Rimsky-Korsakov, Mussorgsky, and Tchaikovsky. Even in January 1945 several speakers noted defensively that while they of course venerated the classics, they could not rely on their example entirely, because their own, modern creative mission was different. As one speaker emphasized, "Soviet composers' and theaters' work is truly innovative, because we have no examples of the classics writing operas on contemporary themes."³ Composer Georgii Kreitner returned to this point six weeks later, when the Composers' Union held an internal discussion as a follow-up to the larger KDI meeting. "Rimsky-Korsakov, Borodin, Mussorgsky – did they ever take up the problem of creating operas about the 1850s and '60s?" he asked. "Never." When a colleague interjected that they would not have been allowed to do so, Kreitner retorted, "The issue of censorship played a role, but it wasn't the main thing."⁴

³ Ibid., 1.22

⁴ RGALI, f.2077, op.1, d.122, ll.53-54.

Whatever the merits of Kreitner's assertion, for Soviet composers during late Stalinism, censorship was an ever-present force. As this dissertation will demonstrate, the combination of two key factors, on one hand the pressure to raise Soviet music to new ideological and artistic heights that emerged in these early postwar meetings, and on the other the imposition of an unprecedented level of censorship, beginning shortly thereafter, profoundly shaped the experience and practices of Soviet composers in this period. By analyzing official directives and aesthetic discussions, state and Party censorship agencies' dealings with each other and with composers, and composers' interactions within their Union, this dissertation illustrates the deep dysfunction inherent in the late-Stalinist art music censorship system and its significant effects on composers and their music. I argue that the Party-state's demand that composers conform to the official Soviet aesthetic of Socialist Realism, which could not be clearly applied to music, paired with its policy of holding them collectively responsible for individual musical missteps, led composers to take a coercive stance toward one another within the professional space of the Composers' Union. Further, I establish that new works were so profoundly shaped by the mandatory collaborative process of critique and revision that the colleagues and censors involved are best understood not merely as advisors and regulators, but as co-authors. With case studies of successful and failed works as illustration, I argue that in the absence of clearly defined aesthetic standards and the presence of high-stakes consequences for transgression, Soviet composers resorted to collective professional group self-censorship, which proved far more effective at controlling their creative production than the state could have achieved alone.

Historical Background

Soviet Music from the Revolution to World War II

When the Revolution swept away the old regime, Russian music, like so many other arts, was experiencing an exciting and tumultuous period of creative productivity, with young

composers striking out in bold experimental and mystical directions, while their elders held fast to the classical canon and its more staid methodology. The exhilaration of this creative scene was only enhanced by the Bolshevik political revolution, which promised to open up broad new vistas in all areas of life. For the nascent Soviet musical community, the first decade following the Revolution, encompassing the Civil War years (1918-1921) and the period of the New Economic Policy (NEP, 1921-1928) was marked by an intoxicating mix of contrasting creative directions, with relatively light supervision from a government occupied by more pressing issues of survival. As Amy Nelson has detailed, three major aesthetic directions coexisted during this period, each of which sought to serve the new society in its own way.⁵ The oldest and most established group, consisting largely of conservatory professors and musical bureaucrats who did not emigrate during the Civil War, belonged to the liberal intelligentsia and held to the populist ideals of the 19th-century Russian “classics”: Glinka, Rimsky-Korsakov, Mussorgsky, Borodin, and Tchaikovsky. Though not socialist in any meaningful sense, these “traditionalists” adhered to the Russian intelligentsia’s traditional mission of bringing high culture to the masses through popular outreach and were instrumental in the designation of historical composers like Mozart and Beethoven as “revolutionary.”

The second group active in Soviet music in the 1920s consisted mainly of young, conservatory-trained composers on the forefront of musical modernism, who, while not possessed of deeply-held political convictions, were intensely excited by the Soviet experiment. Believing a radical new society required radical new music, they employed a range of avant-garde methods in their compositions, often drawing on the sounds of factories, trains, and the rapidly urbanizing and industrializing world around them in such works as Shostakovich’s

⁵ The following summary is drawn from Amy Nelson. *Music for the Revolution* (University Park: Penn State University Press, 2004), 41-124.

Second Symphony, “To October” (1927), Aleksandr Mosolov’s ballet-turned-orchestral suite *Zavod* (*The Iron Foundry*, 1927), and Vladimir Deshevov’s opera *Led i stal’* (*Ice and Steel*, 1930). These pieces often left the newly-recruited proletarian audience puzzled. But modernist composers, united in the Association for Contemporary Music (ASM) and focused on the aspect of Soviet aesthetic theory that called artists to train up the masses’ sensibilities by bringing to them the high culture they had been denied under capitalism, were not concerned. As Nikolai Roslavets opined in response to criticism his music was too esoteric for ordinary listeners, “I believe the Russian proletariat – rightful inheritors of all preceding culture – is worthy of the best music. Thus it is exactly for them I write my symphonies, quartets, trios, songs and such like ‘head-breakers’... firmly convinced I will live to see the day when my music will be just as clear and accessible to the proletariat as it is now to the best representatives of leading Russian musical society... Perhaps the moment will even come when the proletariat will call my art its own.”⁶ In other words, Soviet composers owed it to the mass audience to correct the wrongs of the capitalist past by exposing them to the most forward-thinking music of the day. If that audience responded with confusion, it only proved modernist composers were doing their job right: the music the proletariat could not understand today it would surely adopt as its own in a brighter tomorrow.

The final faction consisted mainly of music theorists and critics who styled themselves “proletarians,” as an indication of the group they sought to serve, rather than their own social origins. These musical “proletarians” believed the traditionalists were misguided in seeking to give the masses bourgeois culture, which had outlived its social usefulness alongside the class that created it. Further, they viewed the unorthodox, often harsh sounds of the modernists’

⁶ Nikolai Roslavets, “O sebe i svoem tvorchestve,” *Sovremennaiia muzyka* 5 (Nov-Dec 1924), 138.

compositions as merely the dying gasps of that very bourgeois culture, which must be cast out and replaced by “healthy” music generated by the masses themselves. In his speech to the First All-Russian Conference of Proletarian Cultural-Enlightenment Organizations in late 1918, theorist Pavel Lebedev-Polianskii spelled out this perspective, noting, “Proletarian culture is replacing bourgeois culture. And it is natural to assume that it will be its opposite... Only the proletariat will be able to fulfill this colossal creative work.” At best, members of the socialist intelligentsia could seek to assist the proletariat, but they themselves were too marked by bourgeois culture to lead the way. Furthermore, he continued, raising the issue of music’s pedagogical potential, culture was, if anything, more important to the proletariat than to the bourgeoisie, as a means of forming its socialist consciousness. “The proletariat will better understand its ideal when it experiences its beauty and grandeur under the influence of an art form: literary, musical, in painting or in architecture,” he remarked, giving the example of a pre-revolutionary worker too afraid to join a demonstration until inspired by the strains of *La Marseillaise*. “Has not each of us felt the influence of music, painting or poetry?” he asked. “But who can resolve the problem of proletarian culture? Only the proletariat, by way of independent search, by the path of revolutionary creativity... Let the working class itself direct its energies to the creation of that which it so lacks.”⁷ Those who wished to help could do so by organizing and educating the masses, he opined, but the music itself could only come from below.

Throughout NEP, the nascent Soviet musical scene remained multifaceted, if not peaceful. Guided by Commissar of Enlightenment Anatolii Lunacharskii, as Sheila Fitzpatrick notes, the state apparatus carefully maintained a watchful but neutral stance toward the arts,

⁷ P.I. Lebedev-Polianskii, “Revolution and the Cultural Task of the Proletariat,” in *Bolshevik Visions: First Phase of the Cultural Revolution in Soviet Russia, Part I*, ed. William G. Rosenberg (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1990), 51-54.

encouraging revolutionary trends without actively discouraging more conservative ones.⁸ The Party, represented by the Central Committee Department of Agitation and Propaganda (Agitprop), followed suit, rebuffing repeated bids by the Russian Association of Proletarian Writers (RAPP), which led the proletarian faction in literature after Proletkul't's demise in 1920, to be given official control of Soviet literature. Yet, as the country stabilized and the Party faithful grew weary of NEP's compromises, such pressure mounted. Still, even as the tide began to turn toward the proletarians, in 1927 the government responded with another measured step, creating Glaviskusstvo, a unified organ to regulate the arts, subordinated to the Commissariat of Enlightenment and subject to Lunacharskii's directives.⁹

However, Glaviskusstvo was almost immediately undermined. Lunacharskii's accommodationist position was brought to an abrupt end by the inauguration of the Cultural Revolution (1928-1932) the following year, coincident with the First Five-Year Plan, rapid industrialization, and radical social change. As the Shakhty Trial launched the dethroning of bourgeois specialists in industry, so Agitprop sought to enact its own bourgeois dethroning, declaring in May 1928 that, in Fitzpatrick's words, "class war on the cultural front was an inevitable part of cultural development" and calling openly for more proletarian control of the arts.¹⁰ Agitprop's new position still did not give RAPP the total control it sought, but it seriously

⁸ The following account draws on Sheila Fitzpatrick, "The Emergence of Glaviskusstvo: Class War on the Cultural Front, Moscow, 1928-1929," *Soviet Studies* 23:2 (Oct 1971), 236-253 and Sheila Fitzpatrick, *The Cultural Front: Power and Culture in Revolutionary Russia*. (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1992), 91-114.

⁹ Katerina Clark notes a marked shift toward the proletarian factions and concomitant intensification of struggle between factions by 1925. Correlating her account with Nelson's this seems to have been more the case in literature than in music. See Katerina Clark, "The 'Quiet Revolution' in Soviet Intellectual Life," in *Russia in the Era of NEP*, ed. Sheila Fitzpatrick, Alexander Rabinowitch, and Richard Stites. (Bloomington, Indiana University Press, 1991), 210-230.

¹⁰ Fitzpatrick, "The Emergence of Glaviskusstvo," 243.

undermined Glaviskusstvo, which had yet to even begin operations, and provided RAPP with an opening to attack. RAPP promptly did so, stirring up scandals concerning a supposed “soft line” toward the right evident in the Bolshoi’s staffing decisions and the recent near-closing of the Meyerhold Theater. By 1930, Glaviskusstvo was rendered powerless, and the proletarian organizations effectively took charge. In music, this primarily benefited the Russian Association of Proletarian Musicians (RAPM), RAPP’s sister organization, which had led the proletarian faction in music since 1923. Drawing on Lebedev-Polianskii’s directive that the socialist intelligentsia must serve the proletariat by helping it create its own musical culture, the RAPMist vociferously combatted both high art music and popular genres like foxtrots and *tsyganshchina*, declaring them harmful manifestations of bourgeois individualism and decadence, respectively. Instead, they demanded Soviet composers develop a new genre of folk-inflected mass songs, easy for amateur proletarian music lovers to sing and perform, with lyrics celebrating Soviet life and values.

For all their theoretical rigor, the RAPMist were unable to write such songs themselves, being trained as critics and musicologists rather than composers. This left much of the songwriting to the Organization of Revolutionary Composers (ORK), a group of self-taught tunesmiths whose *agitki* were so poorly-written and unattractive that workers mostly rejected them. RAPM’s other, more promising ally was Prokoll, a group of conservatory students who endeavored to work together as a “production collective,” discussing drafts and helping shape each other’s pieces, a precursor to the model the Union of Soviet Composers would adopt a decade later. More skilled than the ORKist, Prokoll’s members sought to combine high art forms with melodic mass appeal, often in the form of four-part choruses or simplified oratorios. Yet, ultimately, Prokoll had little more success than ORK; their endless discussions caused

significant delays, and the pieces they did produce were often still too difficult for workers' clubs to perform. In the end, the musical "proletarians" proved unable to produce practical music to fulfill their theoretical goals.

Amy Nelson has demonstrated that the dominance of RAPM over ASM during this period was neither so clear-cut nor absolute as historians once believed.¹¹ Nevertheless, RAPM had gained a strong upper hand, and as the Cultural Revolution wound down, it became clear their dominance of Soviet music had led to a functional dead end. Furthermore, RAPP's more severe control over Soviet literature had yielded similarly unsatisfactory results. Responding to these difficulties, on April 23, 1932 the Central Committee passed a resolution "On the Reconstruction of Literary-Artistic Organizations," which declared the Proletarian organizations had succeeded so well in their efforts that Soviet culture had now outgrown them. The Central Committee therefore dissolved RAPP, created in its place an official Union of Soviet Writers with a broader creative mandate, and enacted "analogous changes in other genres of art."¹² Here again, fifteen years into the Soviet project, musical aesthetics faced a third major shift. It was but a brief step from this point to the First All-Union Congress of Soviet Writers in 1934, where Party officials formally established the new official Soviet aesthetic, Socialist Realism.¹³

Though the Union of Soviet Composers did not fully coalesce as a nationwide organization for several years, this new aesthetic direction was felt in Soviet music almost

¹¹ See Nelson, chapter 8, 207-241.

¹² "Postanovlenie Politbiuro TsK VKP(b) 'O perestroika literaturno-khudozhestvennykh organizatsii' 23 apreliia 1932g," in Andrei Artizov and Oleg Naumov, eds. *Vlast' i khudozhestvennaia intelligentsiia: Dokumenty TsK RKP(b)-VChK-OGPU-NKVD o kul'turnoi politike, 1917-1953gg* (Moscow: Demokratiia, 1999), 172-173.

¹³ For more on musical Socialist Realism, see Chapter 1.

immediately.¹⁴ Having finally stepped in to take control over Soviet creative life, the Party itself, which had never fully trusted Soviet artists to work without supervision, now began to take more direct interest in their creative production. In music in particular, the Party made its preferences felt much more strongly than before by publicly signaling its approval and disapproval of particular works. Increasingly, official attention turned toward opera and ballet, which was hardly surprising, given its aesthetic demands. As Katerina Clark has demonstrated, members of the new Writers' Union soon adapted their technique to produce novels conforming to a standardized Master Plot, in which an ordinary worker or soldier overcame obstacles in a heroic journey from ignorance to socialist consciousness.¹⁵ While music theorists labored to demonstrate symphonic music's potential to exhibit such socialist content, opera and ballet did their fellow musical genre one better, adding staging, sets, costumes, and in opera's case the significant benefit of text, to purely instrumental music's more amorphous melodic and harmonic content. Concrete storylines and libretti thus made ballet, and even more so opera, Soviet composers' best chance to fulfill Socialist Realism by recreating the Master Plot, intensified by emotion-bearing musical content and visually entrancing staged elements.

Like most music, during the 1920s operas and ballets had been written and staged with comparatively little official oversight. And when the pluralism of NEP was curtailed during the Cultural Revolution, relatively few new operas and ballets were produced at all. But in the early 1930s, interest in these genres enthusiastically revived. The first issue of the new Composers' Union's journal, *Sovetskaia muzyka*, featured an article titled, "On the problem of Soviet Opera,"

¹⁴ On the lengthy process of the Composers' Union's formation, see Kiril Tomoff. *Creative Union: The Professional Organization of Soviet Composers, 1939-1953*. Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2006.

¹⁵ Katerina Clark. *The Soviet Novel: History as Ritual*. Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2000. For the Master Plot, see Appendix A, 255-260.

the authors of which expressed concern at how little had yet been accomplished in the genre, despite its unique “cultural-educational” potential. The article called composers to immediate action.¹⁶ It seemed Soviet opera’s fortunes were looking up, and the creation of a successful Socialist Realist opera could not be far off.

Yet a few years later, as the results of this new interest in opera began to be felt, the Soviet musical community experienced a severe shock as a consequence of two very public visits to the theater by Stalin, the nation’s supreme opera critic. On January 17, 1936, he and his retinue attended a touring production by the Leningrad Academic Malyi Opera Theater (Malegot) of *Tikhii Don* (*The Quiet Don*), a simple “song-opera” written by conservatory student Ivan Dzerzhinskii, based on Mikhail Sholokhov’s eponymous Socialist Realist novel. Stalin summoned the composer to his box after the third act and complimented him on his success, praising the opera’s “significant ideological and political value,” as *Pravda* reported.¹⁷ Nine days later, he attended the Bolshoi’s production of Dmitrii Shostakovich’s substantially more sophisticated *Ledi Makbet Mtsenskogo uezda* (*Lady Macbeth of Mtsensk*), and conspicuously departed before its conclusion. Two days later, *Pravda* published an unsigned editorial condemning the opera as “a deliberately discordant, chaotic stream of sounds... music built on the principle of the negation of opera... leftist muddle instead of natural, human music.”¹⁸ These

¹⁶ I. Iordanskii, P. Kozlov, V. Taranushchenko, “K problemu sovetskoi opery (Opernoe tvorchestva sovetskikh kompozitorov za 15 let),” *Sovetskaia muzyka* 1:1 (Jan 1933), 19-50.

¹⁷ Beseda tovarishchei Stalin i Molotov s avtorami opernogo spektaklia *Tikhii Don*,” *Pravda* 20 Jan 1936, 1.

¹⁸ “Sumbur vmesto muzyki: ob opere *Ledi Makbet Mtsenskogo uezda*,” *Pravda* (28 Jan 1936), 3. On Stalin’s early departure from the theater, see Laurel E. Fay. *Shostakovich: A Life* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000), 84. Fay’s monograph deals extensively with these denunciations and their effect on Shostakovich’s career. Leonid Maksimenkov has demonstrated that the *Pravda* editorial is attributable more to Platon Kerzhentsev, head of the new KDI, than to Stalin directly, but with the understanding that Kerzhentsev believed that in initiating this action he was anticipating Stalin’s wishes. See Leonid Maksimenkov, *Sumbur vmesto muzyki: Stalinskaia*

incidents left little question about the model Soviet leaders expected opera to follow, or the seriousness of the consequences for failure to conform.

Given the musical community's clear pre-scandal preference for Shostakovich's opera over Dzerzhinskii's, this official operatic intervention represented yet another shift in Soviet musical aesthetics. A mere month earlier, the Central Committee had established the KDI to serve as the state's primary censorship agency.¹⁹ Together with Stalin's praise of *Tikhii Don* and *Pravda's* attack on *Lady Macbeth*, this action initiated what Marina Frolova-Walker has dubbed the Soviet Opera Project, in which the state commissioned a substantial number of operas, yet monitored their production so obsessively that few managed to premiere.²⁰ What's more, among those that did reach the stage, not one was hailed as an exemplary Soviet opera; even the few that achieved initial success were downgraded as audiences quickly forgot them. Philip Ross Bullock suggests Soviet opera as a whole failed in this period because it was unable fulfill three main tasks: creation of a totalizing manifestation of culture, effective centralization of operatic production in Moscow, and development of unified interpretations of Soviet texts.²¹ He attributes these failures to the fundamental simplicity of style inaugurated by *Tikhii Don's* elevation to canonical status: song-operas lacked the breadth to be totalizing, their small scale caused them to

kul'turnaia revoliutsiia, 1936-1938gg. (Moscow: Iuridicheskaiia kniga, 1997), 88-112. The Central Committee also tipped its hand on the editorial's anonymity in its 1948 resolution "On the Opera *Velikaia druzhba*" by noting that in publishing it, "*Pravda* acted on the orders of the Central Committee." See "Postanovlenie Politbiuro TsK VKP(b) 'Ob opere *Velikaia druzhba*' ot 10 fevralia 1948g." in Artizov and Naumov, 631.

¹⁹ "Postanovlenie Politbiuro TsK VKP(b) 'Ob organizatsii Vsesoiuznogo komiteta po delam iskusstv' 16 dekabria 1935g." in Artizov and Naumov, 281.

²⁰ The following summary is based on two articles: Marina Frolova-Walker, "The Soviet Opera Project: Ivan Dzerzhinsky vs. *Ivan Susanin*" *Cambridge Opera Journal* 18:2 (July 2006), 181-216; and Philip Ross Bullock, "Staging Stalinism: The Search for Soviet Opera in the 1930s" *Cambridge Opera Journal* 18:1 (January 2006) 83-108.

²¹ Philip Ross Bullock, "Staging Stalinism: The Search for Soviet Opera in the 1930s" *Cambridge Opera Journal* 18:1 (January 2006) 83-108.

appear lost on the Bolshoi's vast stage, and their simplified libretti were inadequately matched to the Soviet novels on which many were based.

Frolova-Walker complicates this picture by demonstrating that the role such operas were meant to perform in Soviet culture was fundamentally misaligned to the style they were required to adopt. Thus, the demand for a heroic display of everyday life ran afoul of the fact that "Certain words were considered intrinsically unsuited to opera, such as *partii*, *partbilet*, and *raikom*... Perhaps it was feared that some might snigger on hearing official and bureaucratic terms sung."²² Yet, such terms were necessary to portraying Soviet reality. Likewise, while called to depict events from recent Soviet history, shifting official interpretations of that history all but guaranteed operatic settings would sooner or later be found false. Finally, not only was the Bolshoi too big a stage for small operas, but the demand for grand, exciting productions could never be fulfilled by their equally requisite simplified style, which held the attention of neither officials, performers, or audiences. Thus, the Soviet Opera Project, while greatly spurring Soviet operatic production, left a legacy of little more than failure and apprehension.

Not surprisingly, the Soviet Opera Project petered out during WWII, as the state turned its attention to more urgent matters of survival. By 1944, as composers and performers returned from evacuation and began to reestablish normal musical life in Moscow, the aesthetics of Soviet opera, and Soviet classical music more generally, remained an open question. It is here that our story begins, with the reconstitution of the Union of Soviet Composers, as its scattered members returned to their institutional home on Miuskaia Ploshchad, and, in the unique conditions of late Stalinism, sought the way forward in creating a form of Socialist Realist music that allowed their creative self-expression while simultaneously fulfilling the Party's demands.

²² Frolova-Walker, "The Soviet Opera Project," 214-215.

Zhdanovshchina

As Soviet composers quickly discovered, late Stalinism was far from hospitable to the creative intelligentsia. After leaving Soviet music, and Soviet culture more broadly, more or less to its own devices during the war and early reconstruction, the Central Committee aggressively reasserted its authority over the arts by promulgating a series of rapid-fire, denunciatory resolutions in late August and early September 1946, condemning missteps in literature, theater, and film and levying harsh penalties against those held responsible.²³ These three resolutions in as many weeks launched a broad new assault on the Soviet intelligentsia that became known as the *zhdanovshchina*, named for Central Committee Secretary of Ideology Andrei Zhdanov, the leading official on ideological questions, and soon spread to the physical and social sciences, as well.²⁴ With these decrees, the Central Committee put creative workers, arts institutions, and censors on notice that a new standard was required, and serious consequences awaited those who created or sanctioned works found in transgression.

While the *zhdanovshchina* resolutions touched on different creative genres, they shared several points in common. In strident language, the first resolution, “On the Journals *Zvezda* and *Leningrad*,” censured two Leningrad-based literary journals for publishing “unideological, ideologically harmful works... empty, contentless, vulgar things... apolitical, intended to

²³ “Postanovlenie Orgbiuro TsK VKP(b) o zhurnalakh ‘Zvezda’ i ‘Leningrad’ ot 14 avgusta 1946g.,” “Postanovlenie Orgbiuro TsK VKP(b) o repertuare dramaticheskikh teatrov i merakh po ego uluchsheniiu ot 26 avgusta 1946g.,” and “Postanovlenie Orgbiuro TsK VKP(b) o kinofil’me ‘Bol’shaia zhizn’ ot 4 sentiabria 1946g.” in Artizov and Naumov, 587-591, 591-596, 598-602.

²⁴ On the *zhdanovshchina* in the sciences, see Nikolai Kremmentsov, *Stalinist Science* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1997), 129-226 and Alexei Kojevnikov, “Games of Stalinist Democracy: Ideological Discussions in Soviet Sciences, 1947-1952” in *Stalinism: New Directions*, ed. Sheila Fitzpatrick (London: Routledge, 2000), 142-175.

disorient our youth and poison their consciousness.”²⁵ It reserved particular venom for two frequent contributors, satirist Mikhail Zoshchenko and poet Anna Akhmatova. Zoshchenko was accused of “presenting Soviet people as primitive, uncultured, stupid, with narrow tastes and morals... [a] maliciously hooliganish portrayal of our reality.” At the same time, Akhmatova was denounced for producing “empty, unideological poetry, foreign to our people, saturated with the spirit of pessimism and decadence... fortified by bourgeois-aristocratic aestheticism.” Finally, the journals’ editors were criticized for knowingly publishing works “cultivating a spirit... of servility to contemporary bourgeois Western culture... [and] lowering their demands for artistic quality.” Having forgotten the key principle that “Soviet literature does not and cannot have interests other than those of the people, of the state, and [its] mission is to help the state correctly educate the youth,” the editors were accused of accepting ideologically subpar works out of personal friendship with their authors.²⁶ This shocking resolution, and a speech given by Zhdanov to the Leningrad Writers’ Union a few days later, which heaped more scorn on Zoshchenko and Akhmatova, established the watch words of the *zhdanovshchina*: ideology; negative portrayal of Soviet people and life; servility to the West; that old indefinable standby, “artistic quality”; the duty of art to educate; and cronyism (*semeistvo*).²⁷

The second resolution, “On the Repertoire of Dramatic Theaters and Measures for its Improvement,” raised similar concerns while extending blame from creators to professional monitors and censors. Whereas the resolution on literature primarily criticized authors and editors, with only brief lashes at those who vetted their work in the Writers’ Union and Agitprop for lack of vigilance, the resolution on theater devoted nearly equal space to attacking

²⁵ “Postanovlenie Orgbiuro TsK VKP(b) o zhurnalakh ‘Zvezda’ i ‘Leningrad,’ ot 14 avgusta 1946g.” in Artizov and Naumov, 587.

²⁶ Ibid, 587-589.

²⁷ “Doklad t. Zhdanova o zhurnalakh ‘Zvezda’ i ‘Leningrad,’” *Pravda* 21 Sept 1946, pp.2-3.

playwrights and directors, on one hand, and theater critics, the Writers' Union, and the KDI, on the other. It further deplored that theaters staged few plays by Soviet authors on contemporary themes. And when they did, it alleged, they, like the Leningrad editors, promoted works with "weak, unideological" content. In phrasing nearly identical to the accusations against Zoshchenko, playwrights addressing contemporary themes were accused of depicting Soviet people in "abnormal, caricatured form, primitive and uncultured, with narrow tastes and morals... a false, perverted representation of Soviet life." Further, the KDI was criticized for failing to closely controlling theaters' repertoires, one of its primary duties, while favoring historical themes and committing the "gross political mistake" of permitting plays by Western authors, which, like Akhmatova's poetry, "propagandize reactionary bourgeois ideology and morals in an effort to poison Soviet people's consciousness with a harmful worldview." Lastly, the resolution noted with contempt that the few Soviet plays on modern themes that had been performed were "antiartistic and primitive, written carelessly and illiterately," and had been further doomed to failure by "irresponsible" theater managers, who assigned substandard directors and actors to them, resulting in "gray, unartistic" productions.²⁸

Turning again to the problem of artistic control, the second resolution made a stronger point than the first that the Writers' Union, despite its purported role as a workshop for elevating authors' professionalism, had "done nothing to raise the ideological-artistic level of productions and has not fought against banality and hackwork." Nor did critics, tasked with serving as playwrights' artistic conscience, get off easily. Rather, they were reprimanded for "timidly and clumsily supporting good plays while unrestrainedly praising mediocre ones, and keeping silent about the theaters' and KDI's mistakes." Critics, like journals editors, were led in this, the

²⁸ "Postanovlenie Orgbiuro TsK VKP(b) o repertuare dramaticheskikh teatrov i merakh po ego uluchsheniiu, ot 26 avgusta 1946." in Artizov and Naumov, 591-592.

resolution alleged, “not by the interests of the ideological and artistic development of Soviet dramaturgy and theatrical art, that is, not by the interests of the state and people but, by friendly, personal interests.” Finally, theaters, playwrights, and critics as a group, like their literary counterparts, were accused of failing in their duty to educate the masses through art, a sin that “cannot be tolerated.”²⁹ Thus the resolution on theater confirmed and deepened the criticisms laid out in the resolution on literature, while tailoring them to the specifics of the genre and expanding them to fall on the shoulders of playwrights, directors, critics, and censors alike.

The final resolution, “On the Film *Bol’shaia zhizn’*,” addressed the sequel to Leonid Lukov’s popular and well-received 1938 release of the same name, which portrayed miners in the Donbass during its industrialization in the 1930s. The sequel, depicting the same region during and just after the war, was scheduled for a 1946 release, until it ran afoul of the Central Committee. This resolution differed from its predecessors in addressing a specific work, but it raised many of the same concerns and characterized *Bol’shaia zhizn’, Part Two* as an example of recent filmic failures by such notable directors as Eisenstein, Pudovkin, and Kozintsev and Trauberg, all of whom exhibited the same political and artistic faults.³⁰ The resolution’s first complaint, by now familiar, concerned the film’s “fallacious” ideology. Lukin was faulted for “incorrectly representing the scale and meaning of the Soviet state’s [postwar] reconstruction of the Donbass,” preferring to focus instead on his characters’ petty personal affairs. Yet in a further shift of the resolutions’ trajectory, the Ministry of Cinematography, the state organ responsible for vetting films, was accused of worse: “relating irresponsibly to the work entrusted to it and showing a lack of concern for films’ ideological and political content and artistic

²⁹ Ibid, 592-593.

³⁰ “Postanovlenie Orgbiuro TsK VKP(b) o kinofil’me ‘Bol’shaia zhizn’” ot 4 sentiabria 1946g.” in Artizov and Naumov, 600-601.

quality.”³¹ If the second resolution left any doubt arts control agencies were as deeply implicated in the *zhdanovshchina* as creative workers, the third decisively dispelled it.

To be sure, *Bolshaia zhizn*’s creators were subjected to substantial criticism. In addressing them, the resolution focused mainly on charges of false portrayal of Soviet life. In a detailed analysis spanning nearly half its length, it denounced them for depicting postwar reconstruction “as if the workers’ initiative to rebuild not only did not meet with support from the state, but put the miners in conflict with it,” an “entirely false” distortion of reality. What’s more, the resolution continued, the filmmakers had misled audiences about the achievements of the First Five Year Plan, portraying low-level industrial development and “technologically illiterate” *vydvizhentsy* running the show. Worst of all, like Zoshchenko’s stories and the theaters’ repertoire, the film gave a “false, distorted depiction of Soviet people... as backward and uncultured.” Though the filmmakers observed the Soviet masses every day, they clearly “do not notice their high ideological and moral qualities and are unable to truly depict them in art.” Beyond such ideological transgressions, the resolution further accused the filmmakers of creative incompetence, evidenced by their placing talented actors in “absurd” roles and the “extremely weak” artistic quality of their handiwork overall.

Lastly, the resolution turned to the Ministry of Cinematography’s arts council, or *khudsovet*, an internal bastion of criticism on whose judgments vetting decisions were largely based. The resolution alleged that the *khudsovet* had failed to ensure “impartial and businesslike criticism.” Rather, like the journal editors and theater critics, “many of its members... express judgments based on personal, friendly relations with filmmakers.” Such “lack of criticism in film [and] the atmosphere of cronyism among film workers” were marked as a major reason for the

³¹ Ibid, 598-599, 601.

recent production of unsatisfactory films. Finally, unlike its predecessors, this resolution concluded with an unmistakable warning to the broader creative intelligentsia that “those who relate irresponsibly to their work can easily find themselves left behind the most advanced Soviet art... for the Soviet viewer has grown, his cultural demands have risen, and the party and state will in the future inculcate in the *narod* good taste and high demands toward artworks.”³² Indeed, whether driven by “audience demand” or not, it seemed the late-Stalinist state was determined to apply new, more strident ideological and aesthetic standards to Soviet creative production and closely monitor its progress in a variety of genres to ensure its demands were met. The fact that in the Soviet milieu the aesthetic was to a large extent coterminous with the political only raised the stakes for Soviet creative producers.

Thus, quite soon after the war’s end, the imposition of the *zhdanovshchina* created a sense of fear and acute pressure for Soviet creative artists, which lay especially intensely on the shoulders of Soviet composers, who had yet to find a concrete solution to the problem of musical Socialist Realism, over which they had been puzzling for more than a decade. Nor was this a merely theoretical problem; the consequences of each *zhdanovshchina* resolution arose with swiftness and severity, written into the text of each of them: *Leningrad* was shuttered and *Zvezda*’s editorial staff reorganized, while the head of the Leningrad division of Agitprop was fired; the KDI was charged with taking closer control over theaters’ repertoire and ensuring its correctness; and *Bol’shaia zhizn’* was banned from cinemas, while both the KDI and the Ministry of Cinematography were sternly ordered to overcome the many deficiencies in their operations. True, Soviet music had not yet been targeted by the Central Committee, but it took

³² Ibid, 601-602. Like the German *Völk*, *narod* has no exact translation. Its closest English equivalent is “the people.” Due to the problematic nature of this translation, I have left the term in Russian throughout, along with its adjectival form, *narodnyi* (“folky”), and its nominalized adjective, *narodnost’* (roughly, “folkishness”).

no great leap of the imagination to presume it was only a matter of time until its number was called. Amidst these profoundly altered and uncertain circumstances, the Soviet musical community – including music professionals and music censors – cautiously worked to find their way forward and navigate a safe path through the rocky terrain of late Stalinism.

The Meaning of “Censorship”

Because the theme of censorship is central to this dissertation, it is important to clarify my usage of the term. Though there is a broad literature on censorship in the 20th century, the majority of studies consider its manifestation only in a single political system. This concern is not without merit; as Beate Müller points out, “All censorial actions... need to be seen in their political and historical context because it is this context which structures the way in which censorship can operate.”³³ And of course, this dissertation to some extent follows that model in considering the very specific case of music censorship in the Soviet Union during the period of late Stalinism. However, on the whole this deference to political and temporal context has hindered the development of a broader theoretical definition of censorship, which would facilitate scholarly understanding of the similarities in foundational precepts and intentions of censorship regimes across political systems and historical epochs.

In addition, studies of censorship have traditionally relied on a relatively narrow, state-oriented framework, marking censorship as, for example, “the systematic control of the content of communication *by a government* through various means.”³⁴ Yet, as scholars of a Foucauldian

³³ Beate Müller, ed. *Censorship and Cultural Regulation in the Modern Age* (Amsterdam: Rodopi, 2004), 18.

³⁴ Ilan Peleg, ed. *Patterns of Censorship Around the World* (Boulder: Westview, 1993), 4. Italics mine. Peleg attributes this definition to Michael Scammell, “Censorship and its History – A Personal View,” in Kevin Boyle, ed. *Article 19: Information, Freedom, and Censorship (World Report 1988)* (New York: Times Books, 1988), 10. Though Peleg’s edited volume addresses state censorship in a variety of locations, the case studies of which it is comprised are strictly divided by political system, and further subdivided by country.

orientation have been quick to point out, states are far from the only entities that censor individual expression. As Sue Curry Jansen elucidates in her exposé of the hidden mechanisms of censorship in liberal democracies,

The term *constituent censorship* is used to call attention to a form of censorship which Liberal political theory ignores or denies. Contra Liberalism, I maintain that in all societies the powerful invoke censorship to create, secure, and maintain their control over the power to name... Because this fundamental censorship is largely unrecognized, its influence is insidious. It casts a shadow over all human consciousness: subverting all Promethean aspirations and belying the most studied professions of objectivity.³⁵

Such constituent, or constitutive – as opposed to the traditionally more recognized regulative – censorship, Jansen and others argue, is exerted by a variety of actors, including social groups, religious leaders, private organizations, employers, and the capitalist marketplace, restricting free expression by applying more subtle, extra-legal forms of pressure – social, financial, and more. Though it lacks legal sanction, constitutive censorship is as substantial in its effects as its regulative counterpart.

Bringing this theory into the socialist sphere, Michael Holquist explains how the “insidious” nature of the prescriptive censorship practiced by the Soviet state effectively bridged the gap between regulative and constitutive censorship. If in more traditional non-liberal political systems, like that of imperial Russia, the state told artists what not to create while the professional group encouraged best practices, Soviet prescriptive censorship brought these roles together so closely that they became part and parcel of the same censoring process. In prescribing what *must* be said by requiring composers to conform to the dictates of Socialist Realism, while also forbidding what must not be said, Holquist argues, prescriptive censorship “blurs the boundaries between censorship by the state and by the self,” and, I would add, by the

³⁵ Sue Curry Jansen. *Censorship: The Knot that Binds Power and Knowledge* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1988), 7-8. Italics and capitalizations are Jansen’s.

professional group.³⁶ Acutely aware of both the prescriptive and proscriptive demands placed on them by the Soviet state, as well as the collectively-imposed consequences for transgressing such boundaries, Soviet composers quite naturally brought State-enforced norms into their professional evaluations of each other's work.

Such processes are far too complex to be encompassed by the traditional Manichean "state-vs.-artist" conceptualization of Soviet censorship developed during the Cold War. While acknowledging the political and scholarly reasons for the emergence of this view, including the severely limited availability of reliable sources, this dissertation seeks to move past this outdated Cold War paradigm to understand Soviet creative censorship as a fundamentally collaborative process involving censors and composers alike. In service of this goal, I follow legal scholar Peter Ingram in asking not only "What is censorship?" but also "a more difficult question: What *amounts to* censorship?" Expanding on Holquist's understanding of the intertwining of state- and self-censorship, Ingram notes, "If formal [legal] pre-censorship is thoroughly effective, it naturally leads to a second, more informal kind, namely voluntary self-censorship... For example, a writer of a book simply avoids giving information or expressing opinions which he knows will not be allowed."³⁷ In the case of Soviet composers, a relatively small, tight-knit group of colleagues who employed collaborative methods of critique and revision in their creative work, such prudent "voluntary" self-censorship easily overflowed the boundaries of the self, expanding into a highly effective form of collective professional group self-censorship that policed the creativity of each individual and of the group as a whole. Cognizant that the state held the entire group responsible for musical missteps made by any one member, the most

³⁶ Michael Holquist, "Corrupt Originals: The Paradox of Censorship," *PMLA* 109:1 (Jan 1994), 15.

³⁷ Peter G. Ingram. *Censorship and Free Speech: Some Philosophical Bearings* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2000), 1, 8. Italics original.

cautious urgently reined in the more adventurous, resulting in the effective imposition of a “safe” conservative aesthetic even before new works reached the official censor’s desk.

Thus, in this dissertation I define censorship as the coercive force exerted by the state, the self, or the professional group, often in combination, to limit or direct an individual’s creative self-expression. Such a broad definition raises the question of how censorship may be distinguished from processes we customarily consider more benign, like market forces or peer review. Indeed, how does the Composers’ Union’s consultation process differ from Picador rejecting a novel it considers unsalable, or *Slavic Review* demanding substantial revisions before publishing an article? In fact, I argue, they do not differ; marketing and peer review are forms of censorship, whether we acknowledge them as such or not. What sets the Composers’ Union’s process apart is its monopoly on power, proceeding from the monolithic power of the Soviet state. The disaffected novelist or academic in a liberal democracy may turn to other avenues to bring her work to the public: a different industry publisher, a vanity publisher, a website, or photocopies handed out on the street. Indeed, in a liberal democracy, a composer whose work has been rejected by the orchestra or opera house to which she submitted it may hire her own musicians and stage a guerilla performance in a public space. But while a minority of adventurous Soviet composers embraced similar methods in later generations, it was far too dangerous to attempt in the early postwar period.³⁸ That left late-Stalinist composers in the hands of the established performance organizations, whose directors, equally fearful of official censure for their repertoire choices, would not risk taking on work unless it was pre-approved and recommended by one of the Composers’ Union’s consultative sections. Because they had the

³⁸ On the “unofficial” Soviet music scene that developed in the 1960s, see Peter J. Schmelz. *Such Freedom, If Only Musical: Unofficial Soviet Music During the Thaw*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009.

power to categorically prevent new compositions from reaching the public – or, as far more frequently occurred, to coerce composers into altering their work to meet a more conservative aesthetic standard – the professional group of Soviet composers must be understood as an agent of censorship, enacted through the Composers’ Union’s consultative apparatus, the effectiveness of which ultimately surpassed even that of the Soviet state censorial efforts.

Historiography

Late Stalinism and Stalinist Culture

In the introduction to her edited volume, *Late Stalinist Russia: Society between Reconstruction and Reinvention*, Juliane Fürst makes the case for the “rehabilitation, re-examination and reinterpretation of a neglected, and often misunderstood era,” late Stalinism. Comprising the last years of Stalin’s rule, 1945-1953, late Stalinism was until recently treated as the mere tail end of an era, a final act tacked on after the interruption of the Great Patriotic War to the far more interesting events and developments of the late 1920s and 1930s. As a result of this framing, comparatively little research was done on the late Stalinism until roughly fifteen years ago, with Fürst’s volume, published in 2006, serving as one of the leading efforts to rescue this period from its status as “the ‘black hole of Soviet history’” and establish it as a unique and pivotal moment worthy of study in its own right.³⁹

Yet, while Fürst describes her volume’s contents as “attempting to bridge the gap between social and cultural history,” culture here is best understood in its popular manifestation.⁴⁰ As yet, relatively few studies have been written on the creative culture of late-Stalinism. Rather, the preponderance of research has concerned late-Stalinist society, exploring

³⁹ Juliane Fürst, ed. *Late Stalinist Russia: Society between Reconstruction and Reinvention* (London: Routledge, 2006), 15, 17.

⁴⁰ *Ibid*, 17.

the lives of ordinary workers, women, elites, youth and popular culture, and society as a whole.⁴¹

Late Stalinism has also recently been considered in light of politics⁴² and economics.⁴³ This dissertation seeks to help fill the cultural gap in the current research on late-Stalinism by addressing the composition and censorship of Soviet art music composers in this period.

⁴¹ On workers: Donald Filtzer. *Soviet Workers and Late Stalinism: Labour and the Restoration of the Stalinist System after World War II*. Cambridge; Cambridge University Press, 2002. On women: Greta Bucher. *Women, the Bureaucracy, and Daily Life in Postwar Moscow, 1945-1953*. Boulder: East European Monographs, 2006. On elites: Eric J. Duskin. *Stalinist Reconstruction and the Confirmation of a New elite, 1945-1953*. Basingstoke: Palgrave, 2001; Benjamin Tromly. *Making the Soviet Intelligentsia: Universities and Intellectual Life under Stalin and Khrushchev*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2014. On youth and popular culture: Mark Edele, "Strange Young Men in Stalin's Moscow: The Birth and Life of the Stiliagi, 1945-1953," *Jarbücher für Geschichte Osteuropas* 50:1 (2002), 37-61; Juliane Fürst. *Stalin's Last Generation: Soviet Post-war Youth and the Emergence of Mature Socialism*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010; Gleb Tsipursky, "Pleasure, Power, and the Pursuit of Communism: Soviet Youth and State-Sponsored Popular Culture during the Early Cold War, 1945-1968." PhD diss., University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, 2011. ProQuest (UMI Number 3477511). On society as a whole: Mark Edele. *Stalinist Society, 1928-1953*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011; Donald Filtzer. *The Hazards of Urban Life in Late Stalinist Russia: Health, Hygiene, and Living Standards, 1945-1953*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010; Fürst, *Late Stalinist Russia*; Timothy Johnston. *Being Soviet: Identity, Rumour, and Everyday Life under Stalin, 1939-1953*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011; Elena Zubkova. *Russia After the War: Hopes, Illusions, and Disappointments, 1945-1957*. Armonk: Sharpe, 1998; idem. *Poslevoennoe sovetskoe obshchestvo: politika i povsednevnost', 1945-1953*. Moscow: ROSSPEN, 2000.

⁴² Edward Cohn. *The High Title of a Communist: Postwar Party Discipline and the Values of the Soviet Regime*. DeKalb: Northern Illinois University Press, 2015; Aleksandr Danilov. *Rozhdenie sverkhderzhavy: SSSR v pervye poslevoennye gody*. Moscow: ROSSPEN, 2001; Yoram Grolizki and Oleg Khlevniuk. *Cold Peace: Stalin and the Soviet Ruling Circle, 1945-1953*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004; Vojtech Mastny. *The Cold War and Soviet Insecurity: The Stalin Years*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1996; Michael Parrish. *The Lesser Terror; Soviet State Security, 1939-1953*. Westport: Praeger, 1996; Aleksandr Pyzhikov. *Konfiguratsiia i funktsionirovanie vlasti v SSSR (1945-1953 gg.)*. Moscow: RAN, 1999.

⁴³ James W. Heinzen. *The Art of the Bribe: Corruption, Law, and Everyday Practice in the Late Stalinist USSR*. Seattle: National Council for Eurasian and East European Research, 2007; Kristy Ironside, "The Value of a Ruble: A Social History of Money in Postwar Soviet Russia, 1945-1964," PhD diss., University of Chicago, 2014. ProQuest (UMI Number 3638597); Oscar Sanchez-Sibony. *Red Globalization: The Political Economy of the Soviet Cold War from Stalin to Khrushchev*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2014; Mark B. Smith. *Property of Communists: The Urban Housing Program from Stalin to Khrushchev*. DeKalb; Northern Illinois University Press, 2010.

Within the current landscape of late-Stalinist research, the literature to which this dissertation most closely relates is that on Soviet scientists, another professional group targeted by the *zhdanovshchina*. Between 1947 and 1951, the Soviet scientific community weathered five major scandals, in the fields of philosophy, biology, linguistics, physiology, and political economy. Each scandal culminated in a large-scale, highly performative professional discussion applying ideological criticism to scientific theory, which profoundly shaped participants' careers and subsequent research agendas. Scholars like Nikolai Kremontsov, Vladimir Esakov, Ethan Pollock, and Alexei Kojevnikov have explored these science scandals from a variety of angles, including the interconnectedness of and competing agendas at work between Soviet scientists and their official minders, the entanglements of Cold War politics, the peculiar *zhdanovshchina* institution of the "honor court," and the nature, goals, and outcomes of the large-scale professional discussions themselves.⁴⁴ As Kremontsov points out, the traditional framework that "has tended to view science and the state as two opposing entities locked in an uneven conflict, with the state in the role of dictator and oppressor, and the scientists as victims, trying to defend their autonomy... is in certain respects correct, but it is nonetheless misleading," firstly due to the significant overlap in personnel between scientific institutions and the science control mechanism, and secondly because while the threat inherent in state power was all too real, the scientific community nevertheless developed a range of tactics to "avoid, elude, and exploit" the

⁴⁴ Nikolai Kremontsov. *Stalinist Science*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1997; idem. *The Cure: A Story of Cancer and Politics from the Annals of the Cold War*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2002; Vladimir Esakov. *Delo KR: Sudy chesti v ideologii i praktike poslevoennogo stalinizma*. Moscow: RAN, 2001; Ethan Pollock. *Stalin and the Soviet Science Wars*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2006; Alexei Kojevnikov, "Games of Stalinist Democracy: Ideological Discussions in Soviet Sciences, 1947-1952" in *Stalinism: New Directions*, ed. Sheila Fitzpatrick (London: Routledge, 2000), 142-175.

control system for their own ends.⁴⁵ This dissertation is similarly concerned with revealing the symbiotic intertwining of personnel between the late-Stalinist musical community and music control system, and the ways composers used their professional competency to soften the effects of official scrutiny, in their case, by relying on preemptive professional group self-censorship.

In his investigation of the scandal in biology, Esakov understands the “honor courts” as a mechanism by which the state staked a clear ideological position in the sciences and reestablished totalitarian control over the intelligentsia. By contrast, Pollock and Kojevnikov view the science scandals as having clearer starting points than conclusions. Pollock details how escalating internal scientific debates attracted the Party’s attention, culminating in official pronouncements by Stalin himself, which scientists were then meant to interpret through ideological discussion. Taking this line further, Kojevnikov argues that the fact such ideological discussions were held mattered more to the Party than their outcomes, because its ultimate goal was to train Soviet scientists in the rituals of democratic centralism. This dissertation creates an important parallel to these studies by demonstrating that the pressures and practices they investigate – a specialized professional group’s subjection to the *zhdanovshchina*, the concomitant process of ideological discussion, and strategies employed by the professional group in response to ideological pressure from above – were not unique to the sphere of Soviet scientists, but affected Soviet composers in this period, as well.

Though relatively little work has been done specifically on the creative culture of late Stalinism, Stalinist culture as a whole has received its share of scholarly attention. Alongside the literature on experimental creativity in the revolutionary and NEP eras,⁴⁶ scholars have explored

⁴⁵ Kremensov, *Stalinist Science*, 4.

⁴⁶ See for example: Abbott Gleason, Peter Kenez, and Richard Stites, eds. *Bolshevik Culture: Experiment and Order in the Russian Revolution*. Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1985;

Stalinist visual art, literature, film and even ballet, as well as the use of the arts and press in the creation of Stalinist propaganda and mass culture.⁴⁷ Further, Evgenii Gromov has argued that a

Pamela Kachurin. *Making Modernism Soviet: The Russian Avant-Garde in the Early Soviet Era, 1918-1928*. Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 2013; Christina Kiaer. *Imagine No Possessions: The Socialist Objects of Russian Constructivism*. Cambridge: MIT Press, 2006; Richard Stites. *Revolutionary Dreams: Utopian Vision and Experimental Life in the Russian Revolution*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1989; Denise J. Youngblood. *Movies for the Masses: Popular cinema and Soviet Society in the 1920s*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992.

⁴⁷ On visual art: Matthew Cullerne Brown. *Art Under Stalin*. Oxford: Phaidon, 1991; Matthew Cullerne Brown and Brandon Taylor, eds. *Art of the Soviets: Painting, Sculpture, and Architecture in a One-Party State, 1917-1992*. Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1993 (especially chapters 4-9); Vladimir Paperny. *Architecture in the Age of Stalin: Culture Two*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002; Jan Plamper. *Alkhimiia vlasti: Kul't Stalina v izobrazitel'nom iskusstve*. Moscow: Novoe Literaturnoe obozrenie, 2010. On literature: Valentina Antipina. *Povsednevnaia zhizn' sovetskikh pisatelei, 1930e-1950-e gody*. Moscow: Molodaia gvardiia, 2005; Katerina Clark. *The Soviet Novel: History as Ritual*. Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1981; Vera S. Dunham. *In Stalin's Time: Middleclass Values in Soviet Fiction*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1976; Evgeny Dobrenko. *The Making of the State Reader: Social and Aesthetic Contexts of the Reception of Soviet Literature*. Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1997; idem. *The Making of the State Writer: Social and Aesthetic Origins of Soviet Literary Culture*. Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2001; idem. *Metafora vlasti: literatura stalinskoi epokhi v istoricheskom osveshchenii*. Munich: Sanger, 1993; A. Kemp-Welch. *Stalin and the Literary Intelligentsia, 1928-1939*. New York: St. Martin's, 1991; Gleb Struve. *Russian Literature under Lenin and Stalin, 1917-1953*. Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1971. On film: Evgeny Dobrenko. *Stalinist Cinema and the Production of History: Museum of the Revolution*. New Haven: Yale University Press, 2008; Peter Kenez. *Cinema and Soviet Society from the Revolution to the Death of Stalin*. London: St. Martin's, 2001; Anna Lawton, ed. *The Red Screen: Politics, Society, Art in Soviet Cinema*. London: Routledge, 1992; Richard Taylor and Derek Spring, eds. *Stalinism and Soviet Cinema*. London: Routledge, 1993. On ballet: Christina Ezrahi. *Swans of the Kremlin: Ballet and Power in Soviet Russia*. Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 2012; Jennifer Homans, "Left Behind? Communist Ballet From Stalin to Brezhnev" in *Apollo's Angels: A History of Ballet* (New York: Random House, 2010), 341-395. On propaganda and mass culture: David Brandenberger. *National Bolshevism: Stalinist Mass Culture and the Formation of Modern Russian National Identity, 1931-1956*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2002; idem. *Propaganda State in Crisis: Soviet Ideology, Indoctrination, and Terror under Stalin, 1927-1941*. New Haven: Yale University Press, 2011; Jeffrey Brooks. *Thank You, Comrade Stalin! Soviet Public Culture from Revolution to Cold War*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2000; A.V. Fateev. *Obraz vraga v sovetskoi propaganda, 1945-1954gg*. Moscow: RAN, 1999; Matthew E. Lenoe. *Closer to the Masses: Stalinist Culture, Social Revolution, and Soviet Newspapers*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2004; Kevin Platt and David Brandenberger, eds. *Epic Revisionism: Russian History and Literature as Stalinist Propaganda*. Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 2006;

complete understanding of the politics of Stalinist creative culture writ large requires close study of Stalin's personal artistic tastes, because as a true-believing revolutionary propagandist, the dictator sought not only to be a great patron of the arts, but to bend them to the Party-state's educational purposes, as well.⁴⁸ Drawing on the contextualization across creative genres created by these studies, this dissertation adds a musical perspective to our understanding of Stalinist cultural politics and cultural production more broadly.

Soviet Music and Socialist Realism

The literature on Soviet music has tended either to take the form of broad overviews of the Soviet period,⁴⁹ or focus on the trials and tribulations of an individual composer, particularly Shostakovich and Prokofiev.⁵⁰ Research in this latter category has yielded a wealth of information about those individuals' personal journeys, but the experience of such elite

Malte Rolfe. *Soviet Mass Festivals, 1917-1991*. Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 2013; Richard Stites. *Russian Popular Culture: Entertainment and Society since 1900*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992 (chapters 3 and 4).

⁴⁸ Evgenii Gromov. *Stalin: iskusstvo i vlast'*. Moscow: EKSMO, 2003.

⁴⁹ See for example, Levon Hakobian. *Music of the Soviet Age, 1917-1987*. Stockholm: Melos, 1998; Francis Maes. *A History of Russian Music: From Kamarinskaya to Babi Yar*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 2002; Boris Schwarz. *Music and Musical Life in Soviet Russia, 1917-1981*. Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1983; Richard Taruskin. *On Russian Music*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 2009. Taruskin's work is not intended to be comprehensive, but rather comprises short essays on a variety of Soviet musical topics.

⁵⁰ The literature on Shostakovich is too vast to footnote. See for example, Pauline Fairclough. *A Soviet Credo: Shostakovich's Fourth Symphony*. Aldershot: Ashgate, 2006; David Fanning, ed. *Shostakovich Studies*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995; Laurel Fay. *Shostakovich: A Life*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000; Judith Kuhn. *Shostakovich in Dialogue: Form, Imagery, and Ideas in Quartets 1-7*. Farnham: Ashgate, 2010; Richard Taruskin, "Shostakovich and the Inhuman" in *Defining Russia Musically: Historical and Hermeneutical Essays* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1997), 468-544; Elizabeth Wilson. *Shostakovich: A Life Remembered*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1994. On Prokofiev, see: Kevin Bartig. *Composing for the Red Screen: Prokofiev and Soviet Film*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013; Simon Morrison. *The People's Artist: Prokofiev's Soviet Years*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009; Harlow Robinson. *Prokofiev: A Biography*. New York: Viking, 1987. British musicologist Patrick Zuk has recently been working on Nikolai Myaskovsky: Patrick Zuk, "Nikolay Myaskovsky and the Events of 1948," *Music and Letters* 93:1 (Feb 2012), 61-85; idem. "Nikolay Myaskovsky and the 'Regimentation of Soviet Composition: A Reassessment,'" *Journal of Musicology* 31:3 (Summer 2014), 354-393.

composers differed in important ways from that of the rank-and-file, making such studies of limited use in understanding the broader picture Soviet music. In addition, the majority of such studies have been written by musicologists, who employ a score-centric methodology that enriches our understanding of musical works but leaves their sociopolitical context in the background. Adopting a consciously historical perspective while employing interdisciplinary methods of analysis, this dissertation works to correct these biases by approaching Soviet composers as a professional group and providing substantive historical contextualization to demonstrate how the unique circumstances of late Stalinism shaped the composition and control of Soviet music in this period.

A handful of recent studies have focused more specifically on the initial development of Soviet musical life in the relatively brief interval between the Revolution and Stalin's rise to power, whether viewing this period as one of progressively narrowing artistic freedom, like Larry Sitsky, or demonstrating its relative openness and diversity, like Amy Nelson, and the willingness of some composers to support and propagandize the Soviet project, like Neil Edmunds.⁵¹ In fact, Nelson and Edmunds, provide a valuable corrective to the entrenched state-vs.-artist perspective Sitsky represents, a holdover from the Cold War that remains too common today. This framework, pitting Soviet censors, on one side, against composers, on the other, in a pitched battle for the soul of Soviet music, derives largely from the testimony of memoirs like Rostislav Dubinsky's *Stormy Applause* and Galina Vishnevskaya's *Galina*, which, while relating their émigré authors' real experiences, also played to their Western audience by highlighting the

⁵¹ Larry Sitsky. *Music of the Repressed Russian Avant-Garde, 1900-1929*. Westport: Greenwood, 1994; Amy Nelson. *Music for the Revolution: Musicians and Power in Early Soviet Russia*. University Park: Pennsylvania State University Press, 2004; Neil Edmunds. *The Soviet Proletarian Music Movement*. Oxford: Peter Lang, 2000.

conditions that led these artists to leave the Soviet Union in the first place.⁵² This dissertation joins the work of Nelson, Edmunds, and others in pushing past this black-and-white view and working to discover the far more nuanced and interesting picture of Soviet musical politics as a negotiated process in which the overlapping communities of composers and music censors each had a stake and each had some measure of power, albeit unevenly distributed.

While research on Soviet music has begun to branch out in interesting new directions, including popular music, Soviet rock, and musical nationalism,⁵³ as yet little scholarly work has been done on art music in the postwar period. Four recent studies, by Ekaterina Vlasova, Meri Herrala, Peter Schmelz, and Kiril Tomoff have been pioneering in this regard.⁵⁴ Vlasova and Herrala, who present competing interpretations of the musical *zhdanovshchina*, will be discussed below. Schmelz describes the unofficial space carved out in late Soviet society by composers

⁵² Rostislav Dubinsky. *Stormy Applause: Making Music in a Worker's State*. New York: Hill & Wang, 1989; Galina Vishnevskaya. *Galina: A Russian Story*. New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1989.

⁵³ On popular music: Neil Edmunds, ed. *Soviet Music and Society under Lenin and Stalin: The Baton and the Sickle*. London: Routledge, 2004; Peter Kupfer, "Music, Ideology, and Entertainment in the Soviet Musical Comedies of Grigory Aleksandrov and Isaak Dunayevsky," PhD diss., University of Chicago, 2010. ProQuest (UMI Number 3432744); S. Frederick Starr. *Red and Hot: The Fate of Jazz in the Soviet Union, 1917-1980*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1983. On Soviet rock: William Risch, ed. *Youth and Rock in the Soviet Bloc: Youth Cultures, Music, and the State in Russia and Eastern Europe*. Lanham: Lexington, 2015; Timothy Ryback. *Rock Around the Bloc: A History of Rock Music in Eastern Europe and the Soviet Union*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1990; Sergei Zhuk. *Rock and Roll in the Rocket City: The West, Identity, and Ideology in Soviet Dnepropetrovsk, 1960-1985*. Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2010. On musical nationalism: Marina Frolova-Walker, "'National in Form, Socialist in Content': Musical Nation-Building in the Soviet Republics," *Journal of the American Musicological Society* 51:2 (Summer 1998), 331-371; idem. *Russian Music and Nationalism: From Glinka to Stalin*. New Haven: Yale University Press, 2007.

⁵⁴ E.S. Vlasova. *1948 god v sovetskoi muzyke: Dokumentirovannoe issledovanie*. Moscow: Klassika XXI, 2010; Meri Herrala. *The Struggle for Control of Soviet Music from 1932 to 1948: Socialist Realism vs. Western Formalism*. Lewiston: Mellen, 2012; Peter Schmelz. *Such Freedom, If Only Musical: Unofficial Soviet Music During the Thaw*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009; Kiril Tomoff. *Creative Union: The Professional Organization of Soviet Composers, 1939-1953*. Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2006.

who rejected the state-run musical system, while Tomoff, in exploring the institutional rise of the Union of Soviet Composers, argues that it served as a locus of professional autonomy amidst the treacherous terrain of Stalinist cultural politics.⁵⁵ This dissertation builds on these authors' research and stakes out important new scholarly territory. Centering on a slightly earlier period than Schmelz, it compliments his work temporally while pushing further on the issue of censorship through its focus on the practices of composers working within the official music system to protect themselves from the uncertainties of official censorship. Further, while granting Tomoff's well-demonstrated conclusions, it addresses the other side of the Composers' Union coin by revealing that while the Union was able to protect its members to some extent during late-Stalinism, the combination of unclear aesthetic standards and collectively-imposed consequences for musical missteps also led its professional autonomy to devolve into collective professional group self-censorship as a part of its efforts at mutual self-protection.

The scholarship on Soviet music under Stalin is, quite naturally, deeply entangled in questions of musical and aesthetic politics. It is thus most usefully reviewed in the context of the literature on Socialist Realism. Scholars have addressed Socialist Realism in a variety of ways. Some have focused on Socialist Realism as an aesthetic theory and the purpose it served, ranging from C. Vaughan James' straightforward explication of official pronouncements on Socialist Realism, to Mariia Chegodaeva's stark condemnation of Socialist Realism as a backwards, worthless stricture imposed on artists by the state, to Evgeny Dobrenko's far subtler evaluation of its use in shaping citizens' perception of the world. As a major scholar of Socialist Realism,

⁵⁵ Writing on the fledgling forms of the Composers' Union that existed between the 1932 decree on creative unions and the formal establishment of the All-Union Union of Soviet Composers in 1939, Simo Mikkonen draws similar conclusions to Tomoff about the Union's professional autonomy, though with far less nuanced argumentation. Simo Mikkonen. *Music and Power in the Soviet 1930s: A History of Composers' Bureaucracy*. Lewiston: Mellen, 2009.

Dobrenko has traced the roots of Socialist Realism in Soviet literary theories of the 1920s and investigated the mutually constitutive nature of Socialist Realist reading and writing, that is, the way in which Socialist Realist novels both responded to and generated the mindset of their ideal readers, as well as how a subset of such readers went on to become writers themselves, requiring no coaxing to create new works reflecting the Socialist Realist outlook they had previously imbibed.⁵⁶ Turning to Socialist Realism as an essential component of the Soviet system, Dobrenko has explained, “Socialist Realism’s basic function was not propaganda, but rather to *produce reality by aestheticizing it*... To aestheticize is to re-create the world, to transform it... *Socialist Realism was a machine for transforming Soviet reality into socialism,*” at least in the perception of Soviet citizens, whose entire imaginary consisted of Socialist Realist images.⁵⁷

Other scholars have sought Socialist Realism’s origins, particularly in literature. In her foundational study, Katerina Clark employed an anthropological approach in discovering the Master Plot at the heart of Socialist Realist novels and explaining, similarly to Dobrenko, its role in upholding key Soviet myths.⁵⁸ Turning from Clark’s more political orientation to a purely aesthetic one, Régine Robin and Boris Groys have provided contrasting analyses of Socialist Realism’s roots, the former locating them in the aesthetic tropes of 19th-century Russian realist

⁵⁶ Evgeny Dobrenko. *Aesthetics of Alienation: Reassessment of Early Soviet Cultural Theories*. Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 2005; idem. *The Making of the State Reader: Social and Aesthetic Contexts of the Reception of Soviet Literature*. Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1997; idem. *The Making of the State Writer: Social and Aesthetic Origins of Soviet Literary Culture*. Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2001.

⁵⁷ C. Vaughan James. *Soviet Socialist Realism: Origins and Theory*. New York: St. Martin’s Press, 1973. Mariia Chegodaeva. *Sotsrealizm: Mify i realnost’*. Moscow: Zakharov, 2003. Evgeny Dobrenko. *Political Economy of Socialist Realism*. New Haven: Yale University Press, 2007 (the quotation is from pages 4-5, and the italics are Dobrenko’s). Dobrenko has also written an array of books and articles on Socialist Realism. See also, Sheila Fitzpatrick, “Becoming Cultured: Socialist Realism and the Representation of Privilege and Taste,” *The Cultural Front: Power and Culture in Revolutionary Russia* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1992), 216-237.”

⁵⁸ Katerina Clark. *The Soviet Novel: History as Ritual*. Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1981.

literature while the latter, focusing on visual art, situates them firmly in the world-transforming ethos of the early 20th-century Russian avant-garde, positing Stalin as the “chief artist” of Soviet society.⁵⁹ Building on these perspectives, Irina Gutkin has argued that Socialist Realism must be understood as both political *and* aesthetic, the result of negotiation between the beliefs of Marxist political radicals and avant-garde artistic iconoclasts, developed between 1890-1934.⁶⁰

In the specific literature on musical Socialist Realism, many studies again frame this aesthetic as one imposed by the Party-state on composers. Such studies include Levon Hakobian’s and Boris Schwarz’s general histories of Soviet music, N.G. Shakhnazarova’s study of the 1930s, Sheila Fitzpatrick’s essay on Shostakovich’s 1936 encounter with Soviet “Puritanism” as evidence of the continued influence of RAPM’s aesthetic ideals even after that organization’s demise, and Mikuláš Bek, Geoffrey Chew, and Petr Macek’s edited volume on the transfer of Socialist Realism to the Eastern Bloc after WWII.⁶¹ Much of the vast literature on Shostakovich and Prokofiev takes this perspective, as well. Interestingly, two recent studies focusing on state control have also shed light on its limits. Leonid Maksimenkov argues the 1936 Anti-Formalist Campaign was unplanned, chaotic, and though it had far-reaching effects, ultimately a failure at establishing complete ideological control over Soviet music. Drawing on

⁵⁹ Régine Robin. *Socialist Realism: An Impossible Aesthetic*. Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1992. Boris Groys. *The Total Art of Stalinism: Avant-Garde, Aesthetic Dictatorship, and Beyond*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1992.

⁶⁰ Irina Gutkin. *The Cultural Origins of the Socialist Realist Aesthetic, 1890-1934*. Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1999.

⁶¹ Levon Hakobian. *Music of the Soviet Age, 1917-1987*. Stockholm: Melos, 1998. Boris Schwarz. *Music and Musical Life in Soviet Russia: 1917-1981*. Indiana: Bloomington University Press, 1983. N.G. Shakhnazarova. *Paradoksy sovetskoi muzykal'noi kul'tury 30-e gody*. Moscow: Indrik, 2001. Sheila Fitzpatrick, “The *Lady Macbeth* Affair: Shostakovich and the Soviet Puritans,” *The Cultural Front: Power and Culture in Revolutionary Russia* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1992), 183-215. Mikuláš Bek, Geoffrey Chew, and Petr Macek, eds. *Socialist Realism and Music: Musicological Colloquium at the Brno International Music Festival, Brno, 1-3 October 2001*. Prague: KLP, 2004.

Maksimenzov and extending her study to encompass events ranging from the establishment of the creative unions in 1932 through the musical *zhdanovshchina* in 1948, Meri Herrala further contends this era was marked by the control bureaucracy's confusion and ineptitude, with policy established through unpredictable musical scandals that left composers unable to anticipate the state's expectations. Herrala's perspective on the *zhdanovshchina* sharply differs from that of Ekaterina Vlasova, who sees it as a devastating turning point in which the totalitarian state finally, decisively crushed the spirit of the Soviet musical community.⁶² This dissertation follows Maksimenzov and Herrala in viewing Soviet state control over music in this period as chaotic and multidirectional, and thus never able to achieve the total hegemony postulated by Vlasova.

In an important new trend, recent scholars have turned away from the "top-down" model of Socialist Realism, concentrating instead on the vagueness of this aesthetic's initial iterations in the early 1930s and the significant role played by members of the musical community in establishing its practical meaning for their genre. Tatiana Bukina and Jiří Smrř investigate musicologists' contributions to this debate, while Pauline Fairclough and Katerina Clark use Shostakovich as a lens through which to view composers' and musicologists' mutual work to advocate particular compositional models in symphony and string quartet, respectively.⁶³

⁶² Leonid Maksimenzov. *Sumbur vmesto muzyki: Stalinskaia kul'turnaia revoliutsiia, 1936-1938gg.* Moscow: Iuridicheskaiia kniga, 1997. Meri E. Herrala. *The Struggle for Control of Soviet Music from 1932 to 1948: Socialist Realism vs. Western Formalism.* Lewiston: Edwin Mellen, 2012; Ekaterina Vlasova. *1948 god v sovetskoi muzyke: Dokumentirovannoe issledovanie.* Moscow: Klassika XXI, 2010.

⁶³ Tatiana Bukina, "Ot 'akademicheskogo marksizma' k sotsialisticheskomu realizmu: Issledovaniia muzykal'noi kul'tury v stalinskuiu epokhu," *Observatoriia kul'tury* 2011:1, 54-61. Jiří Smrř. *Symphonic Stalinism: Claiming Russian Musical Classics for the New Soviet Listener, 1932-1953.* Berlin: Lit, 2011. Pauline Fairclough, "The 'Perestroyka' of Soviet Symphonism: Shostakovich in 1935," *Music and Letters* 83:2 (May 2002), 259-273. Katerina Clark, "Shostakovich's Turn to the String Quartet and the Debates about Socialist Realism in Music," *Slavic Review* 72:3 (Fall 2013), 573-589.

However, while such scholars have demonstrated that functional Socialist Realist canons were established in most musical genres by the close of the 1930s, opera remains a notable exception. Investigating why, Philip Ross Bullock argues Soviet composers were not able to create a successful model for Socialist Realist opera because the more specific and contradictory demands placed on it proved impossible to reconcile.⁶⁴ Marina Frolova-Walker encompasses several areas of the above discourse in a brilliant trio of articles, firstly returning to aesthetics and social function, arguing that Socialist Realist compositions' blandness arises from their intended purpose as a form of ceremonial music; secondly countering Bullock in claiming there was in fact an ideal Socialist Realist opera, the 1939 Soviet revision of Mikhail Glinka's *A Life for the Tsar* (renamed *Ivan Susanin*), the very distance of which from contemporary Soviet politics enabled it to gain acceptance as no newly-written opera could; and finally, enlarging on Fairclough and Clark, arguing that as a result of negotiations extending through the 1930s between political leaders, musicologists, and composers, Socialist Realism evolved into a recognizable musical style and thus must be taken seriously as a musical aesthetic.⁶⁵

This dissertation draws on this latter trend of exploring the "from below" negotiation of Stalinist musical politics and the meaning of musical Socialist Realism and, in part, continues Bullock's and Frolova-Walker's inquiry into Soviet composers' and musicologists' inability to successfully claim new works as belonging to the canon of Socialist Realist opera. While I sympathize with Frolova-Walker's contention that this style is "instantly recognizable... at least

⁶⁴ Philip Ross Bullock, "Staging Stalinism: The Search for Soviet Opera in the 1930s," *Cambridge Opera Journal* 18:1 (Jan 2006), 83-108.

⁶⁵ Marina Frolova-Walker, "Stalin and the Art of Boredom," *20th-Century Music* 1:1 (Mar 2004), 101-124. Marina Frolova-Walker, "The Soviet Opera Project: Ivan Dzerzhinsky vs. Ivan Susanin," *Cambridge Opera Journal* 18:2 (July 2006), 181-216. Marina Frolova-Walker, "The Glib, the Bland, and the Corny: An Aesthetic of Socialist Realism," in *Music and Dictatorship in Europe and Latin America*, ed. Roberto Illiano and Massimiliano Sala (Brepols: Turnhout, 2009), 403-424.

for listeners brought up in the Soviet Union... We know it as soon as we see or hear it,"⁶⁶ and would add this is so even for students of Soviet music not raised on it, its aural identifiability likely only added to the frustration of Soviet musicians, who remained unable to make the case for a Socialist Realist operatic canon even after accomplishing this task in other musical genres. In turning to the postwar period, this dissertation extends the investigation of Soviet opera's "failure" past Frolova-Walker's provisional endpoint of 1941 and demonstrates that the negotiation of musical Socialist Realism continued into late Stalinism, with particular acuteness for this genre.

Soviet Censorship

Meaningful research on Soviet censorship has become possible only in the last 25 years, since the collapse of the Soviet Union. Though Western scholars gained limited entry to Soviet archives beginning in the 1970s, files relating to censorship were not among those to which they had access. Neither did Soviet scholars publish on the subject, due to its sensitivity. Studies produced in the West prior to 1991 were thus based on the available materials: official policy pronouncements, memoirs, and first-hand journalistic accounts.⁶⁷ They relied on careful, even creative readings of these materials and in large part reflected the biases of the émigré artists and foreign correspondents who authored them, painting a stark picture of a heartless totalitarian state oppressing its woefully embattled creative talents into conformity or oblivion. As noted above, this Cold War state-vs.-artist framework was an understandable product of its political

⁶⁶ Frolova-Walker, "The Glib, The Bland, and the Corny," 404.

⁶⁷ Policy pronouncements were most often found in *Pravda* or the specialized music, literature, and film journals. Memoirs by Soviet émigré artists began to appear in the West in the early years of the Cold War. For an example that far predates those listed in n.50, see Juri Jelagin. *Taming of the Arts*. New York: Dutton, 1951. For a journalistic account of the *zhdanovshchina* attack on Soviet music in 1948 that appeared shortly after its occurrence, see Alexander Werth. *Musical Uproar in Moscow*. London: Turnstile, 1949.

circumstances; even so, studies rooted in it can serve as little more than artifacts today.⁶⁸

Towards the end of the Soviet period, a new trend arose in Western scholarship of authors making direct use of the growing community of émigré and exiled Soviet writers as interview subjects and even participants in symposia, with the aim of understanding the nature of Soviet censorship at the time of writing and in the recent past.⁶⁹ Donald Shanor took this approach yet further in his study of the effectiveness of *samizdat* and Western radio broadcasts in undermining the official press, by conducting surveys during a visit to the Soviet Union.⁷⁰ While these studies provided a fascinating window into Soviet artists' perceptions of and recent experiences with censorship, their authors remained content to continue using the established Cold War framework, without subjecting it to scrutiny.

In the wake of the Soviet Union's collapse, newly post-Soviet Russian scholars, now with full archival access, turned to the study of Soviet censorship with great energy and a range of scholarly goals. Tatiana Goriaeva, director of the Russian State Archive of Literature and the

⁶⁸ See for example: Edward J. Brown. *The Proletarian Episode in Russian Literature, 1928-1932*. New York: Columbia University Press, 1953; idem. *Russian Literature since the Revolution*. London: Crowell-Collier, 1963; Max Eastman. *Artists n Uniform: A Study of Literature and Bureaucratism*. New York: Knopf, 1934; Ronald Hingley. *Russian Writers and Soviet Society, 1917-1978*. New York. Random House, 1979; Andrey Olkhovsky. *Music under the Soviets: The Agony of an Art*. New York: Praeger, 1955; Harold Swayze. *Political Control of Literature in the USSR, 1946-1959*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1962. Olkhovsky's flamboyant title makes the author's perspective especially clear. For a late example of this trend, see Vladimir Shlapentokh. *Soviet Intellectuals and Political Power: The Post-Stalin Era*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1990.

⁶⁹ For an example of an interview-based study, see: John and Carol Garrard. *Inside the Soviet Writers' Union*. New York: Free Press, 1990. For symposia that brought together ex-Soviet authors with Western scholars, see: Martin Dewhirst and Robert Farrell, eds. *The Soviet Censorship*. Metuchen: Scarecrow, 1973; Marianna Tax Choldin and Maurice Friedberg, eds. *The Red Pencil: Artists, Scholars, and Censors in the USSR*. Boston: Unwin Hyman, 1989. Dewhirst and Farrell focus exclusively on literature, while Tax Choldin and Friedberg examine film, journalism, theater, and science, as well.

⁷⁰ Donald Shanor. *Behind the Lines: The Private War against Soviet Censorship*. New York: St. Martins, 1985.

Arts, has sought to create a comprehensive picture of Soviet creative censorship, editing a volume of case studies in various genres and periods of Soviet history that explores the nature of such censorship, its effects on artists, and resistance to it. She has also written a thorough history of the political censorship apparatus, tracing its development during the first thirty years of Soviet power, its entrenchment in the postwar period, and its effects on Soviet society and culture, and arguing, somewhat similarly to Dobrenko if on a far more practical plane, that censorship was an integral part of the Soviet political system.⁷¹ Concentrating more directly on literary censorship, Arlen Blium has authored a pair of in-depth studies detailing the structure and functioning of Soviet censorship, first during its rise in the first decade after the Revolution, and then in its most powerful and strident phase, under Stalin.⁷² In both volumes, Blium includes a final chapter devoted to “Protests against Censorial Tyranny/Terror,” a telling indicator of his perspective on Soviet creative workers’ relationship to the state. Finally, Denis Babichenko narrowed his timeframe to a mere seven years, from 1940-1946, arguing, as Vlasova does for Soviet music, that it was in this crucial period that Soviet literary censorship achieved total, crushing hegemony over authors, while Boris Frezinskii shifted focus from the censorship system to authors themselves, narrating the histories of a series of Soviet writers, paired with the Party leaders under whose watch they were censored.⁷³ These studies have generated substantial and valuable new knowledge about Soviet censorship; however, in their zeal to lay bare its

⁷¹ Tatiana Gorjaeva, ed. *Iskliuchit’ vsiakie upominaniia...: Ocherk Istorii sovetskoi tsenzury*. Moscow: Vremia i mesto, 1995; idem. *Politicheskaia tsenzura v SSSR, 1917-1991gg*. Moscow: ROSSPEN, 2002.

⁷² Arlen Blium. *Za kulisami “Ministerstvo pravdy”*: *Tainaia Istoriiia sovetskoi tsenzury, 1917-1929*. St. Petersburg: Akademicheskii proekt, 1994; idem. *Sovetskaia tsenzura v epokhu total’nogo terror, 1929-1953*. St. Petersburg: Akademicheskii proekt, 2000.

⁷³ Denis Babichenko. *Pisateli i tsenzory: Sovetskaia literatura 1940-kh godov pod politicheskim kontrolem TsK*. Moscow: Rossiia molodaia, 1994; Boris Frezinskii. *Pisateli i sovetskie vozhdii: Izbrannye siuzhety, 1919-1960gg*. Moscow: Ellis Lak, 2008.

damaging effects and reject the Soviet past, they have largely adopted the state-vs.-artist framework of their Cold War era Western predecessors.

The opening of the Soviet archives created a major shift in Western research on Soviet censorship, as well. While not all scholars have been willing to look beyond the Cold War paradigm,⁷⁴ a number have seized the opportunity to explore more complex questions about the Soviet censorship system. The NEP era has been a source of particular interest. Previously understood as an interval of near complete creative freedom, recent archivally-based studies have scrutinized anew the Soviet state's approach to the arts in this era. Focusing on literature, Katerina Clark has argued it was precisely during NEP that the institutions and practices characteristic of Stalinist cultural life developed, interrupted only by the "aberration" of the Cultural Revolution. In his study of the fate of the academic (former imperial) theaters, Richard Thorpe finds similar processes at work, though he maintains the level of state intervention in the arts was still markedly lower before the Cultural Revolution than after it. Steven Richmond details the rise of one such institution, Glavrepertkom, in the midst of NEP. Finally, Michael Fox uses archival sources to demonstrate that creative censorship was less severe in this period not because state and Party leaders doubted the arts should be controlled, but due to turf battles between the newly-minted institutions of Soviet censorship.⁷⁵

⁷⁴ See for example the continued "state-vs.-artist" framing at work in: Katherine Bliss Eaton, ed. *Enemies of the People: The Destruction of Soviet Literary, Theater, and Film Arts in the 1930s*. Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 2002; Herman Ermolaev. *Censorship in Soviet Literature, 1917-1991*. Lanham: Rowman & Littlefield, 1997.

⁷⁵ Katerina Clark, "The 'Quiet Revolution' in Soviet Intellectual Life," in *Russia in the Era of NEP*, ed. Sheila Fitzpatrick, Alexander Rabinowitch, and Richard Stites (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1991), 201-230; Richard Thorpe, "The Academic Theaters and the Fate of Soviet Artistic Pluralism, 1919-1928," *Slavic Review* 51:3 (Aut 1992), 389-410; Steven Richmond, "'The Conditions of the Contemporary': The Censors and Censoring of Soviet Theater, 1923-1927," *Russian History/Histoire Russe* 27:1 (Spr 2000), 1-56; Michael Fox,

Russian and Western scholars have also begun to apply this more complex form of inquiry to later periods. Focusing on the practice of Soviet censorship rather than its institutional forms, Jan Plamper has revealed the desire of Stalinist censors in the 1930s to “abolish ambiguity” in the interpretation of Soviet cultural production, a paranoid inclination that led to the post-hoc censoring of statues and newspaper layouts, the sins of which only the censors could discern.⁷⁶ Looking to the post-Stalin era, K.B. Sokolov and Mariia Zezina have rejected the Cold War paradigm in investigating the multifaceted history of Soviet authors’ efforts to work with, as well as work around, the censorship apparatus in this later period.⁷⁷ Zezina, in particular, poignantly demonstrates the creative intelligentsia’s belief in the promises of the Thaw and willingness to collaborate with the state to help realize them, as well as its gradual disillusionment and alienation as those promises failed to come to fruition. This dissertation adheres to the post-Soviet turn in the study of Soviet censorship, using archival sources alongside published ones in seeking to understand the full complexity of the nature and practices of Soviet art music censorship during late Stalinism. Firmly rejecting the outdated Cold War paradigm, I argue that late-Stalinist art music censorship was a fundamentally collaborative process, drawing on censors and composers alike.

Sources and Methodology

This dissertation is based on three main categories of sources. First, I draw on archival documents found in the vast holdings of the Russian State Archive for Literature and the Arts

“Glavlit, Censorship, and the Problem of Party Policy in Cultural Affairs, 1922-1928,” *Soviet Studies* 44:6 (1992), 1045-1068.

⁷⁶ Jan Plamper, “Abolishing Ambiguity: Soviet Censorship Practices in the 1930s,” *Russian Review* 60:4 (Oct 2001), 526-544.

⁷⁷ K.B. Sokolov. *Khudozhestvennaia kul'tura i vlast' v poststalinskoi Rossii: Soiuz i bor'ba (1953-1985gg.)* St. Petersburg: Nestor-Istoriia, 2007; Mariia Zezina. *Sovetskaia khudozhestvennaia intelligentsiia i vlast' v 1950e-1960e gody*. Moscow: Dialog-MGU, 1999.

(RGALI), the Glinka State Central Museum of Musical Culture (GTsMMK), and the Russian State Archive of Socio-Political History (RGASPI), which houses documents produced by the Communist Party through the mid-1950s. Second, I draw on published sources, including Central Committee decrees; specialized Soviet music and arts newspapers and journals, especially *Sovetskaia muzyka*, the organ of the Union of Soviet Composers, and *Sovetskoe iskusstvo/Sovetskaia kul'tura*, published by the Committee on Arts Affairs (later the Ministry of Culture); and reviews and reports published in the primary Soviet press organs, *Pravda* and *Izvestiia*. Third, I draw on musical scores, both archival and published.

Within RGALI, I researched the files of the Union of Soviet Composers and the Bolshoi Theater, as well as those of the primary state censorship agency, the Committee on Arts Affairs (KDI) and its many subsidiary agencies, including the Main Administration for Musical Institutions (GUMU) and the Main Administration for Control over Repertoire and Performances (Glavrepertkom). I supplemented these sources with RGASPI's collection of files from the KDI's parallel agency within the Party apparatus, the Central Committee Department of Agitation and Propaganda (Agitprop). These sources provided a wealth of information about the dysfunctional yet symbiotic relationship between Soviet composers and music censors in this period. That this relationship was so complex is hardly surprising, given the overlap in personnel between the musical intelligentsia and their minders, much like the overlap Krementsov has described in the sciences. The majority of Soviet music censors had musical training, and doubtless some sat beside the composers they later censored in the conservatory classroom. Similarly, some composers moved in and out of positions in the censorship apparatus, inhabiting both sides of the equation at various times. Finally, music critics (usually trained as musicologists) served a censorial function in their roles as consultants to opera and ballet theaters

and as participating members of the Composers' Union, while many composers regularly wrote music criticism. That all of these members of the Soviet musical community were drawn from the same narrow pool of musically educated citizens, and that they traded roles with relative fluidity and ease, contributed significantly to the collaborative nature of their interactions.

Given these circumstances, I found in the course of my research that juxtaposition of the records of the Composers' Union, the Bolshoi Theater, and the various state and Party censorship agencies, rather than any single collection in itself, yielded the greatest insights into the nature of Soviet art music composition and censorship during the late-Stalinist period. Comparing official aesthetic pronouncements with theoretical essays published in music journals and with archival records of aesthetic discussions held within the musical community – whether hosted by the Composers' Union, the KDI, or jointly – provided a thorough picture of the complexities of discovering a workable model for musical Socialist Realism and the effects of that effort on Soviet composers and their music. Likewise, archival records of composers' and critics' interactions within the relatively autonomous professional space of the genre-based sections of the Composers' Union's consultative apparatus, seen in the light of these larger pronouncements and discussions, were deeply revealing of the coercive pressure composers exerted on one another within the professional group as a means of mutual protection. In similar fashion, the archived correspondence within and between censorship agencies, and between composers and individual censors, exposed the extent to which composers relied on personal relationships to navigate what was ostensibly a modern, professional bureaucratic system.

In addressing my two case studies (Chapters 4 and 5), I drew on the full range of these sources to create as complete as possible a portrait of the late-Soviet art music censorship system in action, including the influence of the political climate on works-in-progress and the often-

conflicting messages composers received from the Party-state, various censorship agencies, fellow music professionals, and the performance organizations that brought their work to the public – in both cases here, the Bolshoi Theater, which in turn brought its own array of consultants into the mix. In my second case study, Iurii Shaporin’s 1953 opera *Dekabristy* (*The Decembrists*), I added another important source to my portfolio: Shaporin’s *lichnye fondy* at RGALI and the Glinka Museum. Containing not only the composers personal correspondence, but drafts of the opera’s manuscript score and libretto, these collections shed significant light on the composer’s mindset as he navigated the censorship system and, crucially, on how *Dekabristy* itself changed over time in response to the demands placed on it by colleagues, consultants, and censors during the long period of its development. In my first case study, Evgenii Zhukovskii’s *Ot vsego serdtsa* (*With All My Heart*), I did not have access to such resources. However, I analyzed the published score of Zhukovskii’s opera in light of the criticism lodged against it, which yielded substantive insights of its own.

Chapter Outline

This dissertation is organized thematically. Each of the three chapters in Part I explores one aspect of composers’ efforts to navigate the Soviet art music censorship system during the period of late Stalinism, while the two chapters in Part II provide case studies, with very different outcomes, of the negotiated process of late-Stalinist Soviet art music censorship in action.

Chapter 1 opens the dissertation with an exploration of the Soviet musical community’s renewed effort to concretely define musical Socialist Realism, soon after the war’s end. Such a definition had proved elusive during the 1930s, and while Soviet music had achieved notable successes in symphonic and chamber genres in those years, which at least provided practical models to follow, the same could not be said for opera. In fact, despite the concerted efforts of

the Soviet Opera Project, no new operatic work by a Soviet composer had been officially recognized as exemplary. In December 1946, when the Composers' Union and KDI called an All-Union Meeting on Opera and Ballet Questions, in response to the shock of the three initial *zhdanovshchina* resolutions and in an effort to preemptively improve the state of Soviet opera and thereby avoid a fourth resolution, the Soviet musical community seized the opportunity to expand the discussion beyond its intended parameters and finally define Socialist Realism for music in general and opera in particular. After surveying theoretical efforts to define musical Socialist Realism in the 1930s, this chapter delves into the details of the All-Union Meeting and argues that while the Soviet musical community failed to find the definition it sought, the meeting itself was, in essence, an exercise in Socialist Realist transformation. In its wake, those involved in Soviet opera abandoned the endlessly detailed discussions of the Soviet Opera Project that had kept new works in production for years and, in true Socialist Realist fashion, shifted focus to seeing the glorious future as if it had already arrived, fast-tracking promising new operas and attempting to propel them by sheer momentum into the ranks of officially approved Socialist Realist musical works.

Chapter 2 examines the practices of the Composers' Union's genre-based consultative sections, in which composers critiqued one another's works in progress. While such consultations were nominally voluntary, for the rank-and-file composers at the heart of this dissertation they were in effect mandatory, because except in the cases of such leading lights as Shostakovich or Prokofiev, performance organizations like the Moscow State Philharmonic and the Bolshoi Theater relied on the consultative sections' recommendations in selecting their repertoire. Analyzing transcripts of the weekly meetings of the Opera and Ballet Section and the Symphony and Chamber Music Section, this chapter demonstrates the subtly coercive nature of

such consultations, in which composers, while making a good faith effort to aid their colleagues creatively, also imposed a conservative aesthetic on one another, in an effort to protect individuals and the group from the unpredictable wrath of the *zhdanovshchina*. This chapter argues that while, on one hand, the Composers' Union constituted a bastion of professional autonomy and agency, on the other, it also became a locus of highly effective mutual professional group self-censorship.

Chapter 3 turns to the correspondence of the KDI, drawing from a unique file of letters between that agency and rank-and-file composers concerning commissions, contracts, payments, and other issues related to the process of composing, vetting, and performing new musical works during a two year period from late 1947 to late 1949, when the *zhdanovshchina* was at its height. Working primarily through its subsidiary agency, the Main Administration for Musical Affairs (GUMU), and tasked with a vast array of administrative and censoring duties, the KDI exercised a great deal of control over Soviet composers' careers and creative production. After detailing GUMU's inconsistent and at times rocky relationships with the Composers' Union, the All-Union Radio Committee, and other censorship agencies, this chapter further examines its correspondence with composers to demonstrate that because this overburdened agency was so unreliable in its operations, composers developed a range of proactive strategies to manage their affairs with it. This chapter argues that while Soviet composers were often successful in their efforts to create piecemeal partnerships with individual censors in order to shepherd their works through GUMU's oversight, this necessary reliance on extra-procedural methods also robbed them of the benefits of membership in a modern bureaucratic state, ultimately leaving them mere supplicants, rather than truly empowered citizens.

Chapter 4 comprises a case study of Evgenii Zhukovskii's opera *Ot vsego serdtsa*, as produced by the Bolshoi Theater. In February 1948, the Central Committee released its fourth and final *zhdanovshchina* resolution, "On the Opera *Velikaia druzhba* by V. Muradeli," denouncing the Bolshoi's first postwar offering of a new opera by a Soviet composer on a contemporary theme. In the wake of this disaster, the theater seized the opportunity to produce rising star Zhukovskii's latest work, and in keeping with the transformative results of the 1946 All-Union Meeting on Opera and Ballet Questions, ushered it quickly through the production process to premiere in January 1951, after just over a year of work. As this chapter demonstrates, the Bolshoi and the Soviet musical community as a whole consistently touted *Ot vsego serdtsa* as an ideal Socialist Realist opera, which corrected the errors of *Velikaia druzhba* (*The Great Friendship*) and finally achieved the goals of the Soviet Opera Project. Despite these efforts, just three months into its run *Ot vsego serdtsa* was denounced in an unsigned editorial in *Pravda*, a situation reminiscent of the denigration of Shostakovich's *Lady Macbeth* fifteen years earlier. Yet, the opera's score does not bear out the criticism lodged against it. This chapter argues that the condemnation of *Ot vsego serdtsa* arose not in response to the opera itself, but as part of the unique political climate of late-Stalinism. In response to the experience of the 1946 All-Union Meeting and the fear engendered by the February 1948 *zhdanovshchina* resolution, the Soviet musical community felt compelled to proclaim *Ot vsego serdtsa* the definitive answer to operatic Socialist Realism. At the same time, to maintain the control it had asserted throughout the *zhdanovshchina*, the state was equally compelled to deny that claim and denounce the opera as a failure.

Chapter 5 comprises a second case study, focusing on Iurii Shaporin's opera *Dekabristy*, which premiered at the Bolshoi Theater in 1953 after a remarkable 28 years in production.

Unlike *Ot vsego serdtsa*, *Dekabristy* was a holdover from the Soviet Opera Project and remained subject to its methodology even after the war. This chapter explores the reasons for and nature of its extraordinarily long production, and argues that due to the importance of its historical theme, and the circumstance of its premiere as the Bolshoi's first new Soviet opera after the *Ot vsego serdtsa* scandal, *Dekabristy* became a site of intense negotiation between music professionals, censors, and higher officials of official historical memory and its representation on the operatic stage. In the course of production, the Bolshoi mobilized an unprecedented array of consultants – composers, musicologists, theater specialists, censors, bureaucrats, historians, and more – to advise it in its work. Tracing changes in the manuscript score, this chapter argues that as a result of this lengthy consultative process, the opera underwent such thorough rewriting that it ceased to be the creative work of Shaporin alone. Rather, in a demonstration of the essentially collaborative nature of Soviet art music composition and censorship, *Dekabristy* is best understood as a product of collaborative authorship, in which all concerned functioned not merely as colleagues, consultants, and censors, but co-authors of the final product.

PART I

Chapter 1 An Incomplete Aesthetic: Music and Socialist Realist Transformation

Introduction

On August 17, 1934, the First All-Union Congress of Soviet Writers opened in Moscow. This landmark event, attended by socialist literary lights from across the Soviet Union and around the world, was convened with two purposes: inaugurating the Union of Soviet Writers, the model for state-controlled creative unions in all artistic genres, and instituting a unified direction for Soviet creative production through discussion of the future of Soviet literature. Aleksandr Stetskii, head of the Central Committee Department of Culture and Propaganda assured participants, “This meeting will doubtless become a major event in our literature. We all feel... that after this meeting, literature will become different, rise to a new level. Future literary historians will divide their accounts into *before* and *after* the First Congress of Soviet Writers.”¹ And indeed, this proved to be the case, for it was this meeting that established the official aesthetic of the Soviet Union until the nation’s collapse: Socialist Realism.

What was Socialist Realism? Even as the term was brought into official being at the Writers’ Congress, its definition remained curiously unclear. Though state and Party representatives called on writers to adhere to this new aesthetic standard, they described it in only the broadest terms. For example, in his opening speech, Central Committee Secretary Andrei Zhdanov, after reminding Soviet writers Stalin had designated them “engineers of human souls,” summoned them to “know life, so you can truthfully depict it in art, not scholastically, lifelessly, simply as ‘objective reality,’ but depict reality in its revolutionary development... for the ideological reconstruction and education of workers in the spirit of socialism. This method...

¹ “Rech’ zaveduiushchego Otdelom kul’tury i propagandy leninizma TsK VKP(b) A.I. Stetskogo” in *Pervyi vsesoiuznyi s’ezd sovetskikh pisatelei 1934: Stenograficheskii otchet*, ed. I.K. Luppol et al. (Moscow: Sovetskii pisatel’, 1990), 614.

we call Socialist Realism.”² Close on his heels and speaking at greater length, if not with greater clarity, Maxim Gorky, the patriarch of Soviet literature, announced, “Socialist Realism affirms life as action, as creation, the goal of which is the unceasing development of the most valuable individual abilities of man, for his victory over the forces of nature, his health... [and] his great happiness.”³ Even the Statute of the Union of Soviet Writers, drawn up at the Congress’ close, fell back on a repetition of Zhdanov’s formula of artists’ duty to create “truthful, historically concrete depictions of reality in its revolutionary development” for the edification of workers. Further, it exhorted writers to “actively participate in socialist construction, defense of the working class’ interests, and strengthening of the Soviet Union through truthful depiction.”⁴ Such phraseology was exciting and surely inspired Soviet writers to strive for greatness, but the ideal with which it presented them was nebulous at best.

This vagueness presented Soviet writers, and in their wake the broader Soviet creative community, with a particular problem. Whether or not state and Party leaders were willing to provide a lucid definition for the newly-declared aesthetic, the hard experience of the Cultural Revolution and the state’s recent move to assert its control over creative production, through the 1932 establishment of the creative unions, made clear to Soviet artists that officials did in fact have strong ideas about what they wanted from them, and they would be held accountable for their transgressions, intentional or not. Literature was at the forefront of Soviet aesthetics and received the greatest attention, but where it went, other genres soon followed. Clearly, Socialist Realism was a riddle Soviet creative producers in each genre had a strong interest in solving.

² “Rech’ sekretaria TsK VKP(b) A. A. Zhdanova,” *Pervyi vsesoiuznyi s’ezd*, 4.

³ “Doklad A. M. Gor’kogo o sovetskoi literature,” *Pervyi vsesoiuznyi s’ezd*, 17.

⁴ “Ustav Soiuza Sovetskikh Pisatelei SSSR,” *Pervyi vsesoiuznyi s’ezd*, 712.

In response to this difficulty, over the next decade the creative intelligentsia set about establishing a working definition of Socialist Realism. And in literature, at least, they made some progress. Drawing on those novels officially upheld as positive examples, many of which also achieved broad popularity with the reading public, over time the literary community compiled an informal canon exemplifying Socialist Realist style and subjects, including Gorky's *Mat* (*The Mother*), Nikolai Ostrovskii's *Kak zakalialas' stal'* (*How the Steel Was Tempered*), and Mikhail Sholokhov's *Tikhii Don* (*The Quiet Don*). From these examples, they further pieced together a Master Plot, identified in Western scholarship by Katerina Clark, in which an ordinary worker or soldier overcame obstacles in a heroic journey from ignorance to socialist consciousness.⁵ This plot transferred relatively directly to genres like drama and film, in which practitioners soon developed equivalent unofficial canons. Indeed, in such areas it seemed, at least for a while, the creative intelligentsia might have figured out the official aesthetic after all.

But how was this working definition of Socialist Realism to be applied to music? If the essence of literary Socialist Realism was the Master Plot, where did that leave a genre with so little inherent narrativity? Whatever the specifics of “depicting reality in its revolutionary development,” fundamentally, the job of a Soviet writer was to tell a story. Indeed, for Bolshevik ideologues, the great value of the arts lay in their potential to educate the masses aesthetically and politically, to inculcate a sophisticated sense of beauty while transforming them from a downtrodden proletariat into well-rounded New Soviet Men and Women. Master Plot novels performed this task brilliantly. Though famously middlebrow, they provided readers with consistent, instructive, readable tales, peopled by clearly differentiated Good Soviet Citizens and

⁵ Katerina Clark. *The Soviet Novel: History as Ritual*. Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2000. For the Master Plot, see Appendix A, 255-260. For a list of canonical novels, from which my examples are taken, see Appendix B, 261-263.

Bad Class Enemies, which demonstrated the role of the Party in improving workers' lives, highlighted the glories of socialist construction, and even explained historical events from a Soviet perspective. Given this important social function, Clark has dubbed Socialist Realist novels "simultaneous parables of Marxism-Leninism and myths for maintaining the status quo."⁶

Yet, music, if it tells a story at all, does so quite differently and less straightforwardly than a novel, play, film, or even painting. This by no means exempted it from the necessity of conforming to Socialist Realism. Quite the contrary, drawing on romantic 19th-century ideals, Soviet leaders and aesthetic theorists believed music to possess, if not a novel's ability to directly convey a message, then an inherent, universal affectiveness. That is, they believed music reached its listeners by means of emotion, and that the emotion transmitted was the same for everyone. As Gorky recalled Lenin once exclaiming while listening to a Beethoven piano sonata, "I know nothing which is greater than the Appassionata... It is marvelous, super-human music... It affects your nerves."⁷ It was this affective quality, tied somehow to Socialist Realist content, Soviet leaders sought to tap in service of the new society. But while Soviet theorists were convinced music could and should take the listener on a meaningful emotional journey, its ability to do so with specificity was far more questionable.

The Soviet musical community's effort to define musical Socialist Realism thus constitutes a unique and valuable subject of study. Though elucidating the nature of Socialist Realism presented a challenge in every genre, its formulation for music proved especially

⁶ Clark, 10. In her preface, Clark also explains that due to their social function and the consequent need for broad accessibility, Socialist Realist novels were specifically designed to be middlebrow, and thus to criticize them as "bad art" is to miss the point. See *ibid.*, ix-xiv.

⁷ Quoted in Maxim Gorky. *Days With Lenin* (New York: International Publishers, 1932), 52. Lenin then noted that he avoided listening to music too often, because it made him feel tender and complaint, when history had called upon him to fight – a further testament to his belief, and even fear, of music's affective power.

intractable. Those who attempted it found themselves stranded between hazy pronouncements of desired qualities, such as the expression of Soviet reality, and overly-technical descriptions of the finer points of music theory, such as harmonic structures or the appropriate deployment of sonata-allegro form, which could never be mapped directly onto each other. The aim of this chapter, then, is to interrogate Soviet composers' attempt to clearly define musical Socialist Realism in the late-Stalinist period and discover its ultimate result.

Interestingly, the ambiguity surrounding musical Socialist Realism was in some ways beneficial for all concerned. After all, an aesthetic that has not successfully been linked to a single definition bears within it the possibility of any number of definitions. For state and Party leaders, this afforded the flexibility to denounce any work that displeased them by dubbing it a violation of Socialist Realism, without the need to explain the exact aesthetic grounds on which it had failed their test. And for composers, as Pauline Fairclough and Katerina Clark have pointed out, it provided an opportunity to claim Socialist Realist credentials for a broader range of musical works and subgenres than would otherwise have been possible.⁸ But in the late-Stalinist period, the onset of the *zhdanovshchina* changed the calculus for composers. Anxious that their genre might be denounced next and fearful of the attendant individual and collective consequences, the Soviet musical community developed a renewed interest in discovering the precise nature of musical Socialist Realism. If only they could understand the state's aesthetic demands, they believed, they could fulfill them and avoid further trouble.

⁸ Pauline Fairclough, "The 'Perestroika' of Soviet Symphonism: Shostakovich in 1935," *Music and Letters* 83:2 (May 2002), 259-273. Katerina Clark, "Shostakovich's Turn to the String Quartet and the Debates about Socialist Realism in Music," *Slavic Review* 72:3 (Fall 2013), 573-589. For the role of musicologists in this process, see also Tatiana Bukina, "Ot 'akademicheskogo marksizma' k sotsialisticheskomu realizmu: Issledovaniia muzykal'noi kul'tury v stalinskuiu epokhu," *Observatoriia kul'tury* 2011:1, 54-61. Jiří Smrž. *Symphonic Stalinism: Claiming Russian Musical Classics for the New Soviet Listener, 1932-1953*. Berlin: Lit, 2011.

The *zhdanovshchina* was as sudden as it was shocking. In a mere three weeks in August and September 1946, the Central Committee released a series of resolutions condemning missteps in literature, dramatic theater, and film, and imposing both individual and collective consequences on those held responsible. This abrupt maneuver terrified the creative intelligentsia, who had grown accustomed to lax oversight during the war. The resolutions deplored various sins, from poor artistic quality to “bowing low” before the West. But what their criticism amounted to was that creative producers had violated the norms of Socialist Realism. And if writers, theaters, and filmmakers had failed so seriously, could composers be far behind? With this fear in mind, the Committee on Arts Affairs (KDI), the state’s primary censor, which was condemned in the resolutions for inadequate supervision, and the Union of Soviet Composers, which answered for its members activities, summoned composers, directors, musicologists, librettists, and choreographers to an All-Union Meeting on Opera and Ballet Questions, held in Moscow December 19-21, 1946. Through broad discussion, participants sought to preempt a fourth Central Committee resolution, aimed at music, by establishing once and for all a precise, complete definition of musical Socialist Realism.

After three days of exhaustive debate, however, they had not reached their goal. But, as I will argue in this chapter, they had undergone a significant transformation. Because they had discussed the issue so thoroughly and deeply, the members of the Soviet musical community came to believe that they as a professional group had, in fact, developed a solid understanding of musical Socialist Realism, even if they were unable to put it into words directly. In a collective act of Socialist Realist envisioning, they depicted for themselves the “revolutionary reality” of their future perfect comprehension of this aesthetic as if it had already come into being. At the meeting’s close, they congratulated each other on a job well done, and in the ensuing years held

no further large-scale discussions on the topic. In essence, as this chapter demonstrates, the 1946 All-Union Meeting on Opera and Ballet Questions was in itself the Soviet musical community's greatest work of Socialist Realism.

Early Definitions and Key Terms

The Soviet musical community's effort to define musical Socialist Realism got off to an early start, beginning more than a year before the new aesthetic's official announcement at the Writers' Congress. From the outset, discussion of musical Socialist Realism revolved around four key terms with roots in the heated musical debates of the Cultural Revolution: *partiinnost'*, serving the Party's needs; *ideinnost'*, conveying socialist ideology as a means of educating the mass audience; *narodnost'*, often translated as "people-mindedness," providing the mass audience with familiar, folk-inflected music that directly appealed to them; and *sovremennost'*, contemporaneity of both subject and sound. These four terms represented essential qualities for Socialist Realist art, and as such, their potential meaning for music fundamentally shaped the musical community's thinking about Socialist Realism.

With the term Socialist Realism already in the air, the first issue of the journal of the nascent Composers' Union, *Sovetskaia muzyka*, published in January 1933, featured a lengthy article by musicologist Viktor Gorodinskii titled "On the Question of Socialist Realism in Music." The article focused primarily on two of the four main Socialist Realist qualities: *ideinnost'* and *sovremennost'*. While acknowledging that the question of musical Socialist Realism was "endlessly complex and multifaceted," Gorodinskii declared it an essential point of study, to which Soviet composers were called by "our life itself, which presents music with completely new demands." He wasted no time in asserting that music absolutely could and must bear realistic, contemporary content, exploring Soviet themes in particular, and possess

“connections to the socio-economic basis of ideology.”⁹ Musical realism was not a new question, he assured readers, though its correct form had not yet been found. For example, the declamatory ultra-realism of Mussorgsky’s *Zhenit’ba* (*The Wedding*) had fallen into naturalism, which lacked the aspirational quality of true Socialist Realism. Meanwhile, others of his generation had succeeded better in creating non-naturalistic musical realism, but they had been limited ideologically by their bourgeois class perspective. Indeed, as far as Gorodinskii was concerned, “The judgment of an artist’s ideas is the judgment of his worldview, which is always necessarily his class worldview.”¹⁰ Thus, it was up to Soviet composers, as musical representatives of the new socialist society, to move beyond past imperfections and combine the *ideinost’* of their socialist worldview with the *sovremennost’* of Soviet themes to create true Socialist Realist music.

As a marker of the recent transformation of Soviet musical aesthetics, Gorodinskii further used his exploration of Socialist Realism as an opportunity to denounce the now-defeated RAPM’s theory of “sonic images.” This idea was nothing but an ill-conceived fantasy, he assured readers, which relied on external factors like text and commentary to ensure the audience understood the musical message. Gorodinskii did not argue against the idea of image-based music; rather, he clarified, instead of shackling their music to an embedded text or laboriously explaining its meaning through extra-musical pamphlets and lectures, as the RAPMists had done, composers ought to think of music as akin to language and “pose the question of realistic

⁹ V.M. Gorodinskii, “K voprosu o sotsialisticheskom realizme v muzyke,” *Sovetskaia muzyka* 1:1 (Jan 1933), 7.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, 8.

musical speech, of the systematization of musical semantics... Only then can we resolve the question of concrete, realistic, image-based content in music.”¹¹

For Gorodinskii, this aspect of the problem was intimately connected to both *sovremennost'* and *ideinost'*, and further, to *partiinnost'* and *narodnost'*. As he theorized, the ability to perceive musical messages, originated in the listener's historical moment and worldview. For this reason, ancient Greek or even medieval European music failed to reach the contemporary listener. The essence of musical Socialist Realism, therefore, lay in Soviet composers enacting *sovremennost'* by discovering a new musical language that spoke to Soviet citizens, which would naturally proceed from their *ideinost'*, their socialist worldview. Though Gorodinskii did not make the connection explicit, here his ideas also touched on *partiinnost'*, in their appeal to a specifically Soviet (that is, Bolshevik) worldview, and *narodnost'*, in their valorization of mass listener appeal. Further, while cautioning readers against reducing their compositional technique to the adoption of a template, because “Socialist Realism is not a standardized form of musical creativity; standardization means the end of artistry and beginning of cliché,” he nevertheless assured them that Socialist Realist music must have substantive ideological content, if not a precise program. As he affirmed, “Socialist Realism in music is truthfulness, honesty of musical expression... suited only to specific, concrete ideas, events, themes... [It] can't lack content. Otherwise, it becomes an empty game with musical forms.”¹² Thus, in the first article on Socialist Realist aesthetics sanctioned by the new Composers' Union, Gorodinskii made clear the official rejection of RAPM's leadership while foregrounding the value of *ideinost'*, especially in the sense of concrete Soviet content, and assuring readers that if

¹¹ Ibid., 6.

¹² Ibid., 14, 16-17.

they composed with *sovremennost'*, employing contemporary socialist themes, perspectives, and musical language, the Soviet mass audience would surely receive their message.

For the newly minted theorists of musical Socialist Realism, the Writers' Congress provided little in the way of insight. In fact, in the long-form report on the Congress that ran in *Sovetskaia muzyka*, S. Dinamov did not even attempt to connect its literary-aesthetic discussions to musical questions.¹³ However, in the journal's February 1935 issue, Nikolai Cheliapov, head of the Moscow Composers' Union, used the Congress as a jumping off point to discuss, in the words of his article's title, "Fundamental Questions of Soviet Musical Creativity."¹⁴ Though Cheliapov was not a trained musicologist and his article was far less technical than Gorodinskii's, his agreement with the latter on key points demonstrates that the dominant understanding of musical Socialist Realism had not substantially shifted in the intervening two years. What's more, to an even greater extent than Gorodinskii's article, Cheliapov's was shaped by the key Socialist Realist criteria of *partiinnost'*, *ideinnost'*, *narodnost'*, and *sovremennost'*.

The primary issue raised by the Writers' Congress, Cheliapov asserted, was that of artistic "quality," which he equated directly with the question of content, a hobbyhorse of Gorodinskii's as well. As far as content was concerned, he continued, a piece of Socialist Realist music could hope for no great subject than "our great socialist construction... [which] provides exclusively grandiose and deep material for artistic creativity." Cheliapov's call for music

¹³ S. Dinamov, "Za mudroe i strastnoe iskusstvo (K itogam Vsesoiuznogo s"ezda sovetskikh pisatelei)," *Sovetskaia muzyka* 3:1 (Jan 1935), 5-15. It is not clear why *Sovetskaia muzyka* waited four months to run its report.

¹⁴ N. Cheliapov, "Osnovnye voprosy sovetskogo muzykal'nogo tvorchestva," *Sovetskaia muzyka* 3:2 (Feb 1935), 3-9. Unlike Gorodinskii, Cheliapov was not a trained musicologist (or composer), but rather a lawyer and career bureaucrat. However, in this article he does a competent, if less technical, job of discussing Socialist Realist aesthetics as applied to music. On Cheliapov, see Kiril Tomoff, *Creative Union: The Professional Organization of Soviet Composers, 1939-1953* (Cornell: Ithaca University Press, 2006), 20, 23.

suffused with the joy and suffering inherent to the struggle to build socialism, for musical imagery exhibiting “living concreteness,” was in essence a plea for *ideinost’* in Soviet music. Further, turning more directly to *partiinnost’*, Cheliapov clarified that this spirit was best understood as not just a socialist, but a specifically Bolshevik “tendentiousness.” Indeed, he opined, “Soviet art, including music, must be tendentious. We’re proud of this tendentiousness, for it is the artistic reflection of the ‘tendencies’ of the working class and its Party, with the great leader Stalin at its head.”¹⁵ Here, Cheliapov aptly demonstrated the close linkage between *ideinost’* and *partiinnost’*, and affirmed the necessity of both aspects of musical Socialist Realism.

What’s more, Cheliapov’s directive to draw on the “tendencies” of the working class was also, in a sense, a call for *narodnost’*. In musical discussions, *narodnost’* was often associated with the use of folk melodies and intonations gathered from the various peoples of the Soviet Union. But it could also apply to the songs of the working class, both those spontaneously created by workers, and those that caught their imaginations and were taken up by them. It was this interpretation of *narodnost’*, Cheliapov explained, that had led the erstwhile RAPMists to conclude that mass song was the only appropriate form for Soviet music. They were mistaken, of course, but the grain of truth in their theory was the “indisputable necessity of singability of melodies in Soviet music.”¹⁶ In other words, Socialist Realist musical works need not be songs themselves, but they must incorporate a songlike quality attractive to the mass audience.

Ultimately, the characteristic Cheliapov was most concerned about instilling in Soviet music was *siuzhetnost’*, or “subject-ness,” a quality closely tied to the requirement of ideological content, on one hand, and issues of *sovremennost’*, on the other. Cheliapov did not invent the term *siuzhetnost’*; Pauline Fairclough has demonstrated its currency and importance at the

¹⁵ Ibid, 3-4.

¹⁶ Ibid, 6.

Conference on Soviet Symphonism held in February 1935, the same month Cheliapov's article was published, which served as the still-scattered Composers' Union's far less grand follow-up to the Writers' Congress six months earlier. As Fairclough explains, at this early date composers embraced the ambiguity of *siuzhetnost'* and Socialist Realism as a whole, endeavoring to use it to claim legitimacy for symphonic music without an explicit program.¹⁷ In fact, Cheliapov, though a bureaucrat rather than an artist, supported this assertion, stating clearly, "*Siuzhetnost'* need not necessarily be identified with programmatic-ness... [Rather,] it must be the fundamental ideological creative pivot of a musical work."¹⁸ In this sense, the need for *siuzhetnost'* summoned Soviet composers to *sovremennost'*, engaging them in the search for new means of musically expressing ideological content, of which Gorodinskii had written, while enabling them to overcome formalism, defined as the embrace of new musical forms for their own sake, divorced from content.

Cheliapov cautioned that the adoption of *siuzhetnost'* would not in itself solve the problem of formalism. Nor was it an invitation to lessen composers' drive to improve their technical mastery, which often lagged behind and inhibited expression of their *ideinost'*. Rather, in service of *siuzhetnost'*, composers must thread the needle between blindly searching for the new, which led only to formalism, and blindly clinging to the past, which led only to stale "epigonism." Only by respecting and learning from the classical legacy while infusing it with new means of expression directed expressly toward *siuzhetnost'* could Soviet composers create the true *sovremennost'* necessary to musical Socialist Realism.

As Gorodinskii's and Cheliapov's articles demonstrate, the key terms of musical Socialist Realism were established early on, and members of the Soviet musical community quickly

¹⁷ Fairclough, "The 'Perestroika' of Soviet Symphonism: Shostakovich in 1935," here 268-273.

¹⁸ Cheliapov, 5-6

learned to incorporate them into their statements on the musical issues of the day. However, each author's prose also displays a reliance on sweeping statements regarding *ideinost'*, *partiinost'*, *narodnost'* and *sovremennost'*, rather than detailed analyses of these terms' specific application to music. Whether seeking to use Socialist Realism as a cudgel against RAPM like Gorodinskii, or as a vehicle for a broader policy statement like Cheliapov, or even as a means to legitimate a not strictly programmatic approach to composition as at the 1935 Congress on Soviet Symphonism, the experience of those who approached musical Socialist Realism head-on in the first years of the aesthetic's existence reveals an evident hollowness in its theorization, an impediment to penetrating deeper into its essence. To be sure, for some, including the symphonists, this haziness proved beneficial, and others, like Cheliapov, were no doubt just as glad to make a performative gesture and be done with it. But already not long after the new aesthetic's enshrinement, it had become clear that should the Soviet musical community ever deem it necessary to define musical Socialist Realism more precisely, something more than detailed discussion of its key terms might well be necessary.

The 1946 All-Union Meeting on Opera and Ballet Questions

As it turned out, the Soviet musical community was to make that determination just over a decade later, when faced with the intense pressures of the *zhdanovshchina*. By the time composers and musicologists returned from wartime evacuation, Soviet musical thinking had matured into a complex of ideas that reflected the tumultuous legacy of the 1920s and 1930s while maintaining a solid focus on the key terms of Socialist Realist aesthetics. Looking back to the NEP era, the Traditionalists' respect for the classical legacy remained firmly in place, in composers' turn to their musical predecessors for examples of rich, yet accessible style. Though modernism had long since been cast off as the enemy of socially responsible music, ASM's influence was still felt in composers' search for *sovremennost'*, for a measure of innovation, and

in their desire to write something new, but not *too* new, which would gently challenge the masses to develop their aesthetic faculties. And RAPM's influence was evident in the continued attention to *narodnost*', manifested in composers' efforts to use folksong material and intonations in creating music with immediate appeal to listeners. Finally, the Soviet Opera Project left its mark in the persistent anxiety that composers had still not managed to create classic works in the genre. Combined with officials' perennial exhortations to compose music evincing *partiinnost*' and *ideinnost*', which had become more forceful than ever during the war, these factors set the stage for the Soviet musical community's entrée into the postwar period.

However, if this community had imagined a peaceful period of reconstruction, they were sorely mistaken. With the sudden and shocking onset of the *zhdanovshchina*, the Central Committee made clear that postwar Soviet cultural producers would have to mend their unacceptable ways and quickly achieve new creative heights. Though the precise nature of their past sins against Socialist Realism was far from clear, each of the Central Committee's 1946 resolutions framed its complaints in the key terms of Socialist Realism. For example, the resolution on theater opened with a direct declaration that "plays by Soviet authors on contemporary themes have effectively been excluded from the repertoire of the major theaters," an accusation of failed *sovremennost*'. Furthermore, it continued, the few plays on contemporary themes that had reached the stage were "weak and un-ideological," depicting Soviet citizens in a falsely negative light and creating an "untrue, distorted representation of Soviet life" – a clear failure of *ideinnost*'. Even worse, playwrights themselves often avoided contemporary issues, thereby revealing that they "do not know the life and demands of the masses, and are unable to depict the best traits and qualities of Soviet man," which was to say that their work was bereft of *narodnost*'. Finally, in shirking such vital themes, Soviet playwrights as a group had forgotten

the cardinal rule that “Soviet theater can fulfill its important role in educating workers only when it actively propagandizes the politics of the Soviet state.” In other words, they had committed the final transgression of lacking *partiinnost*.¹⁹ This usage of Socialist Realist categories in the three *zhdanovshchina* resolutions was easily discernible to those who knew to look for it, including Soviet composers. Alerted by the resolutions’ severity and rapid succession that an ill wind might soon blow their way, if they were not able to guess what might trigger its coming, they could at least discern the issues with which they could expect to be confronted.

Ultimately, the final *zhdanovshchina* resolution on music did not arrive until February 1948, nearly a year and a half after the others. But rather than passively wait, the Soviet musical community, including its censors in the KDI, which had been criticized in the resolution on theater for negligent oversight, decided to take action. Predicting that opera, as the musical genre most closely related to literature, theater, and film, would be the Central Committee’s next target, the KDI and Composers’ Union convened the All-Union Meeting on Opera and Ballet Questions. The meeting’s official purpose, as KDI Chair Mikhail Khrapchenko announced at its beginning, was “to discuss issues of opera theaters’ repertoire and creation of new operas and ballets on contemporary Soviet themes.”²⁰ And indeed, participants considered these issues at length. However, from the start, their discussion also ranged further afield, touching frequently on the *zhdanovshchina* resolutions and the attendant issues of musical Socialist Realism. From major creative voices like Bolshoi Theater Director Fedor Bondarenko, who remarked, “We need hardly prove the Central Committee resolutions on literature, theater, and film apply in full

¹⁹ “Postanovlenie Orgbiuro TsK VKP(b) ‘O repertuare dramaticheskikh teatrov i merakh po ego uluchsheniiu,’ 26 avgusta 194 g.” in Andrei Artizov and Oleg Naumov, eds. *Vlast’ i khudozhestvennaia intelligentsiia: Dokumenty TsK RKP(b)-VChK-OGPU-NKVD o kul’turnoi politike, 1917-1953gg* (Moscow: Demokratiia, 1999), 591-593.

²⁰ RGALI, f.962 (Komitet po delam iskusstv), op.11, d.480, l.1

measure to Soviet music theater,” to obscure regional representatives like Ismail Idaiat-Zade, director of Azerbaijan’s Akhundov Opera Theater, who noted nervously, “The Resolution [on theater] doesn’t mention opera. But we know it affects us equally... [and] we must draw the necessary conclusions,” those in attendance expressed their anxiousness to overcome whatever flaws the Central Committee might find in their creative genre and thereby preempt a fourth resolution.²¹ Lest there be any doubt, Khrapchenko affirmed the correctness of their efforts, warning darkly, “Probably some here think since they haven’t been mentioned in the resolutions, they can live serenely. That’s a mistake, for they may yet be mentioned.”²²

In his opening speech, Khrapchenko reminded participants opera was “one of the most backward areas of Soviet art” and urged them to apply their utmost strength to its immediate improvement, taking the resolution on theater as their starting point.²³ The first two rapporteurs hewed to the script in adopting Khrapchenko’s concrete approach. Speaking first, KDI deputy chair Vladimir Surin gave an exhaustive run-down of the repertoires of not only the central, Union-level theaters – the Bolshoi, Kirov, Malegot, and Stanislavskii-Nemirovich-Danchenko (SND) – but also the opera houses of the national republics, whose representatives were in attendance.²⁴ Following his lead, musicologist Aleksandr Shaverdian then provided in-depth analyses of four recent works: Sergei Prokofiev’s *Voina i mir (War and Peace)*, Part One of

²¹ RGALI, f.962, op.3, d.1551, l.2 (Bondarenko), 85-86 (Idaiat-Zade).

²² RGALI, f.962, op.3, d.1554, d.20.

²³ RGALI, f.962, op.11, d.480, l.1

²⁴ The independent Stanislavskii-Nemirovich-Danchenko Theater was created in 1941, through the union of the Stanislavskii Opera Studio, attached to the Bolshoi Theater, and the Nemirovich-Danchenko Music Studio, attached to the Moscow Art Theater. Both studios were created shortly after the October Revolution, with the goal of applying the realistic acting techniques pioneered by Konstantin Stanislavskii and Vladimir Nemirovich-Danchenko at the Moscow Art Theater, which they co-established in 1898, to opera. First the studios, then the stand-alone theater, were considered “laboratories” for new Soviet operas, Muscovite counterparts to Malegot in Leningrad.

which premiered the previous summer; Ivan Dzerzhinskii's *Nadezhda Svetlova*, which premiered in 1943; Marian Koval's *Sevastopol'tsy*, which premiered just weeks earlier; and Vladimir Enke's *Liubov' Iarovaia*, which was still in production, assessing their merits and shortcomings as Soviet operas.

But it was the third report, delivered by critic Iurii Slonimskii on Soviet ballet, that ultimately set the meeting's tone. Eschewing specific works, after a brief retrospective glance Slonimskii spoke instead of the future, of what Soviet ballet *ought* to be, what aesthetic qualities it must possess to become worthy of the new culture and its citizens. He averred, "Ballet is kindred more to music than drama. Such dances are lively, rich in content, expressive and truthful, for all their seeming abstraction," and noted that to create such meaningful works, "We need innovators, armed with knowledge and understanding of the most complex processes of reality, able to realize in choreographic images our new life, in a new fashion."²⁵ Over the next two days, this broader line of aesthetic discussion proved far more appealing to participants than a mere consultation on current repertoire. As they worked their way through the familiar and frustrating terms *partiinnost'*, *ideinnost'*, *narodnost'*, and *sovremennost'*, their speeches frequently descended into the performative and declamatory. But behind such grandstanding, participants sought through thorough discussion to finally establish concrete meanings for the aspects of musical Socialist Realism, to at last understand how to create the operas and ballets the Party demanded and thereby preempt a fourth *zhdanovshchina* resolution.

The KDI leadership fought this trend; early in the second session, vice-chair Ivan Anisimov complained, "Our discussion isn't proceeding correctly... It's not much to talk about

²⁵ Iurii Slonimskii, "Sovremennost' i sovetskii balet," *Sovetskaia muzyka* 15:1 (Jan 1947), 29, 31. Slonimskii's and Shaverdian's reports were not preserved in the archival record, so I rely in this chapter on their published versions.

what we want. We must try more boldly to discover the reasons preventing Soviet opera from achieving the necessary greatness.”²⁶ What Anisimov had in mind was a discussion of procedural hindrances, insufficiencies in the work of composers and theaters. And participants did address these issues to some extent. But as soon became clear, under pressure from the *zhdanovshchina*, they preferred to debate the problem of Soviet opera in more abstract aesthetic terms. In effect, participants transformed the 1946 All-Union Meeting on Opera and Ballet Questions into a forum for defining musical Socialist Realism.

Partiinost’

Khrapchenko’s instruction that the meeting be guided by the Central Committee resolution on theater served to open the topic of *partiinost’*. After all, what better way to demonstrate one’s mindfulness of and service to the Party than by focusing on how to fulfill its directives? In his report, Surin pushed this point explicitly, declaring,

The great, responsible tasks set before Soviet art and literature by the Central Committee received a broad response... among workers on the ideological front... Each creative worker, to the extent of his strength and talent, now labors for a high ideological, and artistic level in Soviet art... In the resolutions... we [find] a complete program for purposeful creative activity... These tasks, the active incursion of art into all aspects of Soviet life, must direct the work of Soviet opera theaters.²⁷

As a corollary, Surin raised a point that had been a sore spot for Soviet opera workers for more than a decade: the failure of Soviet opera to generate masterworks equal to those produced in purely instrumental genres. “If in symphony and chamber music we can speak of leading achievements,” he said with disappointment, “in opera we still haven’t received broad recognition and sharply lag behind the general ideological and artistic level of Soviet musical culture.”²⁸ He reminded participants that in January 1936, after praising Dzerzhinskii’s *Tikhii*

²⁶ RGALI, f.962, op.3, d.1552, l.25.

²⁷ RGALI, f.962, op.11, d.480, ll.4-5.

²⁸ Ibid, l.8.

Don, Stalin had called for the immediate creation of new Soviet operatic classics surpassing those of Russia's 19th century masters, a challenge composers and theaters had yet to meet.

On this point, Surin tipped his hand ever so slightly. As Frolova-Walker has noted, Soviet composers had little respect for Dzerzhinskii's "masterpiece," which would never have been considered as such were it not for Stalin's intervention and its proximity to the near-simultaneous *Lady Macbeth* scandal, which effectively positioned the two works as positive and negative poles of Soviet operatic creativity.²⁹ Indeed, at the time of its premiere, Dzerzhinskii was famously on the verge of being expelled from the conservatory and only completed the opera with substantial help from his teacher, Shostakovich.³⁰ Even Surin had to admit, "*Tikhii Don* was an immense credit to Dzerzhinskii in principle... despite its technical immaturity."³¹ Yet, though no one would suggest this overly simple song-opera as a model, it was the only confirmed success to date, and thus a factor with which the meeting's participants had to contend.

Though Surin, and Shaverdian after him, assured the assembly they had no doubt that Soviet opera, guided by the Central Committee resolutions, would soon attain the heights already reached by symphony, chamber music, and even oratorio, the fear that this was not the case, that Soviet opera and ballet suffered from a fatal inability to definitively manifest *partiinnost'*, clearly haunted participants. Identifying the traits that imbued opera with such unique possibilities and challenges, Kirov Theater director Boris Khaikin mused, "In chamber, instrumental, symphonic, choral, and song music, Soviet composers have reached a high level... But opera is the sum of all these elements... If we add the mighty achievements of Soviet dramaturgy... we have all the

²⁹ Frolova-Walker, "The Soviet Opera Project: Ivan Dzerzhinsky vs. Ivan Susanin" *Cambridge Opera Journal* 18:2 (July 2006), 181-216.

³⁰ Laurel Fay. *Shostakovich: A Life* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000), 78.

³¹ *Ibid.*, 1.30.

elements necessary to create Soviet musical theater, only they must be concentrated.”³² How to bring this concentration to fruition was far from clear; Khaikin could only conclude with strained optimism that the Central Committee’s harsh rebukes “set before us goals that testify to the Party and *narod*’s belief in us as fiery artists of the Great Stalinist Epoch.”³³

For his part, Savelii Khodes, director of the Molotov Opera Theater, asserted with confidence that his theater had already fulfilled the Party’s demands with its latest production, Koval’s *Sevastopol’tsy*. With great satisfaction, he read letters from the local audience dubbing the production a “bright, truthful answer... to the historic Central Committee resolutions on ideological work, a bright victory for Soviet music.”³⁴ Yet, even if other participants accepted this affirmation of *partinost*, it remained unclear in what precisely *Sevastopol’tsy*’s *partinost* consisted. Furthermore, many argued, such declarations of mastery, of an individual work having solved all the problems of Soviet opera, did more harm than good to the general cause. When staged, complained Onisim Bron of the Belarus Opera Theater, such operas rarely stayed in the repertoire, which only added to the general anxiety and disappointment.³⁵ And even then, they were lucky to reach an audience at all, continued Isidor Zak, of the Novosibirsk Opera Theater. More often, “The expectation of a Soviet *Kniaz’ Igor* (*Prince Igor*) or *Pikovaia dama* (*Queen of Spades*), of a Soviet classic, is one of the decisive reasons compelling opera theaters to ignore what’s written. Theaters wait for classics... But classics will be created as a result of natural selection... of the staging of productions that are not yet classics.”³⁶ In other words, theaters

³² RGALI, f.962, op.3, d.1551, ll.19-20.

³³ Ibid, l.31.

³⁴ Ibid., l.53.

³⁵ RGALI, f.962, op.3, d.1552, l.22.

³⁶ Ibid., l.39.

afraid to fail ventured nothing, and as a result, Soviet opera remained mired in productions of the 19th-century classics Soviet composers were so often criticized for their inability to match.

Interestingly, Zak's commentary carried an implicit subversion. In effect, by criticizing theaters' tense, immobile stance, he also criticized the *zhdanovshchina* resolutions themselves and, indeed, the Party's entire scandal-based approach to the guidance of Soviet opera, which created the very fearful atmosphere compelling theaters to cling to "safe" repertoire and preventing new classics from being discovered in the first place. Yet, of course it was unthinkable to voice this accusation directly. Instead, Zak, a conductor by trade, blamed the cowardice of theaters' leadership, as did others, who throughout the discussion repeatedly raised the issue of theaters' unwillingness to take a chance on new works.³⁷ Unsurprisingly, this put directors on the defensive. Vladimir Piradov, Artistic Director of the Kharkov Opera Theater, shot back, "The Central Committee resolution... placed on us, the artistic directors, a special obligation to create and stage Soviet operas worthy of our heroic epoch... That's why now, in realizing the resolution... we must approach the choice of operas with every caution."³⁸ What both sides failed to realize was that precisely this paralyzing discretion was the *zhdanovshchina*'s most efficacious consequence. If the resolutions had provided clear directions, which composers and theaters could enact with confidence, and if as a result Soviet opera classics were actually created and acknowledged as such, the Party would lose its strongest, most versatile implement for reigning in composers for perceived infractions, musical and otherwise. In blaming one another for the genre's apparent failures rather than calling for clearer directives from the Party,

³⁷ See speeches by composer Nazib Zhiganov (RGALI, f.962, op.3, d.1552, ll.65-69), composer Vladimir Sorokin (RGALI, f.962, op.3, d.1553, ll.11-19), critic Aleksandr Rabinovich (RGALI, f.962, op.3, d.1553, ll.52-63), and choreographer Petr Gusev (RGALI, f.962, op.3, d.1553, ll.70-83)

³⁸ RGALI, f.962, op.3, d.1554, ll.12, 14.

musical creators and theater administrators only aided the cause of their own creative containment, effectively accepting responsibility for elucidating the exact meaning of *partiinost'*, and for the failures resulting from their inevitable inability to do so.

The frustrating ambiguity of the terms in play was not lost on everyone, however. Alluding to the Party's habit of indicating its aesthetic preferences through negative examples, and the collective anxiety this caused, director Pavel Markov noted, "From the moment of the Central Committee resolution... each of us has suffered from its sharpness, complexity, depth. I don't want to talk about guilt... We know very well the guilt of every worker in Soviet opera... Still, many unresolved questions remain... Much more has been said about what not to stage than what to stage."³⁹ K. Vladimirov, head of the Bolshoi's creative shop, shared his confusion, adding, "What's expected from us is not an improvement in the state of theater and music described in the Resolution, but the most serious reconstruction... [But] it's very hard to define what will be reconstructed and how."⁴⁰ Khrapchenko had no patience with this line of discussion. Affirming Markov's note that the poor state of Soviet opera was a matter of communal guilt, he fumed that while it might be true, as some asserted, that plenty of operas were being composed,

If you sort through all that's written, you'll find... little to nothing worth staging. What can be staged is already being staged. Theaters... think, nothing will come of Soviet opera, let's go back to the classics, and composers think, nothing will come of opera [as a genre], let's write symphonies... Soviet music can't be full-value while it hasn't mastered opera... Theaters and composers can make a great contribution... But only with an understanding of the tasks before music theater, with intense creative energy and a self-critical relationship to work, which many haven't achieved.⁴¹

Khrapchenko's implication was unmistakable: theaters and composers were at fault not only for producing substandard work, but for giving up too easily, abandoning their duty to the Party and

³⁹ RGALI, f.962, op.3, d.1552, l.26.

⁴⁰ RGALI, f.962, op.3, d.1554, l.2.

⁴¹ Ibid., ll.32-35.

the Soviet people, because they found it too onerous to fulfill. Those who failed to grasp what the Party now demanded of them, to fully comprehend the meaning of *partiinnost'* as a Socialist Realist value, only revealed their own lack of effort and introspection. Truly great Soviet artists, suggested Khrapchenko, would seek and find the answer to this dilemma.

In casting blame for the failures of Soviet opera, there was plenty to go around. When he opened the meeting, Khrapchenko had noted mildly enough that the creation of Soviet opera was a mutual task, and “We must achieve the establishment of creative contact between opera theaters and composers, without which the growth of Soviet opera is unthinkable.”⁴² But in the first report, Surin adopted a much firmer and broader approach. He demonstrated appropriate self-criticism by admitting the KDI had fallen short of its duty to vigilantly ensure composers and theaters maintained a high standard of production, while also castigating the Composers’ Union for not directing its members and local branches to engage in more thorough creative discussions – a laughable proposition, given that many local unions consisted of only a handful of members – and critics for not hashing out such issues in review and articles in the specialized press for readers’ edification. Still, he reserved his harshest criticism for theaters, which, he claimed, wasted enormous resources and endless rehearsal time on a small number of needlessly lavish productions of Russian and Western classics, leaving the talents of most of their bloated roster of performers to wither for lack of use. Because “Nearly the whole history of classical opera teaches us that composers created their works in immediate and close contact with theaters, which gave a great boost to authors’ creative experience and knowledge of the laws of the stage,”⁴³ the KDI now resolved to remedy this situation by granting theaters broader latitude in commissioning new works. This newfound power, of course, brought with it a greater

⁴² RGALI, f.962, op.11, d.480, l.1.

⁴³ Ibid., l.29.

responsibility, should such works fail to pass muster. Glossing over this difficulty, Surin voiced a final admonition that “Theater workers and the whole creative collective must become the best friends and companions of composers in the mutual affair of constructing Soviet operatic culture,”⁴⁴ and expressed his certainty that both groups would soon fulfill their *partiinyi* duty.

Theaters, of course, bristled at this portrait of their extravagance and creative blindness. Bolshoi director Fedor Bondarenko pointedly returned to the idea that the reformation of Soviet opera was a problem to be collectively tackled by “workers in opera and ballet theaters of all ranks and categories, as well as composers, librettists, musicologists, critics, the Composers’ Union’s orgkom, and the KDI.”⁴⁵ While allowing his theater could improve its work with composers, he asserted they had already made substantial inroads in doing so. Unfortunately, the two examples he cited were the theater’s renewed push on Iurii Shaporin’s *Dekabristy* (*The Decembrists*), which had lingered in its repertoire plan for sixteen years already and was not to premiere for another seven (see Chapter 5), and its work with composer Vano Muradeli and librettist Georgii Mdivani on *Chrezvychainyi komissar* (*The Extraordinary Commissar*), which was soon to become the infamous *Velikaia druzhba* (*The Great Friendship*) and cost Bondarenko his job (see below). Boris Khaikin, director of the Kirov Theater, was similarly defensive, arguing that while Surin was correct that Soviet theaters produced fewer operas per year than their pre-revolutionary counterparts, his comparison was functionally invalid, because “Pre-revolutionary productions... lacked any ideological content and were, in substance, costumed concerts, in which the elements of performance achieved no harmony. After our great teacher, Stanislavskii, showed us how to work on opera... we can’t return to the old ways.”⁴⁶ Konstantin

⁴⁴ Ibid., 1.59.

⁴⁵ RGALI, f.962, op.3, d.1551, 1.3.

⁴⁶ Ibid., 1.23.

Stanislavskii, of course, had in the waning days of Imperial Russia co-founded the realist acting method that became the basis of all Soviet stage technique, dramatic and operatic, and which involved a notoriously slow process of developing characters and scenic action. By referencing him, Khaikin hoped to safely reframe Surin's complaints of slow production times as a matter of necessary deliberateness in attending to professional duty and high artistic quality. Like Bondarenko, he bolstered this assertion by sharing his ambitious plans for the Kirov's upcoming work with composers on new Soviet operas.

In fact, listing such current and near-future collaborations proved a popular strategy among theater directors seeking to demonstrate their adherence to Party directives. Further, representatives of peripheral theaters seized the opportunity to voice their particular concerns. For example, in touting the Molotov Theater's work on *Sevastopol'tsy*, Khodes noted not only the collaborative participation of theater workers and authors, but also of officials from the local obkom and gorkom, which "enabled us to periodically verify our work through critical analysis... [and] each time placed new tasks before the theater's leadership, composer, librettists, director and conductor."⁴⁷ Presumably, this method did little to hastened the production clock, but it had aided a successful premiere, which, he asserted, "affirms the right of peripheral theaters to be given broader possibilities to create [new] repertoire."⁴⁸ Noting bitterly that critics, the Composers' Union, and the Union-level KDI generally ignored the periphery, Khodes pushed for more funding, greater incentives, and more equitable distribution of qualified performers, and asked the KDI to commission works specifically for peripheral theaters. In a similar vein, Novosibirsk's Zak complained his theater had trouble even finding out about new operas, or obtaining scores and parts when they did. He lamented that if by some miracle a composer were

⁴⁷ RGALI, f.962, op.3, d.1551, l.50.

⁴⁸ Ibid., l.57.

willing to leave the center to work in Novosibirsk on a new production, they might have to turn down the opportunity for lack of skilled performers – a deficit he, too, blamed on the KDI.⁴⁹ Finally, Piradov proudly pointed out that, to secure high-quality new Soviet operas, the Kharkov Theater had convened a group of composers, librettists, and theater workers “not only to fulfill commissions... but to follow and control their creation.”⁵⁰ He described this collective as a “creative laboratory,” a role Malegot and the SND Theater were supposed to play in the center, though their failure to do so adequately motivated several speakers to call for creation of an independent, dedicated institution to do take over from them.

Following Surin’s lead, the meeting’s participants gleefully embarked on blaming one another for Soviet opera’s failures. Bondarenko suggested if the KDI was so concerned about theaters staging more new operas, perhaps it ought to check its own records to verify how many of its commissions had actually been completed. Malegot’s Goriainov seconded this position, adding that his theater was limited in its ability to negotiate its own commissions because “the KDI has established tariffs: the Bolshoi has the right to pay so much, the Kirov so much, etc. So, some comrades, despite their interest in working with [us], think... they should go where they pay more.”⁵¹ The Composers’ Union was also the target of criticism, with composer Vladimir Fere expressing embarrassment the main branch in Moscow had not known about *Sevastopol’tsy*’s success in Molotov. And critics fared no better. In his report, Shaverdian admonished, “In recent years, critics have literally proceeded straight past everything happening in opera. It’ll be hard for those studying the history of Soviet opera to understand why critics

⁴⁹ RGALI, f.962, op.3, d.1552, ll.36-45.

⁵⁰ RGALI, f.962, op.3, d.1554, l.16.

⁵¹ RGALI, f.962, op.3, d.1551, l.41.

didn't say their piece at the time."⁵² Others concurred, and Markov noted that this was not only an issue for posterity. He and the SND Theater had poured their hearts into two recent operas, but "these productions fell, as if into a pit. Not one review, not one discussion. How is that any way to work on Soviet opera?... How do you go to the collective after that and say, 'Let's do another?' They say, 'Why work, if silence follows?'"⁵³ No one had a ready answer.

Yet here, again, the majority of discussion centered on mutual recriminations between theaters and composers. Kiev Opera Theater director Nikolai Smolich initiated this aspect by condescendingly implying composers needed theaters to create successful works. He recounted that when Evgenii Zhukovskii had submitted his opera *Chest' (Honor)*, it had matured into an "interesting production" only after much work on the theater's part. He recommended composers submit their works while still in progress, because with a finished opera, "the author loves his work and the necessary vivisection is painful for him. Later, the facts win out and he comes to a good result. But it's better not to work this way... I don't know a theater in which leading workers can't seriously help our authors."⁵⁴ Kiev composer Filipp Kozitskii responded forcefully that indeed composers should work with theaters to shepherd their works through the production process, because "even a wonderfully written opera, if it's poorly staged... can't have the success it deserves."⁵⁵ For his part, SND Theater conductor Vasilii Dekhterev focused on intra-theatrical quarreling, noting piously that the classics themselves had always created their operas alongside theater collectives, but complaining that while his theater strained to do its part to uphold this tradition, the Bolshoi, with its much vaster resources, refused to take the necessary

⁵² Aleksandr Shaverdian, "Voprosy sovetskogo opernogo tvorchestva," *Sovetskaia muzyka* 15:1 (Jan 1947), 27-28.

⁵³ RGALI, f.962, op.3, d.1551, l.35.

⁵⁴ Ibid., ll.70-71.

⁵⁵ RGALI, f.962, op.3, d.1552, l.10.

risks of doing so. Still, for composers, theaters as a whole were the primary problem. Vladimir Sorokin urged theaters to embrace lesser-known and younger composers, rather than insisting on working with only the brightest stars, and reminded them that *Tikhii Don*, with its Stalinist seal of approval, had been written by “not a ‘venerable’ composer, but a lowly student in the second course at the conservatory, who, by the way, at the moment of its writing, was expelled for poor progress.”⁵⁶ Viktor Belyi agreed, calling on theaters to “widen your circle of composers, trust them more,” because the development of Soviet opera would of necessity be a process of trial and error. “There’s no need to fear staging Soviet operas,” he assured directors. “Each composer must write his opera, and this opera, probably, won’t be perfect. But, so the second opera will be more perfect, the first must be staged.”⁵⁷ Yet, such affirmations could hardly be much comfort to theaters, which were only too aware of the hazards of premiering a new opera, and in consequence, turned to leading composers as their best hope for success.

At any rate, none of these arguments held much weight with the KDI. In his closing remarks, Surin took a harsh line with theaters, castigating Bondarenko for his “complacency” and insufficient self-criticism, dismissing Khaikin’s claim that Soviet theaters required more rehearsal time because their Stanislavskian realist methods produced results of higher artistic quality as an insult to the pre-revolutionary classics, and declaring both unsatisfactory speeches evidence the KDI must continue to strictly regulate theaters’ activity. He expressed skepticism that the brilliant repertoire plans presented would come to fruition, and related a strange anecdote about a composer who signed an agreement with the KDI to write an overture, but later informed the agency it had grown into a symphony, which pleased Surin not at all. “I answered, that means you haven’t mastered the form,” he said triumphantly. “If you want to write an overture, write an

⁵⁶ RGALI, f.962, op.3, d.1553, l.16.

⁵⁷ Ibid., ll.36-37.

overture, regardless of its quality... I think if we had commissioned an opera from him he would have brought us a ballet.”⁵⁸ How this was intended to edify his audience on improving Soviet opera remained unclear. Nevertheless, Surin declared, the center of operatic creativity must be within theaters, and after swipes at the Composers’ Union and critics, he demanded that theaters “not only attract composers, but work with them systematically... in the tightest fusion of theater workers, musicians, and critics.”⁵⁹ If only the many criticized parties would follow the KDI’s instructions, Surin had every confidence they would at last succeed in creating the operas and ballets the Party demanded.

In the course of all this sniping, participants made their collective allegiance to enacting Socialist Realist *partiinost’* abundantly clear. Yet, recrimination was far from definition, and even declarations like Surin’s that all parties must work together “in the tightest fusion” shed little light on how they might functionally proceed in doing so. Though participants understood a disconnect lay at the heart of their situation and many even had ideas for its remediation, on the whole their thoughts remained surprisingly vague, never moving beyond broad assertions of how things ought to be done, as a general rule. For three days, many of the leading minds in Soviet opera succeeded in exhaustively talking around the issue of *partiinost’* without ever penetrating to its heart. Indeed, what they demonstrated most definitively was that when faced with such an amorphous aesthetic problem, it was far easier to cast blame on others, and even oneself, for inadequacies than to identify a specific solution and path forward.

Ideinost’

Closely related to *partiinost’*, at times to the extent of indistinguishability, was the Socialist Realist quality of *ideinost’*: conveying the Party’s ideology and teaching it to citizens in

⁵⁸ RGALI, f.962, op.3, d.1554, l.79.

⁵⁹ Ibid., l.87.

aid of their transformation into New Soviet Men and Women. Discussion in this realm fared little better than with *partiinnost'*. Surin addressed *ideinnost'* directly in his report, asserting, "All genres of Soviet art... now work to attain a high ideological and artistic level. The Party teaches us Soviet art must be a mighty factor in forming leading Soviet ideology and... must play an active role in educating the communist consciousness of the masses."⁶⁰ He noted that Russian classics from Glinka to Tchaikovsky had been ideologically progressive and had favored opera specifically for its ability to influence the masses. He exhorted Soviet composers to carry their banner forward, inculcating love of the Soviet Motherland and belief in communist ideology in their audience. Despite other musical genres' successes, he admonished, "We still don't have a single opera that fully meets our high ideo-artistic demands... The main reason is a lack of deep ideological concepts."⁶¹ To overcome this failing, he advised composers to deepen their knowledge of Soviet life and theaters to stage a greater number of new works. Because Soviet composers and audiences still had much to learn from the classics, he also urged theaters to increase their performances of 19th-century Russian operas, deploring their current, limited repertoire of Italian and French "*verismo* melodramas, with their hysterical passions and limited ideas," which, though admittedly popular, played to audiences' baser instincts rather than elevating their artistic sense. Surin reminded his listeners that "repertoire is a question of our artistic politics. Soviet theater must develop and correct the listener's taste, give him maximum cultural knowledge and aesthetic impressions."⁶² Finally, declaring it the duty of Soviet opera to reveal "the best traits of the new Soviet person, raised and educated in a socialist country, to

⁶⁰ RGALI, f.962, op.11, d.480, ll.4-5.

⁶¹ Ibid., l.21.

⁶² Ibid., ll.41-42. Soviet theorists equated the term *verismo*, often translated into English as *realism*, with *naturalism*, a cardinal sin against Socialist Realism, which called on artists not to merely imitate reality, but to read it ideologically.

show the all-conquering force of the collective, the greatness of the ideas of communism,”⁶³ he demanded composers be bold and nothing less than ideologically impeccable in future endeavors.

In fact, *ideinost'* proved to be of great concern to all three rapporteurs. Shaverdian stressed, “The Central Committee resolutions teach us to view all art from the perspective of the living interests of the Soviet *narod*, the Soviet state. The Party demands from artists a bold incursion into life; it calls artists to be active builders, to educate our youth in the best moral qualities. The Party demands high *ideinost'* and efficacy.”⁶⁴ Before launching into his operative analyses, he outlined what he considered essential criteria: “What is the work’s ideological content, set in sound images? Who are the heroes? What thoughts and ideas, what new, wonderful traits does it bring to art? What is its innovation?... Does it bear a great, generalized image of modernity or at least individual elements of a contemporary Soviet sense of life?”⁶⁵ For Shaverdian, none of the operas under consideration adequately met these standards. Nor did Slonimskii react positively to the ideological state of current Soviet ballets. As with other choreographers present, he struggled against the popular belief that ballet was too fragile and abstract to convey ideology, which effectively sidelined it from official attention and resources. Slonimskii argued that Soviet ballet had made great strides in realism and *ideinost'* in the first two decades of Soviet power, but since the war, it had “failed to keep up with reality, or even its previous achievements, in an ideo-artistic sense.” Recalling Lenin’s comment to Klara Zetkin that workers and peasants deserved more than mere entertainment, he asserted, “like theater and film, our ballet can and must educate Soviet youth to be ‘bold, believing in their strength, not fearing any difficulties,’ as Zhdanov said... [It must] engrave in bright artistic images the moral

⁶³ Ibid., 1.59.

⁶⁴ Shaverdian, “Voprosy,” 16.

⁶⁵ Ibid., 18.

greatness, beauty, and nobility of spirit of people of the Stalinist era, review our *narod*'s past, and 'help light the way forward with a spotlight.'"⁶⁶ Slonimskii deplored fairytale ballets like Prokofiev's *Zolushka* (*Cinderella*) that retreated into fantasy, rather than putting forward ideologically tendentious readings of their source material, and called composers and choreographers to imbue all ballets, regardless of subject, with greater ideological meaning.

As the discussion got under way, several theater directors affirmed their desire to, in the words of Malegot's Goriainov, "resolve the great tasks set before us by the historic Central Committee document... to make art a propagandist for the high ideas of our country."⁶⁷ The ever-confident Rhodes even averred the Molotov Theater had taken a great step in this direction with *Sevastopol'tsy*, which audience members confirmed "wonderfully expresses the patriotism of the freedom-loving Soviet *narod*... In musical images it depicts the heroic days of the war, shows examples worthy of imitation, and inculcates boundless love for the Motherland... led by the Bolshevik Party and the great Stalin."⁶⁸ But others shied away from such straightforward declarations, attempting instead to make sense of *ideinost'* on a deeper level. The SND Theater's Dekhterev suggested true *ideinost'* went beyond mere depiction Soviet life. He mused,

An artist... must be unusually passionate, a dreamer. He must not only see and define events, but discover their future. He must be able, from a series of events, to make generalized conclusions and define the character of the times. He must be able to see from the external insignificance of an event its internal... meaning. He must be the most heated patriot of his motherland... What's important isn't the grandiosity of the subject, but a passionate, highly ideological relationship to it.⁶⁹

Markov, too, sought a deeper meaning for *ideinost'*. Drawing on the perspective that the "socialist," ideological aspect of Socialist Realism must inspire an artist to portray the "realism"

⁶⁶ Slonimskii, "Sovremennost'", 29.

⁶⁷ RGALI, f.962, op.3, d.1551, l.42.

⁶⁸ Ibid., l.53.

⁶⁹ RGALI, f.962, op.3, d.1552, ll.13-14.

of her subject in the best possible light, and referencing the tradition of classic operatic heroes like Lenskii in Tchaikovsky's *Evgenii Onegin*, he philosophized,

Opera is an inescapable idealization of man. And that's good... I mean idealization not in the saccharine sense, not sentimental, but in the deepest sense, an affirmation of the positive basis of life, real truth on stage, the good we see on stage, not the bad against which we fight. And that's why we want Soviet opera, because it, maybe more than drama... is an affirmation of the ideal basis of our Soviet man and our modernity.⁷⁰

In their striving to better understand the process of endowing an operatic work with ideological meaning, Dekhterev and Markov demonstrated their mastery of Socialist Realist theory to the extent it had been worked out over the past fourteen years. Indeed, taken together, their words clearly echo Ivan Gronskaa's speech to the Orgkom of the nascent Writers' Union in late 1932, which Dobrenko highlights as a milestone in the debate over the role of romanticism in Soviet literature. Gronskaa, the editor of *Izvestiia* and confidante of Stalin who was closely involved in the formulation of Socialist Realism, declared the Party "in favor of a romanticism that arms the people by giving them a perspective on the development of our society... Is it possible to idealize the people of our class who are leading a heroic struggle for a better future for humanity? It is possible, necessary, and obligatory."⁷¹ In this sense, Dekhterev and Markov even appeared tantalizingly close to decoding Zhdanov's famous 1934 definition of Socialist Realism as a "depiction of reality in its revolutionary development." Yet, a romantic, starry-eyed orientation to the future, or an idealized understanding of the human soul, while fine things in themselves, still fell short of providing actual, specific directions by which Soviet composers and theater workers could guide their operatic endeavors. Dekhterev's and Markov's speeches

⁷⁰ Ibid., 1.31.

⁷¹ Quoted in Evgenii Dobrenko. *The Political Economy of Socialist Realism* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2007), 59-60. Original citation: *Sovetskaia literatura na novom etape: Stenogramma pervogo plenuma Orgkomiteta Soiuzs sovetskikh pisatelei (29 oktiabria-3 noiabria 1932)*. (Moscow: Gosizdat, 1933), 10.

yielded no precise tools, no well-marked path; they provided only a shimmering vision and a hope that if the assembled comrades kept their eyes on the prize, they would be able to find their way to it. Without question, such words were heartfelt and inspiring, but in the end they were incapable of providing real elucidation, and *ideinost'* remained as vague as before.

As the meeting dragged on and grew more intense, tempers began to flare. Novosibirsk's Zak provided a clear example of the overlap of *ideinost'* with *partiinnost'* in defending *Sevastopol'tsy*, which his theater was also staging, in the version created by the Molotov Theater. Countering Shaverdian's criticism, he declared, "This production commands the force of great emotion and political-educational meaning." Professing his heartfelt belief in its images of Soviet life and people, Zak announced, "It stands on a unique level, of which we can speak from a Party-political position or an aesthetic position, which are in substance the same."⁷² For Zak, taking *ideinost'* as his central tenet, aesthetic value was what the Party wanted, and therefore, whatever the Party wanted must also be aesthetically valuable. If Zak's was an extreme expression of loyalty to the Party's demand for Soviet classics, Sorokin was out of patience with such phraseology. "Our sacred obligation as Soviet artists is to demonstrate the high moral outlook of Soviet man, the crystal cleanliness of the soul of our best people," he began. "I'm sure the creation of such images in opera and ballet will play an immense role in educating our youth." However, in his opinion theaters only hindered the cause by commissioning themes like *Don Juan*, already well-worn by previous composers and morally opposite to an example for Soviet young people. And anyway, Sorokin continued, the whole idea of creating a Soviet *Pikovaia dama* or *Onegin* was wrong-headed. "Surely it's clear," he fulminated,

our Soviet people, building a communist society, are in their moral, ethical, social, and political outlook much deeper and higher than feudal Russians?... Surely it's clear, to

⁷² RGALI, f.962, op.3, d.1552, l.37.

show the image of Soviet man in opera is a more difficult goal?... Tchaikovsky never knew such a complex task as stands before Soviet composers.⁷³

Sorokin pledged to devote his utmost efforts to its resolution, but as far as he was concerned, if officials wanted real change in Soviet opera, they had to change their conceptualization of it, too.

The ballet workers present were equally incensed. Bolshoi choreographer Rostislav Zakharov supported Slonimskii's contention that Soviet ballet had already logged great achievements and asserted his current production of Klimentii Korchmarev's *Iunye serdtsa* (*Young Hearts*) would have "immense educative meaning for the children... who will perform in it"⁷⁴ Similarly, the Kirov's Petr Gusev asserted vehemently, "Ballet is also part of the ideological front, and ballet workers participate in the formation of the consciousness of Soviet audiences... We're deathly tired of being discounted for the conditional nature of ballet, its limitedness, helplessness, etc. We don't want lowered demands; we want you to demand of us just as [much]... as of other arts."⁷⁵ Finally, critic Vladimir Golubov stated the issue directly: "Can ballet transmit feelings of moral superiority, steadfastness, noble self-sacrifice? It can... We will yet see in ballet, always inclined to generalization, not exactly the Zoia we know from [others'] memories, but a girl like Zoia, with her spiritual qualities... Dance, like music, can transmit the emotional content of ideas."⁷⁶ Clearly, those on the forefront of Soviet ballet were as eager as their operatic counterparts to demonstrate their desire to fulfill the demand for *ideinost'*, as well as their ability to do so. Yet, they, too, lacked specific answers to the question of how to bring this goal to fruition. It seemed the best they could do was proclaim their intentions and

⁷³ RGALI, f.962, op.3, d.1553, ll.13, 18-19.

⁷⁴ Ibid., l.65.

⁷⁵ Ibid., l.

⁷⁶ Ibid., ll.98-99. Teenage Zoia Kosmodemianskaia had been a member of the partisans during WWII. On a sabotage mission behind German lines, she was captured, tortured, and publicly hanged. After the war, she was valorized as a Soviet national hero.

principles, in hopes they would finally succeed in defining balletic *ideinost'* and earn Soviet ballet the respect they felt had been lacking.

If there was one thing composers, theaters, and choreographers could agree on, it was the need for better libretti and richer musical dramaturgy, which, they hoped, would better convey ideological content. In his report, Surin asserted opera and ballet workers needed to do more to attract leading Soviet literary lights to writing libretti, and many others noted that top tier authors were dissuaded by the small compensation and even smaller chance a given work survive the production process. To help organize matters, Surin suggested creating a special section for librettists within the Composers' or Writers' Union, to attract new and more celebrated voices. However, he made clear, while a high quality libretto was vital to success, writers were not chiefly to blame for Soviet opera's ideological failures. He noted, "Recently, it's become fashionable to put responsibility for weak ideological conceptions on librettists. Such assurances are only needed by those who would hide the poverty of composers' creative initiative... I want to emphasize the necessity of the ideological weapons of the composer-dramaturge."⁷⁷

Shaverdian could only agree the composer's role in *ideinost'* was primary, and though he called for more attention to be devoted to the creation of higher quality libretti, he did so because "of course, the one who answers for the libretto most is the composer" who put his faith in it.⁷⁸ In his analysis of *Voyna i mir*, which he considered the most advanced of the operas he discussed, Shaverdian compared Prokofiev's musical dramaturgy unfavorably to that in classic works like Mussorgsky's *Khovanshchina* or Giuseppe Verdi's *Don Carlos*, which featured

distinctive political discussions... The composer must achieve exactitude, concreteness of character... But Verdi doesn't forget the great musical task: you hear mighty, melodically-generalized waves, you read broad and passionate subtext into the lines of

⁷⁷ RGALI, f.962, op.11, d.480, ll.22-23.

⁷⁸ Shaverdian, "Voprosy," 25.

both polemicizing sides, you divine their psychologically great character. These are splendid images of a bold, dramaturgically broad, and especially musical resolution.⁷⁹

Though Prokofiev's opera presents something of a special case, in that the composer served as his own librettists, along with his second wife, Mira Mendelson, for Shaverdian the text itself was of less concern than the musical material's ability, or in this case inability, to carry it across to listeners and imbue it with deeper ideological, psychological, and emotional meaning. But here, once again, Shaverdian refused to provide a detailed analysis of how Verdi had succeeded and Prokofiev failed to convey such messages. Instead, he preached piously, "The mastery of a musician-dramaturge is not defined by means of formal-technical laws and dogmas... How is the truthful, great content of life expressed, conveyed to the listener, organized, set on a high level of sound images? That's the measure of a composer's dramaturgical strength."⁸⁰ Yet, without some form of rules, composers could hardly be expected to hit this mark reliably. Presumably, they had already been aiming for it in the works Shaverdian now classified as inadequate. Apparently, from the official perspective, the ideologically true of heart would simply know what to do.

Once again, where the rapporteurs left substantial gaps, music and theater workers stepped in to try and fill them. Bondarenko returned to the idea that an opera's music must add depth and complexity to its text. Pairing the need to attract librettists with better incentives with a suggestion to demand more from them in return, he declared that any composer approaching work on such new, improved libretti "must completely master musical dramaturgy... must approach the libretto critically, not slavishly... Don't forget, in opera the music itself is a deep, psychological subtext to the words. Even the most contemporary words can't characterize the

⁷⁹ Ibid., 20-21.

⁸⁰ Ibid., 22.

situation or the hero if the music doesn't possess the greater influence."⁸¹ Dekhterev took this line of thought even further, declaring, in essence, that the libretto hardly mattered in an opera's success. As evidence, he cited a variety of classical works that succeeded predominantly on their musical merits, "magnificent operas, written on libretti not notable for dramaturgical and literary virtue." These included *Ivan Susanin*, *Iolanta*, and *Oprichniki*, in which "many scenes in the libretto are extremely static... [But] Tchaikovsky by the strength of his genius musical dramaturgical thought managed to make them bright, effective... and highly ideological."⁸² Markov, however, disagreed, claiming instead that the two elements could not be assessed individually, not because music merely illustrates text, but because "just as a director thinks in theatrical images, a composer must think in dramaturgic-theatrical images." Raising his own classical example, he turned to Tatiana's letter scene in Tchaikovsky's *Evgenii Onegin*, explaining, "This is theater, not a concert... It's a simultaneous creation not only of a vocal image, but a scenic one, and these things can't be separated... Opera is when the internal development of the musical ideas comes across in dramaturgically saturated scenic images."⁸³

Yet, whether one sided with Dekhterev or Markov, the question remained, how was a composer to develop such Tchaikovskian skill? According to Onisim Bron, it was simply an inborn trait. After touching on various aspects of musical mastery, he asserted simply, "A composer must be... a dramaturge. No one will prompt him if he himself doesn't feel the necessary tempo, where to put pauses and orchestral solos."⁸⁴ But not everyone was so fatalistic. Rather, Trambitskii suggested that most any composer could write a dramaturgically satisfying opera, provided the subject resonated with his soul. And such resonance occurred not merely by

⁸¹ RGALI, f.962, op.3, d.1551, l.10.

⁸² RGALI, f.962, op.3, d.1552, ll.12-13.

⁸³ Ibid., ll.33-34.

⁸⁴ Ibid., l.23.

chance, but through “knowledge of life, deep understanding of events, wonderful knowledge of people, of one’s *narod*, of all the types of human characters... Beyond what we demand of a dramatist, a composer must possess a still deeper emotional perception and vitality.”⁸⁵

Presumably, such attributes could be honed by aspiring composers who sought to “know life” more fully, placing them on the path to writing ideologically valuable Soviet operas. Building on this point, Viktor Belyi brought the conversation back to *ideinost*’ proper. Agreeing that composers must have “an immediate and living feel for Soviet reality,” he elaborated, “The formation of a Soviet style of art... is impossible unless composers sense the leading ideas of our times, which are expressed in the ideas of our Bolshevik Party, in the ideas of the party of Lenin and Stalin.”⁸⁶ In other words, to achieve the high level of musical dramaturgy necessary to create ideologically pure Soviet operas, one must be an ideologically pure Soviet citizen, a task of personal construction in which Belyi enlisted first and foremost the Composers’ Union, in a clear effort to keep the ideological policing of Soviet opera in house as much as possible.

During the meeting’s final session, some speakers pushed back against the claim that libretti were of little importance compared with musical dramaturgy, including Nikolai Braun, who with Sergei Spasskii had revised the original, failed libretto of *Sevastopol’tsy*. Composers might tell themselves an opera’s success depends on the music alone, Braun asserted, but “The role of words in opera is quite particular. Every deficiency in verbal illustration, verbal sound... reacts in opera... much more harshly than in a play in verse.” Indeed, he continued, Shaverdian was right to say the composer answered for the production, because one who selected a deficient libretto only revealed his lack of literary taste. A librettist, he explained, was in a uniquely difficult position, creating dramatic poetry that could not stand on its own, but “will come to life

⁸⁵ Ibid., ll.46-47.

⁸⁶ RGALI, f.962, op.3, d.1553, l.36.

only when suffused with the blood, nerves, beating heart of musical dramaturgy.”⁸⁷ In recognition of the delicate skill and flexibility required of librettists as they anticipated and fine-tuned their words to accord with the composer’s and director’s intentions, Braun appealed to the musical community for greater respect. Further, he pushed for a revision of the commissioning system, which often set an author to work before a composer had been engaged. “How much energy will the librettist waste, how many verses will he have to rewrite, when he starts working with the composer?” He asked in frustration. “The most correct way is mutual work of the librettist and composer, starting from the first grain of an idea.”⁸⁸ Here, Braun did not dispute the call for higher quality libretti and musical dramaturgy; rather, he pleaded for participants to see librettists not as impediments but partners in the process of their improvement.

Ultimately, while this debate raged between temporarily-allied composers and directors on one hand and librettists on the other, the KDI remained essentially unmoved. In his closing remarks, Shaverdian simply reiterated his position that libretti were not the main factor in an opera’s success, and even suggested that the excessive demands placed on librettists were driving qualified authors away from the genre. The real problem, he opined, was that “composers subcontract all knowledge of the world... to the librettist.” This would accomplish nothing, however, because “we need significantly more ideological saturation than the composer can gain from the libretto... [We need] the emotional enrichment of the melody.”⁸⁹ In other words, composers must stop pawning their duty off on librettists and begin to work seriously on fulfilling it themselves. And lest librettists see in this a justification of their innocence in the ideological failures of Soviet opera, Surin’s closing words contained a barb for them, too. “Of

⁸⁷ RGALI, f.962, op.3, d.1554, ll.41-42.

⁸⁸ Ibid., l.43a.

⁸⁹ Ibid., l.67.

course we must look after librettists,” he began. “But who’s preventing them from becoming real writers?... What respect do they lack? Respect is established by real work. Create good [libretti] and tomorrow there will be respect... Librettists themselves must work better.”⁹⁰ Finally, Surin summed up the official position, intoning sagely, “If a work is ideologically saturated, purposeful, and answers the internal sentiments of the listener, it fulfills its goal.”⁹¹ This maddeningly vague phraseology brought the discussion of *ideinost’* full circle. For all of the participants’ concerted efforts to push past this semantic barrier and explain more fully and thoroughly the meaning of *ideinost’* in this context and how to endow an opera with deep ideological content, their suggests and declarations all essentially boiled down to so many airy affirmations that Soviet operas must possess this intangible quality. With his straightforward statement on the matter, Surin deftly gathered all the threads of this discussion into a neat little package, which, despite the general struggle for more, still contained only one word: *ideinost’*. In essence, Surin’s pronouncement indicated that if participants wished to continue discussing the matter even after the discussion’s conclusion, they were more than welcome to do so. But the KDI would contribute nothing more than endless repetition of the term. If composers and theater workers wished to discover how to create operas praised for their *ideinost’* rather than criticized for their lack of it, they would have to do so on their own.

Narodnost’

The third aspect of musical Socialist Realism discussed at the All-Union Meeting on Opera and Ballet Questions was *narodnost’*. This term presented a particular difficulty, in that it had two general areas of definition. On one hand, *narodnost’* referred to the quality of “coming from” the *narod*, which in opera and ballet was generally taken to mean the use of traditional

⁹⁰ Ibid., 1.82.

⁹¹ Ibid., 1.80.

folk intonations, often in the form of real or synthetic folksongs; folk imagery; and a preponderance of choral episodes. On the other hand, *narodnost*’ referred equally strongly to the quality of appealing to the *narod*, fulfilling their aesthetic desires and expectations. Often these terms overlapped, but they could as easily be at odds. After all, the familiar sounds of the village were not always what Soviet audiences, active builders of communism, wanted to hear. Nevertheless, however ill-defined, *narodnost*’ was an essential attribute for Soviet opera, which Surin, following standard Soviet practice, referred to in his report as “a truly democratic, revolutionary art” and, echoing Glinka, “*narodnyi* music drama.”⁹² Surprisingly, given its centrality, this aspect of musical Socialist Realism received relatively little consideration, compared to its counterparts. Yet, this appearance was deceptive. In keeping with the fungibility of all Socialist Realist terminology, during the discussion many of the issues pertaining to *narodnost*’ were folded into the larger and more complex problem of *sovremennost*’ (see below). Even so, in the course of the meeting, participants devoted substantial effort to elucidating both elements of *narodnost*’, as they looked to the future of Soviet opera.

In mulling over the use of folk culture, Surin contributed little besides a reminder that Stalin had specially praised *Tikhii Don*, the quintessential song-opera, for its *narodnost*’, in this sense of the term, and a stern admonition that in both opera and ballet the use of “images and ideas close to the Soviet *narod* must be significantly broadened.”⁹³ But Shaverdian made up for his colleague’s terseness, admonishing composers, “Operatic realism has a specific strength, its immense advantage over the other arts: the sound of the chorus, embodying the image of the

⁹² RGALI, f.962, op.11, d.480, ll.7, 22. The intensely patriotic Glinka habitually used this designation when discussing his stage works, rather than the more neutral “opera.”

⁹³ *Ibid.*, l.58.

narod,”⁹⁴ of which they must endeavor to make use more fully. He called them to follow the example of the 19th-century classics in rejecting the false division of music into high and popular levels and, like them, write “music of daily life [*byt*], [which] penetrates into the *narod*.” In service of this goal, he called composers to greater study of the melodic and harmonic rules of folk music and enlisted musicologists in the project of “making sense of the immeasurable richness of *narodnyi* [musical] language. Folk songs and dances... carry within themselves inexhaustible, undiscovered treasures,” which the classics had only begun to tap and Soviet artists must now exploit to the fullest. In this task, Shaverdian found that *Voyna i mir* fell far short of the mark. Though in this production Prokofiev had moved closer to the masses than ever before, Shaverdian concluded that he still relied far too much on recitative, and even his choral episodes “are extremely weakly constructed... They don’t achieve the richness of polyphony of folksongs.”⁹⁵ For Shaverdian, if Prokofiev and others wished to achieve true *narodnost’* in their operas, they would have to move closer still to the *narod* and its creativity.

For the moment, this call to make greater use of folk melodies and intonations appeared fairly straightforward. Rather than interrogate it further, theater directors latched onto the relative concreteness of Shaverdian’s pronouncements and set about demonstrating their commitment to *narodnost’* by foregrounding their current work on operas and ballets with folk connections. For example, Khodes excitedly announced the Molotov Theater had undertaken work on *Sevastopol’tsy* specifically because they found its melodic material “saturated with new intonations, generated by new contemporary emotions, while absorbing the legacy of Russian folk melodies, everyday [*bytushchie*] musical intonations.”⁹⁶ Braun, the librettist, affirmed this

⁹⁴ Shaverdian, “Voprosy,” 16.

⁹⁵ Ibid., 25-26.

⁹⁶ RGALI, f.962, op.3, d.1551, l.47.

sentiment later in the meeting, averring, “In Koval’s creativity, Spasskii and I were attracted to the deep *narodnost*’ and fruitful connection with the best traditions of the Russian musical classics.”⁹⁷ The Minsk Theater’s Onisim Bron followed suit, noting with justifiable pride that though his institution had been founded only in 1942 and completely destroyed during the war, they had already rebuilt and were well into work on an opera about 19th century nationalist activist Kastus’ Kalinovskii, “beloved hero of the Belorussian *narod*” and a ballet, *Kniaz’ Ozero* (*Prince Lake*) based on a Belorussian folktale and using Belorussian folk melodies.⁹⁸ Tallinn Opera Theater director G. Tugolesov posed the question on everyone’s mind, asking “What are our concrete, real principles of Soviet art?... What does it mean to truthfully express objective reality?” It meant, he declared without hesitation, *ideinost*’, *narodnost*’, revolutionary romanticism, and “perspective.” And as luck would have it, the Tallinn Theater was working on a balletic setting of an Estonian folk epic and a new opera that embodied all these traits, which he described as “really *narodnyi*, because it touches on ideas of the freedom-loving Estonian *narod*.”⁹⁹

In this area of discussion, the central theaters were notably silent. In fact, despite the general call for *narodnost*’, operas and ballets based on folk legends were largely the purview of peripheral theaters, where local composers, often paired with colleagues sent from the center to “guide” them, were tasked with creating a Westernized canon “national in form and socialist in content.”¹⁰⁰ Though Surin declared operatic culture in the national republics sufficiently mature

⁹⁷ RGALI, f.962, op.3, d.1554, l.44.

⁹⁸ RGALI, f.962, op.3, d.1551, ll.21-22.

⁹⁹ RGALI, f.962, op.3, d.1553, ll.27-29.

¹⁰⁰ This famous formulation was first voiced by Stalin in his report to the Sixteenth Party Congress. I.V. Stalin, “Politicheskii otchet Tsentral’nogo Komiteta XVI s’ezdu VKP(b) 27 iyunia 1930g. III. Partiia. 2: Voprosy rukovodstva vnutripartiinyi delami,” *I.V. Stalin: Sochineniia*, t.12 (Moscow: Gospolitizdat, 1952), 367. Stalin specified that while the slogan of

to advance from this practice and urged a move to more contemporary themes, folktale-based operas and ballets were far too tempting to give up, as they provided an avenue for creating works that attracted the local audience without running afoul of official politics. Union-level theaters, by contrast, faced far more pressure to keeping their subjects within the realm of Soviet experience. Nevertheless, as composer Vladimir Fere, himself a Muscovite musical emissary who co-authored several operas with Vladimir Vlasov and Kirgiz composer Abdylas Maldybaev, pointed out, even the most topical Russian operas could still exhibit musical folk-inflection. He chided Shaverdian for ignoring Dmitrii Kabalevskii's *V ognе (Under Fire)*, which premiered on the Bolshoi's second stage in 1943, noting that though it suffered from a poor libretto, it, like *Sevastopol'tsy*, "achieves great melodiousness, issuing from deeply *narodnyi* roots, characteristic of Russian music."¹⁰¹ Despite the Union-level directors' reticence, it seems the center would not yield this aspect of *narodnost'* to the periphery entirely any time soon.

As with other topics, participants who did not have specific works in mind were still eager to make general statements about use of folk culture in Soviet opera. Here, the Kirov's Khaikin did speak up, opining expansively, "We're experiencing a new level in the creation of Soviet musical-scenic works... defined by the Central Committee resolution... It's conditioned

national culture under bourgeois capitalism was reactionary and served only to strengthen the power of the bourgeoisie, the situation in a proletarian state was entirely different: "What is national culture under the dictatorship of the proletariat? Culture socialist in content and national in form, having as its goal the education of the masses in the spirit of socialism and internationalism." For more on its effects on musical culture among national minorities, see Marina Frolova-Walker, "'National in Form, Socialist in Content': Musical Nation-Building in the Soviet Republics," *Journal of the American Musicological Society* 51:2 (Summer 1998), 331-371.

¹⁰¹ RGALI, f.962, op.3, d.1553, l.6. To be fair, though Shaverdian neglected this opera, Surin called it "an event of principal significance," due to its high-quality music and ripped-from-the-headlines plot. Surin blamed the Bolshoi for its quick withdrawal from the repertoire, but it seems audiences agreed with Fere about the libretto and had voted with their feet. Kabalevskii rewrote the opera to a new libretto, and it premiered under the title *Sem'ia Tarasa* at the SND Theater in 1947, where it achieved greater success.

on immense, continuous growth of our ideological and cultural knowledge of the *narod*.¹⁰² Similarly, librettist Sergei Gorodetskii repeated the well-worn formula, echoed by Fere and Tugolesov, that opera is “the most *narodnyi* art.”¹⁰³ Some even went to extremes, like composer and Kazan’ Conservatory Director Nazib Zhiganov, who declared opera should not only be based on folk melodies and intonations, but in fact, “There’s no need to depart from folk music [at all]. Maybe we won’t write it as composers did 50, 60 years ago, but... Soviet composers must, if they’re Russian, base their music on Russian folk music, if they’re Tatar, on Tatar folk music, etc. Otherwise it’ll be foreign music.”¹⁰⁴ This was a bridge too far for the KDI. Khrapchenko articulated carefully, “Music theater, like all art, grows and develops only in organic connection with the life of the people, with the world of its thoughts and feelings.”¹⁰⁵ Presumably, should a Russian composer feel inclined toward Tatar intonations, or even a newer sound still recognizably folk-inflected, his agency would have no objection. Finally, Shaverdian, rejecting Fere’s criticism that his report had overlooked positive developments in Soviet opera, simply repeated that Soviet composers must make greater use of their *narodnyi* musical heritage, which provided far greater resources than what was available to Western Europeans.

By contrast, KDI officials and meeting participants found the other aspect of Socialist Realist *narodnost*, fulfilling the aesthetic desires of the masses, somewhat easier to address. The officials began by setting the bar high. Khrapchenko convened the meeting with a stern reminder that “our audience, the Soviet *narod*, holds composers and opera theaters to serious account.”¹⁰⁶ Surin took up this line, admonishing that the October Revolution had immeasurably broadened

¹⁰² RGALI, f.962, op.3, d.1551, l.18.

¹⁰³ RGALI, f.962, op.3, d.1552, l.56.

¹⁰⁴ Ibid., l.67.

¹⁰⁵ RGALI, f.962, op.3, d.1554, l.20.

¹⁰⁶ RGALI, f.962, op.11, d.480, l.2

composers' horizons, empowering them to fulfill the thwarted dream of their pre-revolutionary predecessors, "the idea of direct service to the *narod* and its interests," but they had so far squandered this opportunity by failing to create ideal Soviet operas.¹⁰⁷ Not to be outdone, Shaverdian followed by assuring his audience the *narod* had since the days of the *moguchaia kuchka* loved opera for its realism, expressivity, and "ability to transmit the most noble impulses of human emotion." Further, he intoned, this same *narod* had decisively rejected "anti-democratic" musical modernism for its incomprehensibility. With such clear signs at hand, he cautioned, contemporary composers must "more often and more energetically pose the extremely important but often forgotten question of the all-people accessibility of music, created by our composer for the *narod*, not for a caste of musicians."¹⁰⁸

With this aspect of *narodnost*, participants shied away from discussion of their recent productions, for which proof of the *narod*'s approval was all too elusive. Rather, they followed the rapporteurs' lead, speaking predominantly in abstract terms. The SND Theater's Dekhterev noted piously that a composer whose "consciousness is based on the principle of the community of his interests with the *narod*'s" would always find the correct interpretation of events, because in following his own aesthetic and political inclinations, he would thereby serve the *narod*'s.¹⁰⁹ In keeping with the idea of the *narod*'s approval as litmus test, Markov suggested that this also created an opportunity to make a beneficial impact on the audience and fulfill the Soviet artist's pedagogic duty. On one hand, he stated, after the improvements brought to Soviet operatic practice by Stanislavskii and Nemirovich-Danchenko, "Now there can't be a production on a Soviet theme built on old, traditional operatic conventions. The audience won't forgive that." On

¹⁰⁷ Ibid., l.7.

¹⁰⁸ Shaverdian, "Voprosy," 16, 25-26.

¹⁰⁹ RGALI, f.962, op.3, d.1552, l.13.

the other hand, by using the new methods, which more deeply fulfilled the *narod*'s aesthetic expectations, "The theater will begin to sing... of our contemporary life... so the audience will be astounded and moved."¹¹⁰ For Sorokin, the proof of this statement was in the Kirov's experience with its 1946 premiere of Prokofiev's lyric-comic opera *Duen'ia* (*La Duenna*), in which the audience reacted to the apolitical subject and "difficult" music by sneaking out of the theater, such that "by the end of the performance, in the hall sat only a few musicologists."¹¹¹

But if the *narod* didn't want "difficulty," what exactly did they want? What were their interests, of which Dekhterev spoke? Some at the meeting used this aspect of the discussion as a means to further their own particular agendas. For example, soprano Kseniia Derzhinskaia, the only stage artist who contributed to the meeting, lamented that Soviet composers tended to under-utilize soloists' abilities. This would never do, because "The audience wants to listen to singers, and singers want to demonstrate their mastery... The eternal wish of singers is that you write parts that let us show ourselves as real singers. Listeners will go where they can hear real, good singing."¹¹² She invited composers to befriend performers and learn from them the capacities, limits, and specifics of their voices. Close on her heels, Kirov choreographer Peter Gusev lodged a similar complaint, bemoaning that theater directors subscribed to the general prejudice that ballet must limit itself to traditional forms and antiquated costumes. "In new ballets, with a few exceptions, the dance language is very poor. Qualified master dancers have physically nothing to do," he stated. "They're robbed of their strongest weapon, the most decisive means for influencing the viewer, what the audience loves them for... Soviet ballet on

¹¹⁰ Ibid., ll.34, 35.

¹¹¹ RGALI, f.962, op.3, d.1553, l.11. *Duen'ia*'s storyline was based on Richard Brinsley Sheridan's libretto for a late-18th century English comic opera, *La Duenna*, the original music for which was composed by Thomas Linley.

¹¹² Ibid., l.43.

contemporary themes will only be accepted by the audience when it's danced without any discounts and cautions."¹¹³ He demanded to be given leeway to explore new choreographic language, which would be closer to the hearts and minds of the Soviet mass audience.

This critique of directors' caution resonated with KDI officials. Khrapchenko accused them of purposely avoiding new Soviet operas because they were harder to stage than the reliable old classics. "When you stage a Soviet opera," he averred, much more so than with a known 19th-century work, "you must think very seriously how to mount it, so it attracts the audience's attention." Though more difficult, this endeavor was of far greater value, not only benefitting viewers but forcing theater workers to fulfill their duty to aesthetically serve the *narod*. And just as directors must mold their efforts to please the audience, composers were obliged to do the same. Many Soviet operas had failed, Khrapchenko stated bluntly, because their emotionally inert musical material "calls forth joy in musicologists but leaves the audience, those for whom the opera is written, completely cold."¹¹⁴ Surin heartily agreed, exhorting directors to focus seriously on the creative growth of their collectives and "think of the *narod*," which, he assured them, was bored of their safe, limited repertoires, consisting of a small number of classics, often the same ones in every theater. During 30 years of Soviet power, Soviet composers had developed enough of a fan base that directors need not pull new repertoire immediately if the initial response was lackluster. Instead, he suggested, "stage it five or six times, take measures to organize listeners. Only then can a work achieve popularity."¹¹⁵

This last piece of advice presented an interesting contradiction; while all previous discussion had been directed toward composing and staging works that fulfilled the aesthetic

¹¹³ Ibid., l.81.

¹¹⁴ RGALI, f.962, op.3, d.1554, ll.24, 30.

¹¹⁵ Ibid., ll.76, 80.

desires of the mass audience with immediacy, in his closing remarks Surin appeared to admit that this simply might not be possible, that it might take time for new works to catch on, and that a lack of immediate audience response was not necessarily an indication of failure. Coupled with the significant absence of any detailed discussion of what it was the *narod* actually wanted to see and hear in new Soviet operas and ballets – broad areas had been noted, but never examined with specificity – this remark only served to further reveal the fundamental uncertainty at the core of the call for *narodnost*'. That composers must write music audiences found pleasing, everyone could agree. That directors and choreographers must create stagings the audience found attractive and relatable was also beyond question. But what the final product would look and sound like, what musical Socialist Realist *narodnost*' actually denoted, remained a mystery.

Sovremennost'

The final Socialist Realist term on which the discussion centered was *sovremennost*'. This was a particularly frustrating ideal to discuss with clarity, not least because, like *narodnost*', it bore a double signification. Soviet musical aestheticians regularly used the term *sovremennost*' to apply both to the contemporaneity of an opera or ballet's subject and of its musical language. In his report, Surin dwelt primarily on the former. Close on the heels of Khrapchenko's opening admonition that the musical community must engage in "mutual striving to create high-quality operas on contemporary Soviet themes," Surin admonished that opera, like all Soviet theater, had been summoned in the Central Committee resolution to "depict in highly artistic images the stormy life of Soviet society and its unceasing movement forward, to enable the formation of the consciousness of the Soviet person." Building up steam, he condemned the "harmful theory" he claimed had been mistakenly adopted by many music and theater professionals,

as if opera is by nature an entirely conditional art and thus is least able to express the leading ideas of our modernity... Opera, they say, is incapable of representing themes of our days. One needs some distance from events before setting them on the operatic

stage. I don't need to tell you the absurdity of such statements... this gross display of a foreign worldview, this perversion of our Marxist view of art.¹¹⁶

Quite the contrary, he assured the assembly, opera was an ideal medium for such themes, as the classics themselves had known and demonstrated. Yet, after a promising start in the early years of Soviet power, crowned by the successful production of *Tikhii Don*, Soviet composers had shied away from contemporary topics, and theaters had willfully avoided staging any new Soviet operas, regardless of subject. Marshaling a barrage of pre- and post-revolutionary production statistics, Surin argued at length that Soviet theaters had effectively ignored Soviet composers' output, admonishing that the Bolshoi and Kirov were shirking their duty as leaders in Soviet operatic production, Malegot and the SND Theater as creative laboratories, and peripheral theaters as inspirers of developing local and ethno-national cultures. Rather, they devoted their stages to a handful of operas per year, mostly romantic Western European works by the likes of Bizet, Verdi, and Puccini, with an eye to the bottom line, rather than the ideological heights. Even worse, when they did stage Russian classics, the productions were often so outdated that, like the Bolshoi's *Snegurochka* (*The Snow Maiden*), "that's not propaganda, it's discrediting." As a result, Soviet composers had redirected their attention to other genres, where they were more likely to find willing ensembles. After all, Surin retorted, "why waste time and creative strength [on operas] if the... theater doesn't intend to stage them?"¹¹⁷

Such criticism was hardly fair. In the decade after the revolution, there had been few new Soviet operas to stage, and the Union-level theaters had, by and large, produced the works available to them. During the Cultural Revolution, composers under pressure from militant RAPMisty turned their attention to popular song, and since the mid-1930s, the Soviet Opera

¹¹⁶ RGALI, f.962, op.11, d.480, ll.2, 5-6.

¹¹⁷ Ibid., ll.45, 13.

Project had mired theaters in an endless vetting process that kept the majority of works from premiering, particularly at Union-level theaters, on which the state kept exceedingly close watch. This situation had been ameliorated neither by the privations of war, from which the country had yet to recover, nor the chilly atmosphere created by the *zhdanovshchina*. Furthermore, as directors of peripheral theaters tactfully pointed out, many of their institutions had been founded far too recently to be held accountable for the failures of Soviet opera prior to the 1940s. And for Union-level and older provincial theaters, the choice of popular 19th-century Western repertoire was, if not ideologically ideal, a pragmatic response to lean times, making use of existing sets and costumes while bringing in much-needed revenue. However, the KDI was pointedly blind to such arguments. Rather, Surin painted a gloomy picture of promising our composers turning away from opera and ballet, crushed by the disinterest and rejections of heartless, backward-thinking theater directors too lazy to undertake work with young talents to create something new. Surin demanded at least two new Soviet operas per theater, per year.

Surin did find some hope in what he saw as a new interest among composers in contemporary themes, though he still felt they could do more. He cautiously praised this trend, an offshoot of the postwar rush of creative settings of tales of wartime heroism, given substantial added impetus by the previous summer's Central Committee resolutions, as well as the most recent repertoire plans submitted by theaters, which listed many new Soviet operas and ballets as currently in production. However, he also expressed concern that some of these works appeared to be under contract with multiple theaters simultaneously, which could only lead to confusion and delays. "An opera must be created only in one theater," he intoned sternly. "The author must think seriously, choose the theater closest to him, and work with it to completion."¹¹⁸ What's

¹¹⁸ Ibid., 1.33.

more, others appeared to exist as yet only in name, sometimes listed at multiple theaters with conflicting details, while yet others categorized as “new” were new only to the theater in question, not freshly-created productions premiering for the first time before the Soviet mass audience. All this was worrisome, and theaters would still have to work faster on producing the operas in their plans. Nevertheless, after such harsh pronouncements, Surin ended on an optimistic note, assuring participants, “We are approaching the decisive stage in realizing Stalin’s demands... Soviet musical creativity is now sufficiently prepared ... Soon new, leading productions will resound on the Soviet opera stage. It’s the duty of all Soviet musicians and theater workers before the Party, the *narod* and Stalin.”¹¹⁹

In his report, Shaverdian seconded Surin’s call for contemporary themes, averring that the question of a composer’s ability to “without constraining the nature of his art truthfully, naturally, and deeply answer the call to [contemporary] life... [is] the cardinal problem of opera aesthetics,” and that failure to resolve it would mean the death of opera as an engaged, socially conscious art form.¹²⁰ Fortunately, he continued, answering this question was not hard at all. Contemporary Soviet life presented a wealth of subjects ripe for operatic setting, and despite skeptics’ claims, audiences’ love of realist opera classics clearly indicated they would respond positively to realist operas on more up-to-date topics, as well. Raising a rallying cry, he declared,

The most important problem of Soviet opera is embodying the living image of contemporaneity, contemporary man. This is a truly innovative task... Let us in opera look our era in the face, show us the great intellectual, resolute, human richness of our contemporaries! It will be opera’s... part in the struggle to celebrate Soviet ideas... It will mark the ascent to Soviet opera classics. The musical image of the hero of our times is the central, decisive task defining the strivings of the composer-dramaturge.¹²¹

¹¹⁹ Ibid., ll.59-60.

¹²⁰ Shaverdian, “Voprosy,” 16.

¹²¹ Ibid., 21-22.

The trick, according to Shaverdian, was to show the big picture, the heroism and revolutionary romanticism of contemporary Soviet events and characters, rather than becoming mired in petty technical details and trifling lovers' quarrels. It was here in particular that Dzerzhinskii's *Nadezhda Svetlova* failed, Enke's not-yet-premiered *Liubov' Iarovaia* looked dubious, and even Koval's *Sevastopol'tsy* fell short. Shaverdian blamed these disappointments on composers' inadequate knowledge of contemporary Soviet life and exhorted them to undertake meaningful study of their country and its people, as well as recent literature, which had achieved greater success with such themes, so they might finally create operas worthy of their glorious society.

As the discussion of *sovremennost'* got under way, it quickly became clear that the difficulty with contemporary themes was not definitional. Composers and directors alike easily rattled off a list of potential subjects and heroes arising from the war years, ranging from the defense of besieged Leningrad to the valiant self-sacrifice of Zoia Kosmodemianskaia, many of which had already found artistic setting in the literature of which Shaverdian spoke. But a curiously defensive tone soon emerged regarding who was at fault for the lack of operas on such topics. Bondarenko and Khaikin hewed to the safe territory of *samokritika*, acknowledging the insufficient attention to contemporary themes at the Bolshoi and Kirov, respectively, though Khaikin's speech was so full of caveats it could hardly be considered remorseful. "In 1925 our theater performed one of the first Soviet operas, Pashchenko's *Orlinyi bunt* (*The Eagle's Rebellion*)... one of the best and most popular early Soviet operas," he noted. "But since then... though the theater staged many Soviet operas, this work hasn't been our first priority."¹²² Both

¹²² RGALI, f.962, op.3, d.1551, l.20. *Orlinyi bunt* centered on the Pugachev Rebellion (1773-1775) rather than a contemporary theme, but it still served Khaikin's point that the Kirov had long been an active promoter of Soviet composers' output. He also listed several Soviet-themed works the theater had premiered in the 1920s, including Deshevov's ballet *Led i stal'* (*Ice and*

directors, and many after them, highlighted new Soviet-themed operas and ballets currently in production or under contract with them, lists exhaustive enough to make Surin's skepticism seem reasonable.

Goriainov, on the other hand, took a more combative tone. Asserting Malegot's repertoire history, like the Kirov's, demonstrated its early and active commitment to Soviet opera, he agreed the theater had recently focused too much on the classics, but placed blame for this squarely on the KDI, which "persistently oriented us in this direction."¹²³ He further criticized the agency, along with critics, for ignoring Malegot's active work on new Soviet operas during its wartime evacuation to Chkalov, even going so far as to leave the theater without an artistic director for two full years, after Khaikin moved to the Kirov in 1943. "Vladimir Nikolaevich [Surin], you affirmed that Malegot for many years has done nothing in the area of Soviet music," he sighed exasperatedly. But this was obviously untrue; three of the four operas Shaverdian analyzed – *Nadezhda Svetlova*, *Voina i mir*, and *Liubov' Iarovaia* – were Malegot creations. Nor did he have kind words for his musical colleagues. "For a year, we've been trying to make up for lost time and prepare a new work on a Soviet theme," he complained. The theater had identified a subject and commissioned a libretto, but then, "We turned to a whole list of composers... Everyone refused... We asked the KDI... to allow us to hold a competition among young Leningrad composers... We were denied."¹²⁴ In other words, if there was a shortage of contemporary-themed operas, composers and the KDI, not theaters, were to blame.

However real his frustration, Goriainov was alone in his willingness to cast such aspersions. Taking a different defensive tactic, Khodes swept into the opening left by his

Steel), Chishko's opera *Bronenosets Potemkin* (*Battleship Potemkin*), and Shostakovich's ballets *Zolotoi vek* (*The Golden Age*) and *Bol't* (*The Bolt*).

¹²³ Ibid., l.33.

¹²⁴ Ibid., ll.36, 38-39.

colleague and asserted that, to the contrary, plenty of new operas on Soviet themes were available to theaters with a true interest in producing them. As evidence, he happily cited the Molotov Theater's work on *Sevastopol'tsy*, undertaken after other, more prominent theaters turned it down. Rhodes noted that though the theater had been in operation since 1870, the Kirov troupe had taken over its premises during wartime evacuation, and the reconstituted Molotov company had only begun work anew in 1944. After staging a handful of classics, however, they found themselves dissatisfied. As Rhodes piously explained, "to express the heroic traits of our contemporaries by means of the most emotional art, music theater, became a vital necessity for us." In *Sevastopol'tsy* they found their vehicle, and though others had shied away from its flaws, "Amidst the ill-will [of other theaters] toward this still not fully completed work, the Molotov Theater firmly resolved to relate differently,"¹²⁵ working together with the composer to refine it into a production warmly received by the local audience. Their experience, Rhodes argued, was proof that operas on contemporary themes could succeed. He concluded with an ostentatious invitation to composers to send the Molotov Theater more new operas as soon as possible.

Khodes' reliance on audience response as evidence of the viability of contemporary-themed operas was not incidental. In fact, audience response was a matter of great concern, though participants dared not directly speculate on the deeper meaning of the Soviet mass audience's apparent preference for 19th-century classics. Indeed, while Stalin's praise of *Tikhii Don* had elevated it to iconic status, it had proved insufficient to keep that opera in the repertoire after popular attendance dropped. And for Onisim Bron, this was exactly the problem. As he cautioned his colleagues, "The wish to stage Soviet opera by itself is not enough. The opera must hold its ground for more than one season, or a few performances... The majority quickly die; the

¹²⁵ Ibid., 1.46.

audience doesn't come and the opera fizzles." But he was far from blaming such failures on contemporary content. Rather, he blamed such opera's construction, asserting, "It's not Prince Igor, Ivan Susanin, or Lenskii that attract the audience. They're 100, 200, 300 years behind us. We can just as thrillingly depict Zoia, Captain Gastello, even a *kolkhoz* chairman... We just need to do it as masterfully and emotionally as the masters who created *Onegin*, *Pikovaia dama*, and *Aida*... If we portray the true romanticism and lyricism of our days, any theme that moves us in life will move us onstage."¹²⁶ Though audiences' reticence clearly concerned participants, no one would admit to doubting that contemporary images could be effectively created in Soviet opera. Yet this concern was clearly on the minds of those, like Bron, who shadowboxed against it.

Bron's call for a new approach raised another troubling aspect of this side of *sovremennost'*: operas on contemporary themes were a frighteningly new task for Soviet composers, who had learned from experience to avoid stepping boldly into uncharted territory. Moreover, the Russian classics to whom they were constantly referred had not taken operatic subjects from the world around them, but from legends, history, and literature. How, then, were Soviet composers to sure-footedly find the "romanticism and lyricism" of their days? Idaiat-Zade suggested focusing on massive socialist construction projects like the Mingechar irrigation dam and "see[ing] our reality with the eyes of Mejnun," the brilliant, love-maddened poet of Persian legend. Should such perspective prove insufficient, he added, better acquaintance with "Leninist-Stalinist theory" would certainly do the trick.¹²⁷ Markov picked up this line, offering the

¹²⁶ RGALI, f.962, op.3, d.1552, ll.22-23. Interestingly, the characters and operas in Bron's speech do not entirely line up. Prince Igor is the hero of an eponymous work by Aleksandr Borodin, Ivan Susanin is the hero of Mikhail Glinka's *Zhizn' za tsaria* (*A Life for the Tsar*, renamed *Ivan Susanin* in its Soviet revision, to foreground the popular hero), and Lenskii is the hero of Petr Tchaikovsky's *Evgenii Onegin*. Equivalent characters in *Pikovaia dama* and *Aida* would be German and Radames, respectively.

¹²⁷ RGALI, f.962, op.3, d.1551, ll.83, 85.

assurance that though the classics had not written about their times, Soviet composers could, because “We live in a different epoch, more musical because it’s heroic... If Tchaikovsky needed to seek Tatiana in Pushkin, we don’t... because we have Zoia.”¹²⁸ And if Soviet life was not actually always heroic, if Soviet citizens were not actually always Zoias, Zhiganov chimed in, “We must look at Soviet life more deeply and poetically... The theater must depict Soviet reality maybe not as we sometimes see it. The artist must find the colors to poeticize it.”¹²⁹

Indeed, this quality of vision, of seeing contemporary Soviet life not as it was, in its mundane actuality, but as it surely must become, in its overarching heroic future greatness, was central to Socialist Realist aesthetics, and participants clung to the idea of it in their fervent attempt to define a framework for setting Soviet themes in operas that thrilled audiences and satisfied officials. In delving into this issue, discussants turned to a closely correlated Socialist Realist concept, the *generalized image*, which, at least in theory, an artist created by sweeping away the petty details and flaws that marred individual examples, distilling them to reveal their common ideal essence. It was in this sense that Markov mused, “When we talk about Zoia, I don’t believe the biographical Zoia can break into song onstage. But the *image* of Zoia perhaps will sing more than speak.”¹³⁰ As proof, he pointed out the musicality of Margarita Aliger’s 1942 poem about the young heroine. Similarly, reflecting on his experience watching Molotov’s premiere of *Sevastopol’tsy* before he brought it to Novosibirsk, Zak declared, “The main question I asked myself was, do I believe in the images of contemporaneity, of my contemporaries?... With a fully critical approach... I answered that I do.”¹³¹

¹²⁸ RGALI, f.962, op.3, d.1552, ll.30-31.

¹²⁹ Ibid., ll.66-68.

¹³⁰ Ibid., l.30, emphasis mine.

¹³¹ Ibid., l.37.

But what qualities, exactly, must such generalized images possess? How could Soviet artists be sure they were creating them according to plan? Feeling he had some valuable experience in this area, librettist Gorodetskii shared what he had discovered during a trip through the country the previous autumn, as he observed those in the process of postwar reconstruction. Drawing on these ordinary men and women as specific examples, he opined, generalized operatic images of Soviet citizens must be “brave and strong... sing new songs, joyous music... [and] feel that we are a country of victors,” a sense reminiscent of the Revolution, the prewar Five-Year Plans, and all moments of great Soviet achievement.¹³² Indeed, creating such images ought to be easy for a true Soviet artist, claimed Vladimir Fere. Reminding the assembly of his expertise as co-author of four operas on contemporary Soviet Central Asian themes, he proposed his colleagues need only observe the life around them, as Gorodetskii had, because, “No subject from history, legends, or fairytales... can give us such heroes as our reality, heroes who lend themselves to great romantic generalization, heroes of whom it’s easier to sing than speak.”¹³³ Not everyone was so blithe, however. Adopting a more philosophical tone and allowing he had found no easy answers in his choreographic work for the Bolshoi, Zakharov mused,

I’m working on two contemporary productions now... Is it hard? Very. But is it possible? It is. In resolving this task, [we] may make creative mistakes... But that doesn’t mean we mustn’t quickly undertake the task... and resolve it... The most important thing for an artist is to hear contemporaneity, to see it, to feel... the pulsing of the life of his times, to feel with his heart, and with his heart speak.¹³⁴

Certainly no one could disagree with such impassioned and thoughtful words. Yet in a few strokes, Fere and Zakharov managed to turn the discussion from Gorodetskii’s directional, if still

¹³² Ibid., l.55.

¹³³ RGALI, f.962, op.3, d.1553, ll.2-3.

¹³⁴ Ibid., ll.64-65, 69.

rather broad, advice to even vaguer instructions to simply look deep into one's heart and produce the necessary generalized images of Soviet contemporaneity through feeling alone.

In fact, despite the lengthy discussion devoted to contemporary themes as an aspect of Socialist Realist *sovremennost'*, little of substance had been clarified. Having read the Central Committee resolutions and sensed the general climate, composers and theater workers arrived already well-aware they must now seriously embark on creating operas and ballets on Soviet themes and armed with several potential subjects. What they did not know and hoped to learn was the proper way to go about this task, as artists working within the rubric of Socialist Realism. But as with every other Socialist Realist term discussed at the meeting, they were neither given by officials nor able to identify for themselves any concrete tools or guidance for achieving the goal of *sovremennost'*. The conversation revolved around such lofty concepts as mastery, poetic vision, generalized images, and "feeling with the heart," none of which contained much specificity. It was one thing for Shaverdian to declare, and others affirm, that composers and directors must focus on the big picture, the heroism of Soviet society, leaving the petty and personal behind. But it was another entirely to make that work while maintaining a clear narrative and audiences' interest. After all, the characters had to get from high point A to high point B somehow, and "petty" love stories and intrigues had always been at the heart of the genre. Though Surin condemned 19th-century operatic "melodrama," composers well knew that was exactly what people went to the opera to see. Koval's vast, heroic portrayal of the defense of Sevastopol' required the counterweight of the intimate love triangle between Andrei, Natasha, and Sibirko, just as the romantic intrigue of Marina and the Pretender had proved indispensable

to Mussorgsky's *Boris Godunov*.¹³⁵ What composers and directors needed to know was how to integrate such elements without undermining the idealized whole.

Though surely conscious of this pressing need for concrete instruction, KDI officials pointedly downplayed it. Toward the end of the meeting, Khrapchenko coolly advised composers to overcome their unnecessary handwringing. The oft-repeated claim that the classics had written only about the past was untrue, he assured them. Though such characters as Onegin, Tatiana, and German now seemed antiquated, to Tchaikovsky they had, in fact, been quite contemporary. Rather than take fright at abandoning their legacy, composers would do better to draw on it in creating analogous contemporary Soviet characters. What's more, Shaverdian added, they had plenty of their own experience, built up over 30 years of Soviet power, which should have more than adequately prepared them for the task. Even before the war, he asserted, "we said in our debates that the period of Soviet opera's youth was too drawn out."¹³⁶ And now, they still had no works to equal *Pikovaia dama*, let alone Fadeev's wartime novel *Molodaia gvardiia* (*The Young Guard*) or Shostakovich's "Leningrad" Symphony. Put simply, it was high time composers rose to the occasion and produced classic Soviet operas on contemporary themes. They were now mature artists, and the KDI had no intention of providing them with a creative roadmap. This

¹³⁵ Mussorgsky's first version of *Boris*, which used only six of the 23 scenes in the Pushkin poem that served as his source text, had no female roles or romantic storyline. The Directorate of Imperial Theaters rejected it specifically for this flaw. In rewriting, the composer substantially reconceptualized the opera (which was then re-orchestrated after his early death by Rimsky-Korsakov), resulting in the immensely successful version that remained in the international repertoire through the 1970s. See "Boris Godunov" in *Grove Music Online*: http://www.oxfordmusiconline.com.proxy.uchicago.edu/subscriber/article/grove/music/O006575?q=boris+godunov&search=quick&pos=1&_start=1#firsthit [accessed December 12, 2014]. For a more in-depth discussion, see Caryl Emerson. *Boris Godunov: Transposition of a Russian Theme*. Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1986, and Caryl Emerson and Robert William Oldani. *Modest Musorgsky and Boris Godunov: Myths, Realities, Reconsiderations*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006.

¹³⁶ RGALI, f.962, op.3, d.1554, ll.60-61.

attitude contrasted sharply with the hope, uncertainty, and defensiveness that resonated in composers and directors' contributions throughout the meeting. Having failed in their previous attempts, they were far from confident in their ability to create successful contemporary-themed operas. And however hard they tried to discover their own way forward, they found themselves unable to move past the articulation of basic principles to the formulation of specific rules.

Unfortunately, the other side of operatic *sovremennost'*, musical contemporaneity, was, if anything, more confusing. Even isolating this aspect generated some confusion. Puzzling over Shaverdian's singling out of *Voina i mir*, with its historical subject, as a higher-quality Soviet opera than *Nadezhda Svetlova*, *Sevastopol'tsy*, and *Liubov' Iarovaia*, all of which dramatized post-1917 events, Markov complained, "What are we calling Soviet opera?... Is it opera on a contemporary Soviet theme, or opera written by a Soviet composer on a classical theme? Shaverdian confused these positions, as did others, but they represent different goals."¹³⁷ In fact, KDI officials seemed to hope these two types could feed into the same goal, that the more contemporary musical techniques they called on Soviet composers to develop for operas on contemporary subjects could also be applied to historical, literary, and legendary themes, infusing even this second group with a recognizably Soviet perspective. In his report, Surin said relatively little on this subject, focused as he was on repertoire statistics. He noted only the as-yet unfulfilled need for "great symphonic development... broad melodiousness, thrilling emotion... accessibility to a wide circle of listeners."¹³⁸ Further, he admonished that *Tikhii Don*, despite its simplistic music, had established a solid beginning for the new Soviet aesthetics, but others had neglected to develop it, resulting in a late-stage lack of operatic mastery among Soviet

¹³⁷ RGALI, f.962, op.3, d.1552, l.27.

¹³⁸ RGALI, f.962, op.11, d.480, l.22.

composers. With these few remarks, Surin adeptly delineated the Scylla and Charybdis of contemporary Soviet musical language: sufficient complexity and broad accessibility.

Shaverdian picked up where Surin left off, exhorting composers to develop their long-overdue mastery by drawing on the realist traditions of the 19th-century classics, rejecting high modernism while still innovating musically, and always respecting the centrality of melody. These were fine principles in theory, but how was one to thread this needle in practice? Like so many Socialist Realist theorists before him, Shaverdian turned to examples rather than concrete instructions. To Markov's apparent frustration, he praised Prokofiev's *Voyna i mir* for the composer's "movement toward realistic, advanced art, his restless pursuit of contemporary, dynamic, content-rich language... [his] clarification of style, having increased his connection to the *narod* and classical creativity, his leading quest for innovation."¹³⁹ For Shaverdian, Prokofiev had come closer than anyone yet to balancing forward-looking, complex, innovative musical language – the essence of musical *sovremennost'* – with accessibility and rich melody. His "decisive struggle for high quality and originality in music... against poverty primitiveness, musical insignificance" was a model to other Soviet composers, regardless of the opera's theme. Certainly, it stood head and shoulders above *Nadezhda Svetlova*, with its outdated, overly simplistic musical language, or *Liubov' Iarovaia*, which demonstrated that "Enke's compositional technique lacks deep searching, striving for renewal of the melodic system." Shaverdian deplored the latter's "extremely limited intonational basis," "embarrassingly petty" exposition, and "primitively illustrative" musical characterizations, which relied on such expedients as mass songs for the Reds and grotesque mock military marches for the Whites.¹⁴⁰

¹³⁹ Shaverdian, "Voprosy," 18.

¹⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, 18, 24.

Yet, Shaverdian clarified, if *Voina i mir* was a textbook to be studied in terms of compositional innovation, it was still not the answer to Soviet opera's problems. For all his newfound lyricism and substantially increased use of cantilena, Prokofiev remained far too reliant on recitative, making him heir to Mussorgsky's barely-listenable *opéra dialogué* *Zhenit'ba*, rather than his epic historical masterwork *Boris Godunov*. And if melody was to be the heart of Soviet opera, as Shaverdian assured the assembly it must be, it required a clear, lithe skeletal structure to house it, which *Voina i mir*, with its dizzying multiplicity of episodes, lacked. Shaverdian affirmed, "The unquestionable keenness, exactitude, laconicism, and graphic strength of certain episodes... deserve our admiration... But Prokofiev still hasn't succeeded in organizing [them] into an orderly, accessible monumental architectonic whole, and without that, it's unthinkable to create an grandiose, forceful operatic epic."¹⁴¹ Thus, Prokofiev's complexity and innovation Prokofiev were a lesson to Soviet composers, who too often opted for excessive simplicity and adherence to tradition. But his inaccessible, recitative-laden, kaleidoscopic structuring must be firmly rejected. And who could serve as a model for balancing these elements? Shaverdian again turned to the Russian classics, averring, "The search for *narodnyi*, accessible language is not at all a search for the primitive. Poverty, epigonism, archaism are not what we need in Soviet opera... Glinka and his school must be our guiding star, in their striving to unite groundedness with innovation, democracy with richness."¹⁴² In other words, look to the classics, and find a way to build on their methods without straying too far.

In a similar vein, Slonimskii, who tellingly titled his report "Contemporaneity and Soviet Ballet," declared Soviet composers and choreographers must join forces to develop new musical and choreographic methods capable of depicting contemporary themes, revolutionizing ballet as

¹⁴¹ Ibid., 20-21.

¹⁴² Ibid., 26.

they had in the early years of Soviet power. Asserting ballet shared the goals as all Soviet art, he outlined two perspectives on its potential future course. Too many in the musical community, he argued, believed ballet capable only of naturalistic illustration, resulting in “unbearable boredom and neglect of the poetry of dance,” a quality more important than ever in the depiction of contemporary Soviet life. This perspective, Slonimskii continued, led to a dead end and must be abandoned in favor of the opposite view, that dance and music could work together to create satisfying, content-rich contemporary Soviet ballets. To do so required a new approach, led by “balletic innovators, armed with understanding of the most complex processes of reality, able to innovatively set our new life in choreographic images.” But choreographers could not accomplish this task alone; they required the partnership of composers, as “creators of the symphonic basis, coauthors of the production, whose images and methods further the development of themes... Ballet on a contemporary subject demands music of great breath.”¹⁴³ Slonimskii expressed great confidence that, working together, composers, choreographers, and scenarists would succeed in creating the necessary innovations.

Such pronouncements had the ring of authority, yet neither Shaverdian’s nor Slonimskii’s reports contained much in the way of practical direction. To say one must innovate, employ sufficiently complex musical language while preserving broad accessibility, all in the service of musical *sovremennost’*, was one thing; to define those concepts was quite another. In response, participants seized on the rapporteurs’ terms and struggled to make sense of them, often contradicting one another in the process. Bondarenko began by stressing the need for rich musical complexity, opining, “Music can’t be... only naturalistic. Music dies faster and more surely than any other art when it slavishly follows reality, copies, illustrates... Generalization is

¹⁴³ Slonimskii, “Sovremennost’,” 30-31.

necessary in music more than any other art, and illustrative music... can kill any subject... just as music of great psychological depth and truth... can elevate any slice of life.”¹⁴⁴ However, Khaikin countered him almost immediately. Fearing composers might get carried away by Bondarenko’s directive, he made a plea for accessibility, assuring his musical colleagues that if the essence of *sovremennost’* was modernity, this certainly did not entail musical modernism. He asserted, “Musical language in opera can’t be forced, deliberately complex. In opera more than anywhere else, the composer must be a fiery agitator, speaking honestly and with his whole heart.”¹⁴⁵ Thus, within the first half hour of discussion, it became all too clear the serious tension between complexity and accessibility, which had troubled Soviet music since the Revolution, remained unresolved. And the rapporteurs had done nothing to clarify the state’s position.

Interestingly, though both sides of the complexity-accessibility debate received play, on the whole composers and directors were more concerned with avoiding the former. This cannot be understood as a reaction to the Central Committee resolutions, which, beyond their primary concern with ideological failures, deplored the lack of sophistication in the works in question – Zoshchenko’s “vulgar” short stories and Akhmatova’s “empty” poetry, *Bol’shaia zhizn*’s “extremely weak artistry,” and most significantly, dramatic theaters’ repertoire of “anti-artistic and primitive plays on contemporary themes” – which is to say, their excessive simplicity.¹⁴⁶ In fact, the meeting’s only accusation of “formalism,” the dreaded blanket signifier of unacceptable complexity with which Shostakovich had been branded in 1936, was voiced by composer Filipp Kozitskii. He noted Ukraine could not be accused of inattention to Soviet opera, having produced

¹⁴⁴ RGALI, f.962, op.3, d.1551, l.10.

¹⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, l.19.

¹⁴⁶ “Postanovlenie Orgbiuro TsK VKP(b) ‘O zhurnalakh *Zvezda i Leningrad*’ ot 14 avgusta 1946g.,” “Postanovlenie Orgbiuro TsK VKP(b) ‘O repertuare dramaticheskikh teatrov i merakh po ego uluchsheniui’ ot 26 avgusta 1946g.,” and “Postanovlenie Orgbiuro TsK VKP(b) ‘O kinofil’me *Bol’shaia zhizn*’”, ot 4 sentiabria 1946g.” in Artizov and Naumov, 588, 598, 592.

30 new works during the war alone, 16 with contemporary themes. Yet, none had stayed long in the repertoire. Kozitskii opined, “When you analyze the reason... you have to agree with Shaverdian, who blamed composers for their enthusiasm for formalist theories.”¹⁴⁷ Shaverdian, of course, had not used the term “formalism,” and had balanced his call for accessibility with his caution against over-simplicity. Far from an oversight, Shaverdian and others, cognizant that such politically charged language could only escalate an already tense situation, deliberately avoided it, in hopes of preserving the possibility that the meeting could, through meaningful discussion, produce a clear definition of musical Socialist Realism.

On the whole, participants were more eager to demonstrate the value in a certain level of musical complexity and the pitfalls of excessive simplicity, a position supported at least to some extent by Surin’s tacit acknowledgement that it was in nobody’s interest for *Tikhii Don* to become the gold standard of Soviet opera. And if Kozitskii had drawn on Shaverdian’s labeling of modernism as serious misstep in Soviet musical history, advocates of more complex writing had a strong foothold in his praise of *Voina i mir*’s innovations. Goriainov, whose theater premiered Prokofiev’s epic, even took this a step further, arguing against Shaverdian’s qualification that with its predominance of recitative and kaleidoscopic structure, *Voina i mir*, for all its merits, was ultimately still too complex for the mass audience. Quite the contrary, he asserted, the opera had been hugely successful, with plenty of repeat attendees. “This shows our audience can understand complex music,” he claimed triumphantly. “Our viewer is sufficiently mature and curious. He’s interested in what’s fresh and new, and if he doesn’t get it the first time, he’ll come again.”¹⁴⁸ Dekhterev seconded this point, noting that Soviet composers’ tendency to select particularly complex subjects for their operas need not be counterbalanced by

¹⁴⁷ RGALI, f.962, op.3, d.1552, l.3.

¹⁴⁸ RGALI, f.962, op.3, d.1551, l.38.

simplistic musical language. Rather, complex subjects must be matched by sufficiently complex music. Thus, composers' path to reaching their audience lay in creating ideologically-saturated, generalized musical images, "enabling us to escape naturalistic portrayal of the everyday details of life, which always conflicts with the nature of music."¹⁴⁹

Finally, Belyi chimed in, arguing that the issue in Soviet contemporary operas was not so much that its themes were complex as that they were new, a substantial change from operatic subject matter in any previous era, which required a different mode of composition. "To say that Soviet opera must sing isn't much," he said. "One can sing in various ways," ranging stylistically from Wagner's weighty grandiosity to Dargomyzhskii's *opéra dialogué* to Tchaikovsky's or Verdi's soaring melodies. But mechanically following any one of these styles in Soviet opera could only lead to failure, due to the resultant mismatch of contemporary theme and traditional, non-contemporary music. Nor, of course, was modernism, with its deliberate theatricality and lack of melody the answer. Rather, Belyi affirmed, Soviet opera must follow "the path of connection with new intonations," a direction initiated by *Tikhii Don*, which, he agreed with Surin, Soviet composers, including Dzerzhinskii himself, were at fault for failing to further develop. It was high time to "overcome empiricism, when songs are included falsely, and opera becomes a mere conveyer of songs. This danger befell Soviet opera, and... composers proved insufficiently strong to create from these new intonations a vocality that can express the complex world of our heroes. The result was simplification."¹⁵⁰ If Soviet opera on contemporary themes was to achieve greatness, Belyi and many others believed, it must speak in a musical language complex and vivid enough to express such themes' deeper ideological and emotional meaning.

¹⁴⁹ RGALI, f.962, op.3, d.1552, l.14.

¹⁵⁰ RGALI, f.962, op.3, d.1553, ll.31-33.

For some, however, acknowledging the need for complexity still left the question of how to determine the right admixture, without bleeding into either esotericism or primitiveness. To this end, Fere attempted to parse Shaverdian's favoring of *Voina i mir*'s apparent over-complexity above *Nadezhda Svetlova*, *Sevastopol'tsy*, and *Liubov' Iarovaia*'s apparent oversimplicity. He reasoned, "If we agree opera is the most *narodnyi*, democratic art, then an opera that's a textbook for musicians but hard for the mass listener to understand must be a bad thing. Just as bad as one with impoverished, primitive, sentimental language."¹⁵¹ Why, then, had Shaverdian praised *Voina i mir* while denigrating the others? And if these operas fell to either side of the mark, how were composers to understand where the middle ground lay? Here, Fere suggested Kabalevskii's *Vogne* as an overlooked positive example. The problem with this claim was that *Vogne* had not found popular success, or even the repeat attendees Goriainov cited as proof of *Voina i mir*'s suitability for Soviet audiences, and Kabalevskii himself had set to work revising it so thoroughly that it would eventually become an entirely different opera.¹⁵² In any case, Shaverdian found no cause to doubt his assessments, merely retorting that Fere had failed to support his accusations with sufficient argumentation.

If composers' and directors' speeches revealed their concerns about Soviet opera slipping into mindless simplicity in service of accessibility, KDI officials' response, by contrast, demonstrated their apprehension creative workers would take opera too far in the other direction. During the final session, Khrapchenko averred modernism had been a primary factor holding back Soviet opera. He assured those preoccupied with achieving complexity their efforts would

¹⁵¹ *Ibid.*, 1.5.

¹⁵² After *Vogne*'s failure, Kabalevskii essentially wrote a new opera, setting a new libretto by S. Tsenin and B. Gorbakov while incorporating much of the same musical material. At the time of this meeting, Kabalevskii's opera bore the working title *Nepokorennye* (*The Unvanquished*). It would premiere the following year under the name *Sem'ia Tarasa* (*Taras' Family*) at the SND Theater. Kabalevskii revised it again in 1950 and a final time in 1967.

be better spent combatting this ill, because “the influence of modernism is felt even today... Perhaps not everyone can separate modernism from contemporary music.” Surely, no one would want to be identified as adhering to or sanctioning a confusion so harmful to Soviet music. Yet, on the other hand, Khrapchenko declared equally unacceptable “those composers who strive for clarity and accessibility, but employ of the most part simplified and primitive means of orchestral coloring.” Tellingly, when a voice from the floor suggested this trend was even worse, he parried, “I don’t know if we need to choose between these two tracks. Perhaps we can take the position that neither can satisfy us.”¹⁵³ Khrapchenko’s readiness to criticize both excesses, paired with his unwillingness to identify either as Soviet opera’s true enemy, spoke volumes about the KDI’s own uncertainty in this matter, as well as its willingness – even preference – to keep composers and directors guessing about how best to direct their efforts.

Without contradicting their superior, Shaverdian and Surin lingered longer on the dangers of excess musical complexity in their summations. Standing by his assessment of *Voina i mir* as ultimately too complex and inaccessible, Shaverdian turned again to the classics to support his claim that excess complexity surely spelled an opera’s downfall. Pairing famously difficult works with their more celebrated counterparts, he argued, “I’ve been criticized for not posing the issue of complexity correctly. But *Zhenit’ba* is more complex than *Boris Godunov*, though *Boris* is [better]... *Kamennyi gost’* (*The Stone Guest*) is harder to comprehend than *Ivan Susanin*, [but] *Susanin*, in the sense of musical fabric, is richer.” Besides, he continued, “I was one of the first to speak against primitiveness in opera.” In other words, his critique of Prokofiev was not an assertion that Soviet opera must shed its complexity altogether, but a warning against going too far. Finally, attempting to break the endless complexity-accessibility debate, he sighed

¹⁵³ RGALI, f.962, op.3, d.1554, ll.28, 31.

exasperatedly, “For the listener who’s not a musician, in the end it’s all the same whether a composer uses complex or simple methods. For him what’s important is the expressivity of the ideas, the richness of its human content.”¹⁵⁴ Here, again, Shaverdian provided a strong directive and laudable goal, but the path to fulfilling it was no clearer than before. Nor did Surin clarify matters. He began with a nod to complexity, stating, “I agree entirely that we must strive for what’s new, unique, original, Soviet,” but then quickly shifted course, asserting, “We must keep in mind that not everyone is capable of being an innovator.” The innovative trail blazed by Shostakovich and Prokofiev was not for all composers, he continued, and this was likely for the best, because “this path is not without its drawbacks.” Instead of trying to become an army of little Prokofievs, which could well result in disaster, composers should stick to their strengths in composing contemporary operas, because ultimately, “there’s nothing wrong with creation of moving, interesting, keenly emotional, but in some measure traditional work.”¹⁵⁵ Surin’s remarks thus fell neatly into line with Khrapchenko’s and Shaverdian’s, vociferously reiterating the need for both complexity and simplicity while clarifying neither a more precise definition of these terms, nor where the balance between them lay. For all their declarative statements, composers were left in much the same position as before in their efforts to understand musical *sovremennost’*.

Still, if any aspect of contemporary musical language would seem uncontroversial, it was melodicism, as the antidote to modernism. In his report, Shaverdian stated the KDI’s prioritization of melody firmly, declaring, “In operatic melody... the richness of the human voice is truthfully transmitted, the movement and richness of the human soul.” The classics had realized this fundamental truth, but modernism had robbed Soviet opera of melody alongside

¹⁵⁴ Ibid., ll.65-66.

¹⁵⁵ Ibid., l.80.

accessibility. As a result, composers must now engage in “the struggle for a real renaissance in opera... for the rebirth in opera of real heroes, for the resurrection of melody, of broad human breath, of truthful expression. This is the basis of Soviet opera aesthetics.”¹⁵⁶ In keeping with this precept, Shaverdian praised Prokofiev’s increased use of cantilena and lyricism in *Voyna i mir*, while deploring its predominance of technically brilliant but emotionally cold recitative. He also highlighted the choral episodes in *Sevastopol’tsy* as an example of contemporary Soviet melodicism done right. But even such chorales, like *Voyna i mir*’s ariosi, still fell short of the grandeur of true aria, which Shaverdian found sorely lacking on Soviet opera. “Imagine *Kniaz’ Igor* without Igor’s arias!” he exclaimed. “Imagine *Boris Godunov* without Boris’ monologues! How it would lower the whole concept! The portrait of the hero would disappear... just where his true greatness must be revealed.”¹⁵⁷ He called on composers to create contemporary heroes grand enough to demand arias, and write arias in which they could truly sing their hearts out.

Yet even on this point, though all present acknowledged melodicism was vital to contemporary Soviet opera, they could not fully agree on what forms of melodicism were best. Many shared Shaverdian conviction that aria was the height of melodic expression. Bondarenko again set the tone, balancing his call for sufficient complexity with the assertion, “In opera, what we want most is singing... The meaning of opera lies in the human voice. The peoples of our country... love songs and sing well. So it’s our duty to create operas where the human voice feels free.”¹⁵⁸ He urged composers to abandon recitative and create music that motivated performers to sing from their hearts. Bron concurred, expressing concern that as a legacy of anti-melodic modernism, Soviet composers had lost their feel for the human voice, which they must

¹⁵⁶ Shaverdian, “Voprosy,” 16, 17.

¹⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, 26.

¹⁵⁸ RGALI, f.962, op.3, d.1551, l.11.

now recapture. He opined that those who “don’t know the rules of vocal art, its difficulties and possibilities, [who] misuse extreme registers or heavy orchestral accompaniment” could not hope to write truly expressive operas and lamented, “What a shame our composers forget lyrical singers! They’re almost completely unused in Soviet opera, though it requires heroism and even humor. In this genre, lyrical and lyrical-coloratura singers could serve well.”¹⁵⁹ Zhiganov continued this thought, explaining that one of Soviet opera’s great innovations was its discovery of ordinary citizens’ heroism, expressed most effectively through bold, lyrical arias. Singers were far more attracted to such arias, which enabled them to show off the skills they had painstakingly developed in conservatory training, he averred, than to inaccessible, difficult recitatives. This was an important factor to remember, he cautioned, because “The composer’s first duty is that performers love his music. If a lyrical tenor sings a part that’s good for him, if he falls in love with the music, he’ll do it well. Otherwise, the opera will be useless.”¹⁶⁰

However, not everyone was convinced that aria alone could carry the work, as Zhiganov suggested. For his part, Trambitskii did not dispute the value of melodic expressivity in the form of aria, but he cautioned such expression must be closely linked to an opera’s text. He explained, “What we’re dealing with here is the interaction of two types of thought, aria and recitative. They very often come into conflict, but they don’t have to,” because each had its appropriate use. The logic of melodic development may contradict the natural flow of speech, an incongruity that could confuse the audience and distract from a work’s ideological substance. Thus, while aria was well deployed at points of heroic culmination, other moments required the enhanced precision of recitative. In such passages, “The melody must be conditioned by the specific image, so the performer can master and the listener fully understand its qualities... Here we must

¹⁵⁹ RGALI, f.962, op.3, d.1552, ll.23-24.

¹⁶⁰ Ibid., l.68.

inspire the *narod* to listen closely to each word, action, thought ... and find the artistic quality that exactly and truthfully reflects their substance.” At such points the melody must be “truthful, fresh, pure, exact, fiery, convincing” – which recitative was simply better suited to achieving than aria.¹⁶¹ In so saying, Trambitskii by no means spoke against the use of aria. Rather, he characterized recitative as an equally important aspect of composers’ craft and advocated balancing the two as necessary in service of creating a contemporary musical language for Soviet opera capable of conveying both emotional and ideological content.

Though Trambitskii’s speech was marked by thoughtfulness and earnest endeavor, Khrapchenko would have none of it. Noting he felt compelled to speak strongly on the issue because “such a talented and... respected composer as Trambitskii” had mistakenly advocated for recitative, Khrapchenko deplored such errors as evidence of the continuing influence of modernism, which culminated in an “unwritten... codex of musical morals according to which it’s considered reprehensible to write good melodies, arias, and duets, to express human feelings well and naturally.” As a result, Soviet composers were inclined to create declamatory operas when they ought to focus on song. This was unacceptable, he admonished, because

Recitative opera cannot give us creative achievements... Contemporaneity in opera means most of all creation of the image of Soviet man, depiction of his internal qualities... Recitative is not capable of conveying the richness of the human soul, the Soviet soul. It may characterize specific psychological states, but it can’t express emotions. For that, we need melody, aria, duets, choruses... Our opera will find its way when it unites a melodic basis with the richness of Soviet symphonic culture.¹⁶²

Many recitative operas were quiet skillfully crafted, he acknowledged, but ultimately, they pleased only the critics, who failed in their duty to society by promoting this operatic dead end. Yet, if a penchant for declamation led to emotionally inert recitative-operas, prioritization of

¹⁶¹ Ibid., ll.50, 52-53.

¹⁶² RGALI, f.962, op.3, d.1554, ll.28-31.

melody, could as easily lead to its opposite, the insipid song-opera style of *Tikhii Don*, which even KDI officials did not seriously suggest as a full-fledged model for Soviet contemporary opera. Thus, even within the general consensus on the importance of melodicism, the conflict between recitative and aria replicated the unresolved complexity-accessibility debate.

Despite such controversies, there was one directive on which participants unequivocally agreed: whatever the exact parameters of musical *sovremennost'*, however Soviet opera was to balance complexity with accessibility, aria with recitative, what its musical language must be most of all was *new*. Socialist Realist opera must find new compositional methods to match its new, contemporary themes. Surin called on composers to develop the new direction established by *Tikhii Don* over a decade ago, which had stalled in the years since. And Markov attested that new musical language was necessary not only for contemporary themes, but even for historical ones. Soviet composers could never match up to the classics by imitating their methods, he claimed, but they could create a unique, innovative, and valuable Soviet perspective by developing new compositional techniques specifically for Soviet opera. It was the failure to do so that made works like *Liubov' Iarovaia* sound pre-revolutionary, despite their Soviet themes. Quite simply, Markov declared, contemporary Soviet subjects “demand new musical language, new vocal colors, new musical characteristics, so old associations don’t interfere... Then we’ll really honor Tchaikovsky and Mussorgsky, not by imitating them, but by expanding the grandiosity they set as the basis of Russian musical and theatrical culture.”¹⁶³ Similarly, Zak called for a “new aesthetics,” and Zhiganov asserted that while the formal elements like aria and ensemble must be maintained, “Soviet content in itself will be an operatic innovation, and its

¹⁶³ RGALI, f.962, op.3, d.1552, ll.28, 31.

language must be intelligible.”¹⁶⁴ Ballet workers also eagerly joined the chorus advocating newness. Claiming ballets on contemporary themes had failed not because the genre was incapable of depicting Soviet life but because choreographers had played it safe and relied on tradition, Gusev declared, “New ballets about Soviet people must speak not in impoverished language borrowed from old ballets... but in bold, unprecedented dance.”¹⁶⁵ Golubov heartily concurred, noting that while the new demands placed on Soviet ballet by contemporary themes were formidable, they were achievable. Rather than fall back on the position that such themes could not be expressed balletically, he urged, “Try, endeavor, find new paths and form of danced characteristics... To depict Soviet man in dance, we must persistently invent and create, revise the old and discover the new.”¹⁶⁶ If only composers and choreographers kept innovation in their sights, all agreed, they would surely find the requisite new language for Soviet opera and ballet.

The theme of newness greatly pleased KDI officials. Khrapchenko seized on it and applied it further to the work of theaters, exhorting directors as well as composers to overcome their reliance on outdated traditional approaches. “To work on a contemporary theme in opera is much harder than to make the hundredth version of *Pikovaia dama* or *Ruslan*,” he acknowledged. “You must discover new paths, find new methods. You must search for the new.”¹⁶⁷ Khrapchenko expressed certainty that if composers, choreographers, and directors put their minds to it, they would locate the necessary innovations and finally succeed in creating contemporary Soviet opera and ballet classics. Yet, notably, he gave no concrete indication of what such newness might entail. Nor had participants managed to develop a deeper understanding of it through the course of their discussion. Rather, it seemed they had simply

¹⁶⁴ Ibid., ll.39, 67.

¹⁶⁵ RGALI, f.962, op.3, d.1553, l.81.

¹⁶⁶ Ibid., ll.101, 104.

¹⁶⁷ RGALI, f.962, op.3, d.1554, l.24.

added one more watchword, *newness*, to the growing list of complexity, accessibility, and melodicity, without coming closer to defining musical *sovremennost'* in a functional, detailed way. In fact, the KDI's position had been handily summed up by Slonimskii at the end of his report, when he quoted 18th-century French ballet innovator Jena-Georges Noverre: "You want me to give you advice on how to create truly new ballet... Stop talking; start doing. If your first ballet doesn't succeed, quickly undertake a second... There is no other path for discoverers of new worlds in art."¹⁶⁸ Such advice was fine, perhaps even freeing, for Noverre and his disciples. But for the Soviet musical community it was far from adequate. As the tumultuous history of Soviet music had taught them all too well, they simply did not have the leeway to experiment and fail, whatever officials might claim. To fail was to risk harsh punishment certainly for oneself, and considering the nature of the 1946 *zhdanovshchina* resolutions, quite possibly to one's professional community more broadly. Indeed, it was for this very reason Soviet composers had become relatively timid in their musical endeavors since the days of the Cultural Revolution. In exhorting them to discover the nature of operatic *sovremennost'* for themselves, the KDI sent a clear, if deeply frustrating message: composers would be held to the highest standard of achievement, but would receive no assistance along the way.

Conclusion

As the All-Union Meeting on Opera and Ballet Questions drew to a close, KDI vice-chair Ivan Anisimov heartily thanked all present for their participation. "Our meeting is sure to have a significant result," he stated confidently. "It's given a great deal to the KDI... And I think it will give much to all of you... and arm you for your further work... I'll end this meeting with a call:

¹⁶⁸ Slonimskii, "Sovremennost'," 31. For more on Jean-Georges Noverre and his specific innovations to the genre, see Jennifer Homans. *Apollo's Angels: A History of Ballet* (New York: Random House, 2010), 67-97.

Let's get to work!"¹⁶⁹ Yet, despite the many hours of discussion, it was far from obvious what had actually been gained. Though all the right terms had been invoked, repeated, and endlessly debated, on the evening of December 21 the Soviet musical community was not appreciably closer to concrete musical definitions of *partiinnost'*, *ideinnost'*, *narodnost'*, *sovremennost'*, or Socialist Realism than they had been on the morning of the 19th. An outside observer could be forgiven for concluding that they had, in fact, talked themselves in circles to no avail.

Should we, then, understand this meeting as a knowing exercise in futility, a concatenation of professionals cynically filling seats, dutifully spouting approved slogans until the requisite time had been expended and they could all go home? I argue this was definitively not the case. Despite the blatant performativity of some speeches, the intensity of discussion, piquancy of disagreement, breadth of philosophical exploration, and passionate tone employed indicate a genuine collective effort to finally define musical Socialist Realism. And in fact, there was nothing unusual in this; such theoretical work was by no means new to Soviet composers. From the regular work of the Composers' Union's consultative apparatus and specialized journals like *Sovetskaia muzyka* to broader sessions periodically convened by state and Party organs, Soviet composers were no strangers to discussion of Socialist Realist aesthetics. From their perspective, the 1946 All-Union Meeting represented not the start of a new conversation but the continuation of an older, ongoing one. As Markov noted, before the war, "There was a time when we had very sharp fights about *Semen Kotko* and *V buriu (Into the Storm)*... We're taking the same positions as when we broke off... We're starting again what we stopped then."¹⁷⁰

¹⁶⁹ RGALI, f.962, op.3, d.1554, l.88.

¹⁷⁰ RGALI, f.962, op.3, d.1552, l.28. Sergei Prokofiev's *Semen Kotko* premiered at the Stanislavsky Opera Theater in June 1940, and Tikhon Khrennikov's *V buriu* premiered at the Nemirovich-Danchenko Music Theater in October 1939, prior to the two theaters' unification. Though both operas were based on Socialist Realist novels and both composers endeavored to

What set the All-Union Meeting apart, then, was not so much its form as its intent. Whereas in the first years after the official institution of Socialist Realism, composers and musicologists had tolerated or even embraced the term's ambiguity, the onset of the *zhdanovshchina* caused them to significantly shift their approach. Under intense pressure from the Central Committee's first three resolutions, the Soviet musical community determined it was now in their interest to concretely define Socialist Realism and its key terms, in order to preemptively bring Soviet music into conformity with it and thereby avoid a fourth resolution. Ultimately, they failed in both tasks. Musical Socialist Realism remained as ambiguous as ever, and on February 10, 1948, just over a year after the All-Union Meeting, the Central Committee released its final *zhdanovshchina* resolution, "On the Opera *Velikaia družba* by V. Muradeli," denouncing the titular opera and broader "formalist" direction in Soviet music, condemning and temporarily destroying the careers of six leading composers, and striking fear into the hearts of many more.¹⁷¹ In the end, the All-Union Meeting had done nothing to prevent it.

However, the Soviet musical community's failure in this regard is hardly surprising, nor should it be attributed to a lack of desire or ability to evaluate complex questions of Soviet aesthetics. Rather, they were unable to hone in on a precise formulation because Socialist Realism was by design a term with only the vaguest definition, which further melted into air when applied to music. The originators of this slippery aesthetic, Zhdanov among them, were well aware it served the Party better the less clearly artists understood it. By providing only broad terms like *partiinnost'*, *ideinnost'*, *narodnost'*, and *sovremennost'*, paired with periodic,

enact Socialist Realist musical style, Prokofiev's more complex effort was judged a failure, while Khrennikov's simpler song-opera met with success. The differences in their composition and fate generated substantial discussion in the musical community, especially as these were among the first new Soviet operas to premiere after the *Lady Macbeth* scandal.

¹⁷¹ "Postanovlenie Politbiuro TsK VKP(b) 'Ob opere *Velikaia družba* V. Muradeli,' 10 fevralia 1948g," in Artizov and Naumov, 630-634. For analysis of this resolution, see Chapter 4.

unpredictable, sometimes even unplanned scandals like the 1936 denunciation of Shostakovich's opera *Lady Macbeth*, Soviet arts officials guaranteed composers would proceed cautiously, always seeking the Party's approval, while guaranteeing themselves enough room to use scandals instrumentally to tame those who dared venture too far into independent territory. From the Party's perspective, ambiguity was perhaps Socialist Realism's most useful feature.

And yet, as Anisimov's closing remarks reveal, despite the evident absence of a concrete aesthetic definition at the close of the All-Union Meeting, members of the musical community nevertheless firmly believed they had achieved something. After all, they had done everything right, proceeding through all of the key terms, debating each one at great length. How was it possible that after all that, they, an assembly of highly-trained music professionals, could come up empty-handed? The answer, they concluded, was that they had not. After so much discussion, it must be the case that they as a professional group had come to a deeper understanding of musical Socialist Realism, even if they were unable to articulate it precisely. In its way, this deduction was the ultimate expression of "reality in its revolutionary development": the collective envisioning of their future complete comprehension of musical Socialist Realism as if it already existed in the present. In essence, during the three exhausting days of the All-Union Meeting, the Soviet musical community underwent a collective Socialist Realist transformation, willing themselves through sheer aspirational envisioning to metamorphose from a group of anxious, uncertain theorizers into full-fledged, aesthetically confident Soviet artists. Rather than defining Socialist Realism, through the process of the 1946 All-Union Meeting on Opera and Ballet Questions, the Soviet musical community had instead enacted it.

Chapter 2: **Solo and Ensemble: Creative Consultation in the Union of Soviet Composers**

Introduction

When the Central Committee established creative unions in April 1932, the mandate it gave them was grand, but not particularly specific. After dissolving the former “proletarian” arts organizations, the Central Committee called for “unification of all writers who support the platform of Soviet power and strive to participate in socialist construction into a single Union of Soviet Writers” – in essence, creating an umbrella organization for anyone who wished to write creatively and did not wish the Soviet Union harm – with the same procedure to be repeated in other artistic genres.¹ This resolution made no mention of structure or procedure; it simply brought the creative unions into being and left the rest to be determined in the process of their work. On one hand, this lack of detail was freeing, and as new composers’ union branches sprang up in Moscow, Leningrad, and other cities prior to the establishment of the All-Union Union of Soviet Composers in 1939, many music professionals greeted them as a welcome relief from the militancy of RAPM and the Cultural Revolution. They saw the creative unions as beneficial, mainstream organizations, which would finally lead the way forward by setting reasonable norms for Soviet creative production. On the other hand, as this chapter will demonstrate, the Composers’ Union’s de facto authorization to establish its own structure and procedures also brought with it the potential to adopt more coercive practices for controlling the creative processes and the forms of the musical works resulting from it.

¹ “Postanovlenie Politbiuro TsK VKP(b) ‘O perestroika literaturno-khudozhestvennykh organizatsii’ 23 apreliia 1932g,” in Andrei Artizov and Oleg Naumov, eds. *Vlast’ i khudozhestvennaia intelligentsiia: Dokumenty TsK RKP(b)-VChK-OGPU-NKVD o kul’turnoi politike, 1917-1953gg* (Moscow: Demokratiia, 1999), 173.

Kiril Tomoff has ably detailed the rise of the Composers' Union, beginning with the Moscow Union of Soviet Composers, which began operating five months after the Central Committee's resolution establishing creative unions.² At this early stage, the Moscow Union contained three departments: the first handled organizational issues, the second educational outreach, and the third the creative endeavors of the new union's members. From the start, the third department, the Creative Commission, formed the heart of the Union's activities, providing a forum for composers to discuss each other's latest work, as well as broader creative questions. Over the course of the decade, the organization continued to expand. By 1939, when the All-Union Composers' Union subsumed it, the larger organization inherited an extended consultative apparatus of eleven genre-based sections within the Creative Department, dealing separately with symphonic, chamber, vocal, choral, operatic, light (*estrada*), military, and "anti-fascist" music, as well as music written for film and theater, for wind and folk instruments, and for children.

During its wartime evacuation, the Composers' Union, like so many organizations, was reduced to a skeletal structure. Of the eleven prewar creative sections, only two remained, governing military music (marches and anthems, but also popular songs) and children's music. These surviving sections existed alongside a consolidated Creative Commission, which continued to hold discussions of art music in a variety of genres. As the tide of the war turned, the Union began its re-expansion, forming a Musicology Commission in July 1943 and a new Consultation Commission in March 1944, which was envisioned as a space for raising the professional qualifications of the self-taught popular composers who had recently swelled the

² This and the following draw from Kiril Tomoff. *Creative Union: The Professional Organization of Soviet Composers, 1939-1953* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2006) 19-45, 190-192 and Kiril Tomoff, "Creative Union: The Professional Organization of Soviet Composers, 1939-1953," PhD diss., University of Chicago, 2001. ProQuest (UMI Number 3006561), 332-368.

Union's ranks, The Consultation Commission soon took over the Creative Commission's work, as well. Finally, the Union's leadership established a new Opera Commission in April 1945, renamed the Military Commission the Mass Music Section that October, and created a Young Composers' Section not long after that. By October 1946, the Composers' Union's consultative apparatus seemed to have settled into a firm footing with six commissions: Mass Music, Children's Music, Musicology, Opera, Young Composers, and last but not least, the Consultation Commission, with its purview now reduced to symphony and chamber music.³

Yet, these reforms, too, proved short-lived. The Central Committee's February 1948 resolution "On the Opera *Velikaia družba*," which brought the *zhdanovshchina* to music, occasioned another reorganization. The Union's 24-member Orgkom, which had been established in May 1939, was now replaced by a six-member Secretariat, and its six consultative commissions were replaced with a hybrid system of genre-based sections and cadre-based commissions.⁴ While each new body was given new leadership, some changes were more substantial than others. For example, the Musicology and Young Composers' Commissions remained largely intact, though the latter was given additional responsibility for music education. Similarly, the Children's Music and Mass Music Commissions simply altered their names, becoming Sections. The Opera Commission was initially broadened into a Music Theater Section, but the next year was re-divided into four subsections, dealing with Opera, Ballet, Musical Comedy, and Theoretical Issues separately. For its part, the Consultation Commission

³ A Folklore Commission was added in mid-1947 but functioned only sporadically and was eliminated two years later.

⁴ "Postanovlenie Politbiuro TsK VKP(b) 'O meropriiatiakh po sozdaniiu Soiuzs Sovetskikh kompozitorov,' 3 maia 1939g.," in Artizov and Naumov, 429 (establishment of original Orgkom) and "Postanovlenie Politbiuro TsK VKP(b) 'O smene rukovodstva Komiteta po delam iskusstv pri SM SSSR i Orgkomiteta Soiuzs Sovetskikh kompozitorov SSSR,' 26 ianvaria 1948g.," in Artizov and Naumov, 628-629 (replacement of Orgkom with Secretariat).

gave way to the Symphony and Chamber Music Section, but as it had already been winnowed down to these genres in October 1946, this was again more a change of name than function. Finally, a few genuinely new bodies were formed, including the Commissions for Directing the Creativity of Composers of the USSR and RSFSR, a Film and Theater Music Section, and a Foreign Music Section.

Throughout this extended period of evolution, the purpose of the Composers' Union's consultative apparatus remained the same: to serve as a venue for composers to share their new works-in-progress with their colleagues, receive professional evaluation of them, and obtain a clear understanding of what alterations would be necessary for their works to gain full acceptance and approval from their professional peers. In Tomoff's words, the consultative apparatus provided "an institutional venue for discussing, evaluating, and controlling the creative process and its musical and theoretical products."⁵ Tomoff highlights these practices to demonstrate that the Union functioned as a professional organization, and thus a locus of professional autonomy within Soviet state and Party control over music. And indeed, his case is convincing. This chapter supports Tomoff's conclusion while drawing attention to one particular practice among those he cites as evidence for the Union's professional status: controlling the creative process and its musical products.

It does so through examination of the records of the weekly meetings of the units of the consultative apparatus that dealt most closely with art music: the Consultation Commission and its replacement, the Symphony and Chamber Music Section, as well as the Opera Commission

⁵ Tomoff, 37.

(Section), from 1945 through 1957.⁶ This end date is dictated by two circumstances. First, though the late-Stalinist period may logically be said to have ended with Stalin's death in March 1953, and Soviet literature began to feel the first hints of the Thaw shortly thereafter, the change in music did not arrive so quickly.⁷ Second, the Composers' Union underwent a major structural shift at the close of 1957 with the creation of a separate Union for the RSFSR, to which the central consultative apparatus was transferred, in service of decentralizing the consultation process.⁸ As Sergei Aksiuk explained at the Secretariat meeting establishing the new RSFSR Composers' Union's structure, the All-Union organization would henceforth only provide "consultants who acquaint themselves with affairs in the republics, and help them... on the territorial principle. We can have 5-6 consultants for the Union Republics and 4-5 for the RSFSR, and that will be the extent of our consultative apparatus."⁹ The impact of this decentralization, paired with the growing liberalization of Soviet music, makes 1957 a fitting endpoint for this study of the All-Union consultative apparatus' practices during late Stalinism.

⁶ In an effort to reduce the confusion caused by the shifting names of these bodies, throughout this chapter I will refer to them individually as the Consultation Commission, the Symphony and Chamber Music Section, and the Opera Section, and collectively as the consultative sections.

⁷ On the comparatively slow evolution of the Thaw in music, see Peter Schmelz. *Such Freedom, If Only Musical: Unofficial Soviet Music during the Thaw* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009), 26-66.

⁸ With the typical slowness of Soviet bureaucratic processes, the RSFSR Union of Soviet Composers did not officially come into existence until 1960. However, it began meeting separately from the All-Union Composers' Union and took over responsibility for the consultative apparatus in 1958. See RGALI, F.2490 (Soiuz sovetskikh kompozitorov RSFSR), op.1 (structure includes Presidium, Cadres Department, Bookkeeper, Organizational-Creative Commission, Symphony and Chamber Music Commission, Opera and Ballet Commission, and Sections for Choral Music, Popular Song, Light Instrumental Music, Folk Instrument Music, and Wind Band Music) and the Union's official history on its website:

http://www.soyuzkompozitorov.ru/history_of_russia_sk.html (accessed July 21, 2015)

⁹ RGALI, f.2077 (Soiuz sovetskikh kompozitorov), op.1, d.1314, l.134; full discussion ll.125-135.

Officially, submitting work-in-progress for discussion in a consultative section was voluntary. But in practice, Soviet composers faced significant pressure to do so. The Composers' Union was a small, tight-knit organization, membership in which was highly sought-after, as the sole path to professional recognition and advancement in a career in Soviet music. Those who exhibited sufficient skill to gain entrance quickly discovered that regular participation was the surest way to demonstrate they belonged and build a name for themselves as composers, consultants to performance organizations, and conservatory professors. As the greatest share of the Union's work took place in the consultative sections, it was clearly in members' interest to attend their meetings, voice opinions about the works demonstrated, and share their own work frequently. Further, the consultative sections held significant power over composers' creative lives. It was to the sections composers turned with applications for everything from membership in the Union, to creative grants and stays at Union-owned resorts, to recommendations for performance, publication, and purchase of their works by the KDI. The Orgkom-Secretariat habitually rubber-stamped the sections' membership recommendations, and as a practical matter, performing ensembles and Muzgiz, the state music publisher, relied on such recommendations in making their repertoire decisions. Thus, for all but the most celebrated composers whose name recognition allowed them to circumvent these processes to a certain extent, the consultative sections were the gatekeepers of professional Soviet musical life. While theoretically voluntary, submission of one's work-in-progress to them was functionally mandatory.

The power wielded by the consultative sections over the composers whose works they evaluated carried within it an inherent coercive force. Because their primary task was to appraise such works and assess how they might be improved, most meetings concluded with a list of suggestions. And as with submission of works for evaluation, implementation of such

suggestions was similarly functionally mandatory for those who wished to see their pieces performed and published. Through the harrowing experiences of the Cultural Revolution and the 1936 Anti-Formalist Campaign, Soviet composers as individuals and a professional group had learned to play it safe aesthetically, aesthetics being never far from ideology in Soviet artistic discourse. This lesson was further re-enforced in 1948 by the Central Committee's resolution "On the Opera *Velikaia druzhba*," which held composers collectively responsible not only for the shortcomings of Vano Muradeli's opera, but for the "unfavorable state of contemporary Soviet music... the formalist perversion and anti-democratic tendency in music, foreign to the Soviet *narod* and its artistic tastes," especially in symphonic and operatic genres.¹⁰ Unfortunately, these campaigns did more to create negative and positive labels for musical "tendencies" – for example, "formalist" vs. "democratic" – than to explain what they meant in practice. This chapter argues that as a result of the combined fear and uncertainty created by the *zhdanovshchina*, dating from its first salvo, the Central Committee's August 1946 resolution "On the Journals *Zvezda* and *Leningrad*," which revived the language of anti-formalism after the war, Soviet composers as a group urgently sought protection from further detriment by imposing a safe, conservative aesthetic on themselves and each other within the Composers' Union.¹¹ As this chapter will demonstrate, the mechanism through which this collective professional-group self-censorship was imposed was none other than the Union's consultative apparatus.

Form, Function, and Investment

The Composer's Union's consultative sections met weekly, usually reviewing either a single long-form work-in-progress, especially in the Opera and Ballet Section, or a handful of

¹⁰ "Postanovlenie Politbiuro TsK VKP(b) 'Ob opere *Velikaia druzhba* V. Muradeli' 10 fevralia 1948g," in Artizov and Naumov, 630-631.

¹¹ "Postanovlenie Orgbiuro TsK VKP(b) o zhurnalakh *Zvezda* i *Leningrad*' ot 14 avgusta 1946," in Artizov and Naumov, 587-591.

shorter ones, as was more common in the Consultation Commission and its successor, the Symphony and Chamber Music Section. Each section was led by a *biuro* of experts in the genre, appointed by the Orgkom-Secretariat, and maintained a larger group of regular members. Section meetings were closed to the public but open to all Union members. They were attended by a rotating cast of section members and other composers and musicologists interested in a particular work under review, with an average of ten to fifteen attendees per meeting. Union members tended to spend most of their time with one section, while paying visits to others as they saw fit. KDI officials were also welcome to attend section meetings and did so from time to time, though this distinction is complicated by the fact that some KDI officials were themselves active composers and musicologists, and thus also members of the Union.

In presenting their works-in-progress, composers usually opened with a brief introduction, explaining the work's origin, program, and future completed form. Their existing sketches were then demonstrated, occasionally by a professional performer or chamber ensemble, but more often by the composer and an assistant, in two- or four-hand piano reduction. This practice was a matter of long-standing tradition, dating back to the first generation of Russian professional composers, the Might Five (Aleksandr Borodin, Modest Mussorgsky, Nikolai Rimsky-Korsakov, Mili Balakirev, and Cesar Cui), who educated themselves in Western European compositional technique and demonstrated their works-in-progress for one another by playing through them in four-hand reduction. For the consultative sections, this method was economical and practical, but it also had its limits. Because discussants were hearing the work for the first time, in incomplete form and without a score for reference, they were not always able to get a thorough sense of the composer's vision. After the presentation, discussion began, with each participant giving her assessment and advice. The composer was then invited to

respond. Occasionally, the composer was not in attendance; in such cases, he or she was expected to read the transcript of the meeting, which was kept in the offices of the Union.

Composers usually attended meetings, because failing to do so was highly disadvantageous. An absent composer could not introduce and contextualize the work and had to leave its demonstration in the hands of another performer, which made it only harder for the discussants to provide useful commentary. Non-attendance was also bad for a composer's professional reputation; given the Union's strongly communal ethos, reluctance to participate was viewed as careless at best, and ideologically suspect at worst. Perhaps most frustratingly, non-attendance robbed composers of the opportunity to respond to the discussion, which many did with gusto. For example, after the Consultation Commission's evaluation of Mikhail Grachev's *Symphonic Poem* and Sergei Razorenov's *Symphonic Fantasia on Slavonic Themes* in January 1945, both authors were eager to have their say. Speaking first, Grachev took an accommodating tone, noting earnestly, "It's been very important for me to hear your opinions... I'll study everything you said... In my future work, I think I can overcome the incompleteness of this piece." Razorenov, on the other hand, was more resistant. Like his colleague, he thanked the Commission for its "objective criticism" and made note of the points he found valid. But he also took the opportunity to push back against a line of commentary he felt was mistaken, regarding the inadequacy of his fantasia's development section. "There is a development section here," he asserted defensively, "only you didn't get a good sense of it due to my [poor] playing. I wrote a very full development section, and the most important and fundamental themes received elaboration in it. In its sweep and culminations, the development will be very symphonic."¹²

¹² RGALI, f.2077, op.1, d.123, ll.13-13ob. For more on this discussion, see page 169.

Despite this small point of resistance, both Grachev and Razorenov responded relatively submissively to the Commission's commentary, which was likely to some extent a calculated move, taking into account the Commission's power to decide the fate of their pieces. But composers were by no means always so deferential. For instance, one of the first works considered by the new Opera Section in June 1945 was Antonio Spadavecchia's *Khoziaika gostinitsy* (*The Hostess*), presented in a piano reduction of the completed first act and sketches of the second. After a thorough discussion, the composer began his response by remarking spitefully, "At the very least, I've found affirmation that one mustn't demonstrate a work in this form." He granted some criticism had rung true for him, but much had certainly not. In particular, he fulminated,

I'm in absolute disagreement that I harmonize by some sort of artificial means, that I take a simple harmony and dress it up in finery. I encumber the harmony very little. I can't artificially intensify my harmonic language while working in the specific context... of Italian folk melody... I'm not trying to discover any new horizons... I understand my creativity; I know my strengths and the goal I set myself.

In the end, he softened his vitriol a bit by thanking the Section and allowing that though he resisted much of their criticism, "maybe tomorrow I'll take it under advisement more than I have today."¹³ Spadavecchia's vituperative response is remarkable, but not unique. Nor is it altogether different from Grachev's and Razorenov's. True, they accepted the consultative sections' criticism far more readily than Spadavecchia did, but not without thinking it through and responding to it in detail. In all three examples, the authors' genuine engagement with the consultative process is on clear display. Whether they agreed with what was said or not, Soviet composers brought their works-in-progress to the consultative sections and participated in their discussions in person not only because it was a savvy career move, but because they were truly

¹³ RGALI, f.2077, op.1, d.122, ll.10ob-11.

invested in the collaborative practices of critique and revision conducted there and believed it would help them improve their creative work.

Indeed, this investment in the consultative process was widespread among those who took part in it, as presenters and commenters. This was especially in evidence in early 1945, when the Union was in the process of creating the new Opera Section. That this body was reconstituted after its wartime dissolution is in itself significant; more than a year before the onset of the *zhdanovshchina*, the musical community on its own already felt the need to return to the collaborative practices established during the 1930s. During the January 1945 meeting hosted by the KDI on the question of Soviet opera, mentioned in the introduction to this dissertation, KDI official Vladimir Surin had urged, “Within the Union, you must create conditions that give composers uninterrupted help in their work on operas, in terms of libretto issues, qualified criticism, and consultation.”¹⁴ In discussing the issue further within the Union that March, composers embraced this idea and took it further. Viktor Belyi seized the moment, exhorting his colleagues that they must “Find the path, *dependent on us*, for overcoming the too slow and unsatisfactory development of opera, which we all feel.” Directing focus toward fostering a positive “atmosphere” for the development of Soviet opera, he stated, “We in the Union must create conditions so opera gets the same attention... as popular songs or children’s music,” the two genres that retained consultative sections through the war. In other words, he continued, “We need to create an Opera Commission, analogous to the Military and Children’s Music Commissions... [which] acquaints itself with everything written recently and what’s only begun. Such social intervention can lead to great results.”¹⁵ He further recommended the new section take on “educational” tasks, like arranging lectures on dramaturgy, and organizational ones, like

¹⁴ RGALI, f.962 (Komitet po delam iskusstv), op.3, d.1379, l.16.

¹⁵ RGALI, f.2077, op.1, d.122, ll.24, 31-32. Italics mine.

suggesting operatic subjects to composers and working with the KDI on state commissions (*goszakazy*).

In a sign of their allegiance to the consultative process, the meeting's participants overwhelmingly supported Belyi's vision for the new Opera Section. Only composer Dmitrii Kabalevskii expressed doubt, questioning whether yet another administrative body would make a real difference, or just create more busywork. But speaking for the majority, Mikhail Raukhverger impatiently dismissed this objection. Accusing his colleague of "nihilism," he fumed, "If you think an Opera Section will be superfluous, that it won't bring any results, well then, let's not discuss opera at all. Let's not discuss symphony, or children's music. Which begs the question, why do we need a Composers' Union at all? Okay, so let's shut down!" If Kabalevskii believed in the value of the Union, Raukhverger insisted, then he had to believe in the value of the consultative sections, especially one for opera, "one of the most substantial musical forms, and maybe the most responsible one."¹⁶ With further assurances the new section would focus primarily on creative consultation rather than organizational issues, the group reached consensus and resolved firmly to re-establish the Opera Section.

Three months later, the new section held its first meeting, evaluating Spadavecchia's *Khoziaika gostinitsy*. The preliminary discussion, after commission chair Nikolai Chemberdzhii welcomed his colleagues to their new work, revealed participants' faith in the consultative process had not dimmed in the least. One speaker emphasized the Section's projected function in supporting the "creative spirit" of those engaged in the massive undertaking of opera composition and noted the need to create an "intimate atmosphere," in which all felt welcome to demonstrate sketches and present their creative plans for consideration. Another spoke to its

¹⁶ Ibid, ll.65-66.

potential role as an ambassador to opera theaters, encouraging them to take on untested works and thus ameliorate the problem of new Soviet operas not reaching the stage.¹⁷ Returning to the Section's meaning for composers themselves, a third averred, "Organizing an opera section is truly a matter of exclusive importance because opera composers now... are somehow orphaned. We need our own, real center... so composers know they can bring us their ideas and be taken seriously." To make the greatest impact, he continued, the section must not only discuss completed works, but evaluate early-stage sketches in detail, as works-in-progress. Finally, another *biuro* member, Aleksandr Shaverdian concluded, "This section's goal is for composers to receive multifaceted help [at all stages], in the process of work on the libretto, on preliminary sketches, and on the completion of the opera... and to create the social atmosphere around opera that's currently lacking."¹⁸ In each of these statements and the discussion as a whole, the commitment of the Opera Section's members to the consultative process shines through. Creative consultation through the Union was functionally mandatory, and at times composers surely chafed at its effects, but at the same time, those who took part also believed they were helping each other, and receiving help themselves, by doing so.

Composers' investment in the consultative process was also evident in their concern over how best to critique one another's work. In the course of the consultative sections' meetings, participants often pondered whether a subjective or objective approach would be more helpful to their colleagues and the professional group in their mutual efforts to improve the quality of new Soviet compositions. Occasionally, objectivity came out ahead in this debate. For example, in February 1948, at a broad "creative gathering" hosted by the Consultation Commission, composer Aleksei Machavariani averred that while he felt the criticism of his first symphony was

¹⁷ RGALI, f.2077, op.1, d.122, ll.1ob-2ob.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, ll.3-4.

a bit harsh for someone still at the start of his career, even so, “I want to thank my comrades, who spoke objectively and gave me real instructions,” indicating he understood the meeting’s participants meant him no ill will, but were simply doing their job as professionally and thoroughly as possible.¹⁹ Similarly, four years later, during the Symphony Section’s evaluation of Aleksandr Lokshin’s violin sonata, Iurii Levitin analyzed the work’s flaws in great depth, then explained he had done so to “help the composer, so he understands that none of us wants either to torpedo or extol his work. Rather, we want to make an objective judgment of his successes and failures.”²⁰ In this way, Machavariani and Levitin both characterized objective criticism as the path to improving the works in question and Soviet music as a whole.

Yet, such cases were the exception. Far more often, objectivity was a matter of mistrust. For instance, when the Consultation Commission audited Boris Kozhevnikov’s second symphony in 1946, Nikolai Timofeev found himself disagreeing with another colleague’s severe criticism of the work. “Maybe his is an entirely objective point of view,” Timofeev allowed, “but when I heard this piece, I didn’t get such a painful impression as he did.”²¹ In other words, while Timofeev felt compelled to give objectivity its due as a mode of professional commentary, he clearly did not put much faith in it as the key to understanding the essence of the symphony. For that, he preferred to trust his instincts, an entirely subjective measure. In a meeting of the Symphony and Chamber Music Section in 1950, Sergei Gorchakov took this line of thought further. Having audited Igor Beloruset’s *Symphonic Poem on Ossetian Themes*, two speakers delineated its flaws carefully, while a third noted the composer had drafted it six years prior, before the Central Committee resolution imposed a new standard on Soviet music. For

¹⁹ RGALI, f.2077, op.1, d.266, l.75. For more on this discussion, see page 175.

²⁰ RGALI, f.2077, op.1, d.765, l.93.

²¹ RGALI, f. 2077, op.1, d.144, l.36.

Gorchakov, however, this was no excuse. He fumed, “I’m surprised by the objectivist approach with which others have spoken. For me, it plays no role when this was written. The author demonstrated it today. That means this is his creative credo today... It’s the kind of doubled-down [*dvoinoi*] formalism of which we simply can’t speak calmly, and I reproach my comrades for their objectivism.”²² As far as Gorchakov was concerned, objective commentary was not only untrustworthy, failing to penetrate what really mattered about a piece, but more dangerously, it distracted those entrusted with the fate of Soviet music from what their art form needed most: fiery, vigilant commentary that brooked no half-measures in service of the drive for perfection.

Commenters proved remarkably insistent not only about the correctness of their subjective judgments, but that subjectivity was the optimal approach to critique within the consultative sections. For example, when discussing excerpts from Aleksandr Zil’ber’s opera *Vasilii Temnyi*, Genrikh Litinskii opined the libretto was too “heavy” and dragged down the music, a phenomenon he had noticed in a number of similar works over the years. “Maybe that’s a subjective perception,” he concluded, “but I think I make no major sin against truth in saying so.”²³ Many others adopted a similar tactic in affirming the veracity of opinions that were deeply held, but relied on subjective professional experience and could not be expressed in objective terms. In another meeting, Vano Muradeli took up the banner of subjectivity as a matter of principle. Responding to Daniel’ Zhitomirskii’s suggestion that an objective approach might be more helpful to the composer whose works were under discussion, Muradeli declared, “When I speak, I can’t be objective. I beg your pardon in advance, but I’ll speak subjectively, because I’m a composer and there are things that are close to me and those that are not.” Similarly, in

²² RGALI, f.2077, op.1, d.465, ll.67-68.

²³ RGALI, f.2077, op.1, d.123, l.80.

evaluating Boris Antiufeev's string quartet, Georgii Polianovskii announced his unwillingness to avoid subjective language because "though in the end it's not solid, it's very honest."²⁴

Indeed, it was on account of this perceived honesty that subjectivity ultimately won out in the debate over how best to evaluate works-in-progress in the Union's consultative sections. Subjectivity might lack objectivity's rational basis, but it more than compensated through its directness, sincerity, and continuity with the longstanding Russian practice of playing through a new composition for one's colleagues and seeking their opinions before bringing it to the public. Whatever elements of formal critique might be brought to bear, for Soviet composers the definitive evaluation of a new work would always be rooted in the subjective impressions of those gathered for consultation. In expressing a marked preference for subjectivity in their commentary, the members of the Composers' Union thus rejected the notion that musical composition – or, for that matter, any artistic production – was just another type of skilled work measurable by universalizable standards, and instead embraced the method they as experienced professionals believed would lead most surely to the eradication of errors and elevation of Soviet music to a higher level of excellence.

In fact, for those invested and involved in the Union's consultative process, a larger question was exactly how brutally honest to be in their subjective analysis of each other's works-in-progress. Often, the very honesty that made subjectivity so desirable was used as a way to justify severe evaluations. For example, in one of the final meetings of the Consultation Commission before its demise, Georgii Polianovskii commented that while Lev Knipper's *Four Soldiers' Songs for Symphony Orchestra* was lovely, the music did not express the stated program at all. When Knipper responded indignantly that this assessment was not only untrue

²⁴ RGALI, f.2077, op.1, d.123, l.65; d.144, l.106.

but insulting, Polianovskii shot back, “Your reply is simply disgraceful... You shouldn’t reproach a person for saying what he thinks.”²⁵ The meeting’s chair agreed Knipper had overreacted and would do better to take Polianovskii’s critique in the spirit of unvarnished honesty in which it was offered. Similarly, in late 1946, when an audition of Revol’ Bunin’s piano quintet resulted in harsh criticism across the board, Iurii Shaporin protested in a fatherly tone that this was no way to treat a young, talented composer. This was not unusual; those who called for softer critical blows often cited youth as a mitigating factor. However, in this case, Timofeev was unmoved. “In our meetings we must speak honestly,” he countered. “Each of us is strong enough and mature enough that the won’t hang himself or jump in front of the metro if we don’t praise his work. Bunin needs to know how his music comes across.”²⁶ Indeed, this was an insurmountable argument for brutal honesty: the consultative process was worthless if it failed to provide composers with substantive advice on how to improve their works-in-progress. And how else could such advice be conveyed, but through directness and honesty? Often in consultative meetings participants prefaced their remarks by stating that they took no pleasure in saying painful things to their colleagues (although there were others who clearly relished it), but all agreed that doing so served the greater good of raising the level of Soviet composition.

However, even with such broad acknowledgement of its necessity, composers agreed that harsh criticism had to be concrete and goal-oriented to be truly beneficial to individuals and the professional group. True, some declared on principle, as Timofeev did in 1945, that “a correct relationship to art and self-criticism is the most important thing, so I’m never afraid to say offensive things to people’s faces.”²⁷ But most participants demanded a more specific reason for

²⁵ RGALI, f.2077, op.1, d.266, ll.34ob-35.

²⁶ RGALI, f.2077, op.1, d.144, l.173.

²⁷ RGALI, f.2077, op.1, d.123, l.211.

mobilizing unpleasant critiques. For instance, when in late 1948 the Opera Section audited Spadavecchia's ballet *Bereg schast'ia* (*The Banks of Happiness*), roughly halfway through the meeting Tikhon Khrennikov complained of the overall "panegyric" tone, which he felt contradicted the "sharply critical atmosphere" established in the consultative sections in the wake of the Central Committee resolution. He accused his colleagues of making "debatable speeches, striving to avoid real critical evaluation," and then launched into his own detailed assessment.²⁸ Some found his approach too harsh, but as the meeting's chair, Vasilii Dekhterev noted pointedly at the meeting's conclusion, "Khrennikov's speech motivated a series of more concrete ones, which will help not only this production, but also future ones... More concrete criticism helps us clarify what works in this ballet and must be encouraged in the future, and what doesn't work and must be avoided... The high demands [on Soviet music] obligate us to undertake serious and harsh criticism."²⁹ It seemed the course of the meeting had proved Khrennikov's point; perhaps he himself had been too severe in his expression, but in the end it was his call for sharper and more thorough critique that had turned the meeting from a series of bland positive appraisals into a trenchant evaluation of the ballet's successes and failures, enabling Spadavecchia to rethink specific points in the score and other aspiring ballet composers to learn from his mistakes. As Levitin asserted at a meeting of the new Symphony and Chamber Music Section a year later, particularly after the Central Committee resolution, "our task is to teach and help each other." For this, neither empty praise nor "naked technicism" would do; only direct and substantive criticism would allow Soviet composers to achieve their goals. Therefore, as one who wished to

²⁸ RGALI, f.2077, op.1, d.262, l.44.

²⁹ Ibid, ll.60-61, 94.

aid his professional community, Levitin declared, “the friendly relationships between us compel me to say exactly what I think” – as specifically, directly, and even harshly as possible.³⁰

In keeping with this last comment, participants in the consultative sections often framed their critiques in terms of their duty and desire to help one another, and especially young composers just embarking on their careers, bring their new compositions to their most perfect form. This point came across clearly in February 1947, when the Opera Section audited sketches for Dmitrii Vasiliev-Buglai’s opera *Nepokorennye* (*The Unvanquished*). Despite his earlier protestation that he was never afraid to offend, in this instance Timofeev prefaced his remarks with the caveat that he felt compelled to be especially careful in critiquing a work in such an early formative stage, for fear of distorting the author’s as yet unrealized vision. Vladimir Fere strongly disagreed with this notion and asserted, “When our comrade demonstrates his work for us with a special goal, to receive friendly help, it’s absolutely wrong to approach him apologetically... I consider it our duty to speak, in the process of work, to share with our comrade our impressions, and... tell him his mistakes.” Even Spadavecchia, though never a fan of the criticism he received in his own works, agreed with Fere, adding, “Let Vasiliev-Buglai take our criticism as a desire to help him overcome the difficulties we all encounter in such a difficult pursuit as opera.”³¹ In other words, because the intentions of those gathered for the meeting were directed toward helpfulness, to providing commentary of use to Vasiliev-Buglai and other operatic aspirants, they had a professional obligation to pull no punches in their critiques. In this sense, to backpedal as Timofeev had was not to exhibit kindness, as he intended, but actually to do harm to the broader community of Soviet composers. Rather, for those who

³⁰ RGALI, f.2077, op.1, d.362, l.80.

³¹ RGALI, f.2077, op.1, d.170, ll.47ob-48ob.

wished to truly help in the mutual endeavor of elevating their art, a direct approach was by far the better option.

On the other side of this equation, if it was commenters' duty to help by providing straightforward criticism, it was composers' to take their criticism graciously, and acknowledge the help they had received. Thus, when at the close of an intense 1952 meeting of the Symphony and Chamber Music Section S. Serezhnikov angrily rejected the negative evaluation of his piano sonata, he found himself the subject of a different kind of criticism. During the meeting, Mateusz Vol'berg had given such an exacting appraisal that others had, for once, urged him to moderate his tone, particularly because Serezhnikov was still a conservatory student, just beginning his career. As Knipper lectured him, "We must help the author... If in general we discuss works quite harshly... in relation to Serezhnikov we have a significantly greater responsibility, because each word said to a young author by experienced comrades, he'll take as absolute truth."

Knipper need not have worried; Serezhnikov was in no mood to accept the commentary offered him. But in this, he miscalculated, and his defiant response turned the meeting's tide. "Everything would have been fine if the author hadn't spoken," Evgenii Makarov sighed angrily.

His speech disappointed me. Here you received... specific, clearly expressed thoughts about your work. The speakers, recognizing its merits, saw in it major flaws and thought it necessary to tell you so, because they hoped you'd learn from it. But you related to this insufficiently thoughtfully... even immodestly. That grieves me as a participant in this meeting.³²

Here, multiple factors came into play. As Knipper's remarks demonstrate, as a young composer, Serezhnikov was expected to take to heart the analytical opinions of his seasoned elders, who had even been kind enough to gesture toward protecting him from the full brunt of Vol'berg's assessment. Yet, he had shown no such respect, and worse, he had broken a cardinal rule of the

³² RGALI, f.2077, op.1, d.765, ll.3-4, 12-13.

consultation process. The composer was certainly free to disagree with particular points of criticism, and many frequently did. But the requisite partner of such disagreement was a promise of further consideration, which Serezhnikov had not provided, saying only that he would think about the “lesser part” of what had been said. Having strayed from the script and violated the unspoken contract between participants in the consultative sections, Serezhnikov marked himself as one who was not truly invested, thereby turning his comrades’ sympathy into censure.

Fortunately, not every composer had a tin ear for the rules of the game. Ol’ga Nikol’skaia fared far better in a similar situation, when the Symphony and Chamber Music Section audited her second string quartet in June 1948. In this meeting, much of the criticism was rather bland, prompting Litinskii to remark, as Khrennikov had, “I think it necessary to speak more harshly. I think this will help the author.” He proceeded to do so, and when it came time for Nikol’skaia’s response, she thanked him for his helpful advice. “I want to say that it’s very good you spoke so harshly,” she averred. “Better you speak like that, than tell me everything is wonderful, because nothing sensible every comes from that kind of critique.”³³ With this statement, so unlike Serezhnikov’s, Nikol’skaia signaled that she understood both the helpful intentions of the meeting’s participants and the value of harsh criticism in their mutual endeavor. In doing so, she identified herself as a member of the community of Soviet composers striving to achieve ever-higher standards through the consultative process, rather than an angry outsider like Serezhnikov.

As a final aspect of composers’ determination to help one another through harsh, honest subjective criticism, participants in the consultative process adopted a sense of collective responsibility for the resultant musical works, whether they were counted as failures or successes. For example, after listening through Max Mazor’s string quartet in a meeting of the

³³ RGALI, f.2077, op.1, d.265, ll.38ob-39.

Symphony and Chamber Music Section in March 1949, Aleksandr Veprik expressed disappointment that after three years' work, the piece was neither complete nor promising. Given the higher demands placed on Soviet composers by the Central Committee resolution, he asserted, neither Mazor nor anyone else could be satisfied with such a result. But who was to blame? "Probably, the Union is at fault," he declared. "We must demonstrate [such works] more often, take an interest in what our comrade is working on... We live as one family, and his failure is our failure."³⁴ Other participants could only agree. To be sure, Mazor himself should have offered up his sketches earlier in the process, but his reluctance to do so did not make the quartet's failure his alone. As members of the Union, Veprik and others believed, they all had a responsibility to help each other, not only by providing detailed assessments of their colleagues' work, but also by drawing out quieter members, keep track of their work, and make sure they submitted it for regular evaluation, for their own good and the good of the professional group.

And when they did so, the process truly seemed to bear fruit. For example, a year after Mazor's debacle, in April 1950, Vano Muradeli demonstrated a revised version of his symphonic poem with chorus, *Put' k Berlinu (The Road to Berlin)*, noting the Symphony and Chamber Music Section had subjected its initial draft to "correct and deep criticism, after which I decided to rework it." This time, participants praised the work heartily. Stressing the substantial difference between the two versions, Levitin declared, "I'm very moved... I'd like first of all to congratulate all of us, then the author, with the appearance of this wonderful new work, which answer the demands now before us all." Veprik agreed, noting proudly, "I can't help but mention that this work was entirely prompted by us, and in the process of work we helped as much as we could." That the piece had turned out so well, he continued, was a tribute to Muradeli's

³⁴ RGALI, f.2077, op.1, d.361, ll.94-95.

attentiveness to criticism and an affirmation of the value of the consultative process. When it was Muradeli's turn, he upheld this line of thought entirely, crediting the "friendly atmosphere" of the consultative apparatus for his success and averring, "If at the first audition my comrades hadn't given me harsh criticism, I'd have been robbed of the chance to deeply understand my mistakes and further work on them."³⁵ Muradeli was a slick character, and here, as so often, he laid it on rather thick. Nevertheless, he did majorly revised the symphonic poem based on his colleagues' criticism, and with the second version he attained success in their eyes. As far as Levitin and Veprik were concerned, it was precisely because Muradeli had brought his work to the Symphony and Chamber Music Section, and its members had so thoroughly, conscientiously, and even harshly evaluated it, that it ultimately achieved such a refined form. To mark the piece's success as a mutual accomplishment of the Section's participants was an entirely reasonable claim, and Muradeli understood his role as author was to share the accolades with his musical comrades.

As these examples demonstrate, the meetings of the Composers' Union's consultative sections were by no means a mere performative duty for Union members to more or less reluctantly fulfill. Those who participated, as presenters and commenters, were deeply invested in the consultative process. Through regular attendance, active participation, and often fiery exchanges, they demonstrated their commitment to not only show up and say a few words, but to engage in real discussion of each other's works-in-progress, as a continuation of the collaborative practices employed by Russian composers since the nineteenth century. As they worked, composers regularly expressed concern over how best to formulate their critiques, ultimately settling on a subjective approach marked by its honesty, directness, concreteness, and

³⁵ RGALI, f.2077, op.1, d.449, ll.1-1ob, 3-3ob, 7-7ob. The earlier history of this work in the Symphony and Chamber Music Section is recounted below, on pages 157-158.

even harshness, as an expression of their desire and sense of duty to effectively help one another reach ever greater accomplishments. And perhaps most significantly, whether such heights were attained or not, composers understood the resultant musical works as a matter of collective responsibility. Through this process, Soviet composers developed into a tight-knit mutually supportive professional group, with an ambitious, shared aspiration raise Soviet music to a higher level, who believed the consultative process, however much they might sometimes chafe against it, was the best method by which to achieve their shared goals.

Aesthetics and Ideology

In their evaluations, the Composers' Union's consultative sections relied on the established Soviet practice of combining aesthetic and ideological criteria in determining the fate of a particular composer or musical work. In a milieu in which the charge of "formalism," ostensibly an aesthetic term, was explicitly associated with Westernness, an explicitly political term, they could hardly do otherwise. This tendency to conflate the two comes across most clearly in the meetings of the Symphony and Chamber Music Section's *biuro*, the subset of section members who formed its governing board. The *biuro* made more directed, efficient decisions on specific questions in closed meetings, which were held separately from the larger meetings of the section as a whole, where more free-form discussion was the norm.

As noted above, the Symphony and Chamber Music Section made decisions affecting every stage of the professional lives and compositional processes of its members. This control began with applications for membership in the Composers' Union. Here, the necessity of satisfying both aesthetic and ideological criteria was on full display. For example, when Izrail' Kan applied in July 1948, presenting short piano pieces and salon romances in support of his case, *biuro* members expressed dissatisfaction both aesthetically, because the works "display dilettantism and a lack of mastery" and ideologically, because "Kan's worldview is a bit

pessimistic.”³⁶ Fortunately for Kan, he was given a chance to salvage his application by presenting “more substantial” works three weeks later. This time, *biuro* members praised his “good professional level and undoubted creative honesty.” Though his ideological credentials were still found lacking – he was warned to pay more attention to “the necessity of creating musical images closer to our era” – Kan’s recommendation for membership was approved on the second attempt.

A similar pairing of aesthetic and ideological criteria was in evidence when Margarita Kuss went up for membership four months later, on the strength of her cantata *Slav’sia, molodost’!* (*Hail to You, Youth!*) After auditing the work, the *biuro* unanimously approved her application for a membership recommendation, placing equal weight on her “inarguable talent and sufficiently high professional mastery,” and on “the democracy of her musical language and her correct understanding of the ideological aims set before Soviet composers.”³⁷ Tatiana Saliutrinskaia, on the other hand, was not so lucky. Though the *biuro* found the pieces she presented the following January demonstrated compositional talent, it denied her request for a membership recommendation because her work “almost entirely lacks bright melodic images, and she uses folksong intonations very little.”³⁸ As clear imagery and folk elements were essential components of politically correct Soviet music, her application failed on ideological grounds.

To be sure, aesthetic quality and professional skill were primary in the Symphony and Chamber Music Section *biuro*’s recommendations for Union membership. In some cases,

³⁶ RGALI, f.2077, op.1, d.263, l.35.

³⁷ RGALI, f.2077, op.1, d.264, l.34.

³⁸ RGALI, f.2077, op.1, d.360, l.3.

decisions were made without mention of ideological criteria.³⁹ And in others, the aesthetic and ideological were not easily separable, as when Iurii Shishakov was given a green light based on his “outstanding melodic warmth and sufficiently simple form of expression,” commentary that nodded toward the ideologically requisite qualities of expressivity and accessibility, but framed them in aesthetic terms.⁴⁰ Still, the *biuro* never approved applications in which the music presented explicitly failed to meet ideological criteria, which indicates that where aesthetic concerns dominated, the music at least had to meet a minimum ideological standard. Taken together, the *biuro*’s decisions sent a clear message to composers aspiring to Union membership: only those who demonstrated an ability to write music that met both its aesthetic and its ideological standards could gain entry into professional Soviet musical life.

The entangling of aesthetic and ideological criteria was further in evidence in *biuro* decisions affecting composers in the midst of work on new pieces. In such cases, the Symphony and Chamber Music Section controlled the Union’s purse strings, through its management of creative grants (*tvorcheskaia pomoshch*’) disbursed through Muzfond, and access to the Union’s various rural resorts (*doma tvorchestva i otdykha*). The Section’s administration of grants and resort access proceeded in two phases. First, in the early stages of writing, the *biuro* reviewed a composer’s creative plan and audited excerpts of the work-in-progress to determine whether to award a grant or resort stay and establish a deadline for completion. Second, once a funded work was complete, the *biuro* reviewed its final version to determine whether to accept it in fulfillment of the terms of the grant. If its evaluation was positive, the *biuro* directed Muzfond to produce a final receipt for the composer, and if negative, the composer was asked to further revise. As with

³⁹ See for example the case of composer Volchkov in RGALI, f.2077, op.1, d.360, l.45.

⁴⁰ RGALI, f.2077, op.1, d.360, l.24.

Union membership, the Symphony and Chamber Music Section's decisions regarding creative grants and resort access were rubber stamped by the Orgkom and later Secretariat.

Theoretically, when reviewing a completed work, the *biuro* could reject it entirely, which would obligate the composer to repay the grant. But as Tomoff has shown, this was not the consultative sections' usual practice, and in fact there are no examples of this result in the archival record for this period.⁴¹ Rather, the members of the *biuro* took their role as advisers and monitors quite seriously and believed that providing commentary directed toward revision and success was far preferable to declaring a work a failure. As Veprik reminded his colleagues in October 1948, "Each work written on a creative grant must be good enough to recommend for performance and publication." Citing the "enormous responsibility" placed on the *biuro* by the state's heightened demands for music, he asserted that every composer ought to bring his or her work-in-progress to the Section and "if we find it's proceeding incorrectly, we must tell our comrade, warn him about his mistake, and help with advice and instructions."⁴² In some cases, this sense of responsibility even extended as far as assigning personal consultants with whom a composer was obligated to work as a condition of her creative grant, as when the *biuro* directed Samuil Urbakh to consult with Vladimir Iurovskii in the process of work on his oratorio about Stalingrad.⁴³ As Veprik's speech indicates, in response to the state's practice of holding composers collectively accountable for individual musical missteps, reaffirmed by the February 1948 resolution "On the Opera *Velikaia družba*," Union members proactively assigned themselves a collective obligation to shepherd each other away from making "mistakes" in their works, before the state had an opportunity to discover them.

⁴¹ Tomoff, 122-152. Tomoff argues that lax financial management was one of the motivating factors behind the 1948 *zhdanovshchina* campaign against the Soviet musical community.

⁴² RGALI, f.2077, op.1, d.264, l.22.

⁴³ Ibid., l.2.

In the Symphony and Chamber Music Section *biuro*'s assessments of creative grants and resort access, aesthetic and ideological concerns both remained important, though one or the other might dominate at different stages of the process. In early-stage decisions, ideological criteria tended to gain the upper hand. The Composers' Union sought to promote compositions that would be officially recognized as triumphs of Soviet creativity, a victory in which the entire professional group could share, so *biuro* members had a vested interest in assessing the ideological potential of the in-progress works they auditioned. So, for example, the *biuro* eagerly funded Aleksandr Abramskii's choral-orchestral composition on the theme of a soldier's postwar return to his native *kolkhoz* and Aleksandr Dzegelonok's symphonic poem on the battle of Sevastopol', while granting a stay at the Union's resort in Ruza to Iurii Biriukov as he worked on his cantata in memory of Zhdanov.⁴⁴ For their part, composers, aware of this bias on the *biuro*'s part, often responded by directing their creative efforts to suit its preferences and taking pains to play up their work's ideological credentials in their grant pitches. Thus, in asking for a creative grant for his fifth symphony, former RAPM member Boris Shekhter highlighted his recent work for the Central Committee in collecting revolutionary-era songs and claimed it had inspired him to write a large-scale orchestral work "whose content and ideological conception are marked by the influence... of songs from the Bolshevik revolutionary underground and Civil War... Its themes are closely connected with the ideological content of this material." The *biuro* found this proposal for a work that expanded Shekhter's RAPMist ideals to symphonic scale "extremely interesting" and awarded him the grant.⁴⁵

Vano Muradeli employed a similar technique in undertaking and seeking a grant for his first major work after the denunciation of his opera *Velikaia družba*, a symphonic poem entitled

⁴⁴ Ibid., ll.25-27; d.360, l.7.

⁴⁵ RGALI, f.2077, op.1, d.264, l.22ob.

Vziate Berlina (*The Capture of Berlin*, later, *Put' pobedy*, *The Path to Victory*). In October 1948, the *biuro* awarded him a grant based solely on the ideological promise of its title and program. However, as often happened, when the composer presented his mostly-completed score four months later, the *biuro* expressed greater concern for its aesthetic qualities, as well. On the ideological side, Elena Grosheva praised Muradeli for “trying to answer the Central Committee resolution and create a programmatic symphonic work written in simple, accessible language.” For the most part, she and others agreed, he had succeeded admirably, though there were still flaws to be corrected; for example, she found the introduction “excessively elegiac, lacking the feeling of quietly assured will and decisiveness” required by the work’s theme. But on the aesthetic side, Boris Tsukkerman, without disputing its sterling ideological credentials, was less satisfied. He opined that the poem would benefit from greater use of polyphony and that Muradeli “must overcome harmonic issues (in part, the preponderance of organ points) and misuse of repetitive rhythms.” Still, based on its “positive evaluation of the author’s ideological efforts and the basic thematic material,” the *biuro* recommended the work be accepted in fulfillment of the grant, provided Muradeli revised it based on the commentary received and presented a new version in the near future.⁴⁶

At the other end of the compositional process, aesthetic concerns were more likely to take center stage, as the *biuro* debated whether a given composer had fulfilled the obligation incurred under the terms of the grant. Encouraging composers to undertake ideologically-driven themes was one thing, but as the gatekeepers of professional music, *biuro* members also felt a duty to maintain high standards of artistry and professional skill. With this goal in mind, the *biuro* especially noted the “good quality musical material” in its approval of Sergei Razorenov’s violin

⁴⁶ RGALI, f.2077, op.1, d.264, l.25; d.360, ll.13-14ob. The further history of this work is related above, on pages 151-152.

concerto in November 1948. Likewise, when approving Nikolai Narimanidze's poem for violin and orchestra shortly thereafter, the *biuro* remarked with satisfaction that its "rhapsodic melody in the Armenian national spirit is well developed against the limpid orchestral accompaniment. Artistically and technically, the work reaches a high level." Finally, a few months later, when the *biuro* approved Nikolai Miaskovskii's second cello sonata, it highlighted the "necessity of noting this work's high artistic value."⁴⁷ Though surely not blind to ideological concerns, in each of these cases the *biuro* foregrounded compositional skill and artistic quality in making its decision to accept the work in question in fulfillment of the terms of their creative grants.

Nevertheless, while ideological concerns might dominate initially and aesthetic ones in the final accounting, in the majority of the *biuro*'s deliberations on creative grants, at all stages, both sets of criteria came into play. This was certainly the case for Aleksei Aksenov, who presented his application for a grant by marking both his symphonic suite as ideological valuable, in that its themes were based on folksongs from regions across Russia, and himself as a consummate music professional, in that his "scientific-theoretical knowledge of folk music" would ensure the work's aesthetic value.⁴⁸ The *biuro* agreed on both counts and awarded the grant. Lev Abeliovich had similar success with his proposed piano suite on Belorussian themes, for which the *biuro* awarded a resort stay based on his ideologically correct use of folk materials and his "professional, serious approach to the theme, which enables one to believe the work will be successful."⁴⁹ Yet, the application of both aesthetic and ideological criteria could also be a double-edged sword, as Aleksandr Zil'ber discovered in late 1948. Though he boosted his proposed symphonic poem's ideological credentials by titling it *Moskva Pobednaia (Victorious*

⁴⁷ RGALI, f.2077, op.1, d.253, ll.33, 34; d.360, l.4.

⁴⁸ RGALI, f.2077, op.1, d.264, l.23.

⁴⁹ RGALI, f.2077, op.1, d.360, l.1.

Moscow), after auditing excerpts, the *biuro* declined to fund it due to dissatisfaction with its aesthetic quality.⁵⁰

The combination of aesthetic and ideological criteria was equally common in the *biuro*'s decisions regarding completed grant-funded musical works. For example, in October 1948, it approved and even recommended for performance the final version of Vadim Kochetov's Trio no.2, declaring it "mature and sufficiently interesting" aesthetically, as well as a work that "will surely attract sympathy from listeners," a key ideological characteristic.⁵¹ Arkadii Mazaev's romances were a similarly big hit. After expressing both its aesthetical pleasure in the "doubtless talent of the author, with each romance bearing the stamp of his unique individuality" and its ideological satisfaction with Mazaev's "striving to create a clear melodic line based on folk intonations," the *biuro* accepted them in fulfillment of the creative grant and further recommended them for performance and publication.⁵² Finally, both aesthetic and ideological criteria played clear roles in the *biuro*'s discussion of Irina Iordan's string quartet, both before and after the author received a grant. Iordan first presented her quartet in June 1948, when the score was far enough along to be demonstrated in proper instrumentation rather than piano reduction. After the presentation, one commenter noted approvingly that the work stood out as a rare example of ideologically sound, realism-based chamber music, and another seconded this by declaring, "Our formalists introduced into chamber music such foreign elements that we have even grown accustomed to hearing un-quartet-like music. I'm glad this work has a very clear, simple conception. It creates a realistic impression, which we need today." However, on the aesthetic side, others felt the finale lacked sufficient musical development. In the end, the *biuro*

⁵⁰ RGALI, f.2077, op.1, d.264, l.24.

⁵¹ Ibid., l.3ob.

⁵² RGALI, f.2077, op.1, d.264, l.22.

gave Iordan a grant with the stipulation that she make revisions to improve the work's aesthetic quality. This plan proved successful on all fronts; when Iordan presented the revised quartet six months later, the *biuro* judged it an ideologically and aesthetically "significant work," which fulfilled the terms of her grant, and further recommended it be performed at the upcoming Composers' Union plenum.⁵³ In each of these cases, neither aesthetic nor ideological merit alone was sufficient to obtain the *biuro*'s approval. While at times one or the other concern might dominate, ultimately, composers had to satisfy both sets of criteria to successfully navigate the process of obtaining a creative grant or resort stay and having their finished work accepted in fulfillment of the terms of their grant.

The final area in which composers were reliant on recommendations from the Symphony and Chamber Music Section's *biuro* was in determining whether their completed works would achieve a status beyond that of compositional exercise, by reaching the public through performance and publication, and by generating income for their authors through purchase by the KDI. Neither performance ensembles nor Muzgiz were interested in undertaking the extensive work of sorting through every new work to discover those of potential use to them. Both for practical reasons related to the limited time available for such efforts – and in Muzgiz's case, the severe backlog and paper shortages affecting all Soviet publishers in this era – and as a matter of self-protection against implication in potential future musical scandals, these organizations preferred to direct their attention to works already been vetted and recommended by the Composers' Union, through its consultative sections.

⁵³ RGALI, f.2077, op.1, d.263, ll.23-26; d.264, l.34. For the audition of Iordan's quartet by the full Symphony and Chamber Music Section a week before the *biuro*'s second discussion of it, see page 179.

In keeping with its increased attention to aesthetics when evaluating whether to accept completed works in fulfillment of a creative grant, the Symphony and Chamber Music Section's *biuro* likewise emphasized aesthetics when considering whether to recommend works for performance and publication. Even so, it did not focus on this aspect exclusively. On one hand, the archival record does not contain any examples in which ideological criteria were employed exclusively in making this determination. But on the other hand, here, as elsewhere, circumscribed reliance on aesthetic criteria was also rare. There were a handful of examples, as when, in late 1949 the *biuro* recommended Iakov Solodukho's vocal-orchestral cycle *Rodina* (*Motherland*) for performance at the upcoming Union plenum after one member pronounced it "melodically very good; the music is honest, broad, and accords very well with the text" and others noted its "organic nature" and marked it as a "great step forward" in its author's creative development.⁵⁴ And in a case with the opposite outcome, the *biuro* declined to recommend either performance or publication A. Kazakevich's symphony, judging it "an immature work... though the author has doubtless abilities to create a small symphonic piece." The *biuro* suggested Kazakevich build up experience with a more modest orchestral effort before attempting a full-scale symphony and resolved to ask the Secretariat to award him a creative grant for such an endeavor.⁵⁵

But more often, when recommending works for performance and publication, the *biuro*, as usual, applied both aesthetic and ideological criteria. This was certainly the case in its extensive discussion of Iulian Krein's piano concerto on Uzbek themes in May 1948. In aesthetic terms, *biuro* members enjoyed Krein's arrangement of Uzbek melodies. As Iurovskii remarked, "This is pretty music, wonderfully done... He made the material he used even more attractive."

⁵⁴ RGALI, f.2077, op.1, d.360, ll.38-39.

⁵⁵ RGALI, f.2077, op.1, d.263, l.12.

Indeed, Krein's turn to Uzbek melodies served also as an ideological strong point, and one *biuro* member declared the concerto "a significant victory over the flaws of his previous works, which were [aesthetically] delightful but lacked realistic objectivism." Still, Krein had proposed the concerto for publication, and as another member cautioned, "To publish a Soviet composer's work after the Central Committee resolution is a very responsible affair. I feel like he lives in his own world, a good one, but between him and our real Soviet life of 1948 there's some sort of haze." This was potentially a serious problem, given the Party's increased demands for greater realism from composers as a group. Finally, Veprik salvaged the situation with a philosophical question, asking, "Do Soviet composers have the right to such lyricism?... I think we do." Others concurred, and Iurovskii noted that if there was yet some impressionism in Krein's work, he was clearly striving to overcome it and had made great progress in his concerto. This settled the ideological debate, and the *biuro* approved the concerto for publication.⁵⁶

Indeed, as the caution in Krein's case indicates, the application of ideological criteria was, if anything, more likely to result in the *biuro* declining to recommend a piece. Only about half the pieces considered on both aesthetic and ideological grounds received recommendations, while the rate increased to two-thirds for those in which the discussion revolved only around aesthetics. Such was the experience of Aleksei Muravlev, who proposed his *Skazki (Fairytale)* for piano for publication in June 1948. Though one *biuro* member enthused that in terms of aesthetics, "This is a good piece, with many positive qualities. It's meaty, noble in style, severe and stern, with unique, fresh harmonies and good texture," others expressed doubt about its ideological fitness. One complained, "It's abstract and doesn't make a living connection with listeners," while others criticized its "darkness" and lack of contemporaneity. The *biuro* offered

⁵⁶ Ibid., ll.60b-8

to reconsider if Muravlev revised the work to improve its ideological credentials, but the author declined, and the *Skazki* went unpublished.⁵⁷ Such benefits were reserved for pieces like E. Lutskii's three piano pieces, discussed the following year, which the *biuro* praised both aesthetically as "written with taste and good knowledge of piano texture" and ideologically as "possessing clear musical logic and healthy emotional coloring," and recommended for performance at the Union plenum and beyond.⁵⁸

The consultative sections' relationship to the KDI was somewhat different than to performance ensembles and Muzgiz, in that the KDI's censors did review the works it purchased as state commissions (*goszakazy*), both in the early stages, when the initial contract was signed, and after completion, when the payment was disbursed, a sort of inversion of the Union's administration of creative grants.⁵⁹ Even so, the KDI, and especially its branch that dealt with commissioning and censoring music, the Main Administration for Musical Affairs (GUMU), sought to cover its bases by partnering with the Union, enlisting the consultative sections to recommend promising new works and attract composers to undertake themes and genres GUMU had an interest in promoting. To this end, in October 1948 Konstantin Sakva, a senior GUMU official, addressed the Symphony and Chamber Music Section's *biuro*. Though in introducing him *biuro* member Nikolai Ivanov-Radkevich noted pointedly that in their mutual work "KDI takes a organizational role... while our section handles creative work and tutelage of composers," Sakva lost no time in demanding more. What Soviet music needed most in the wake of the February 1948 resolution, he declared, was "large-scale works on Soviet themes, primarily works about our leaders... [and] programmatic music." Though some positive efforts had

⁵⁷ RGALI, f.2077, op.1, d.263, ll.16-17.

⁵⁸ RGALI, f.2077, op.1, d.360, ll.21-21ob.

⁵⁹ For more on the KDI's commissioning and purchasing process, see Chapter 3.

already been made, they were far from sufficient, and Sakva placed the onus on the Section to “devise concrete measures to improve work,” which the KDI would enforce. Lest the *biuro* doubt his seriousness, he concluded in a threatening tone, “If the situation continues as it has... we’ll be in a very unpleasant position quite soon.”⁶⁰

Sakva’s words drew sharp protest from *biuro* member Veprik, who asserted, “The Union can’t and shouldn’t replace GUMU” in taking on such organizational duties.⁶¹ Furthermore, he pointed out, if GUMU wished to encourage composers to work in larger forms, it ought to more freely distribute advances, rather than habitually withholding payment until the work was completed and approved. This enraged Sakva, but his colleague Sofia Gotgel’f quickly moved to smooth things over. While stressing that GUMU had to maintain its standards in granting advances only to the most promising cases, she assured the *biuro* GUMU had come to seek their help, not make accusations. “The Section’s work, listening to works-in-progress, is very important,” she averred. “You can advise us so we make fewer mistakes and work with a larger circle of composers.”⁶² Placated, *biuro* member Levitin adopted her conciliatory tone, expressing confidence that neither Sakva nor Veprik had intended to malign each other’s organizations, but rather, “we all, together, must correct this situation... The Section’s job is to help GUMU. We composers, our Section, our Secretariat, are responsible for the music that’s written; we must help by attracting composers and giving advice on the acceptance of works.” However, he emphasized, the Section could only help “creatively, not administratively.” Finally, Ivanov-Radkevich and Sakva joined the consensus, the former committing the Section to evaluating new works and working toward “educational goals, including finding new means of musical

⁶⁰ RGALI, f.2077, op.1, d.264, ll.6, 10-11.

⁶¹ Ibid., l.12

⁶² RGALI, f.2077, op.1, d.264, l.13.

expression” and the latter inviting members of the *biuro* to help GUMU formulate its commissioning plan for the coming year.⁶³ It seemed the two organizations had reached agreement, with the consultative sections’ recommendations playing a vital role in the KDI’s decisions to purchase new works as state commissions.

In practice, the Section’s *biuro* made recommendations to the KDI less often than to performance organizations and Muzgiz. When it did so, the *biuro* relied more heavily on aesthetic criteria than in other areas of its work. For example, Isaak Shvartz’s *Romantic Suite* for chamber orchestra was recommended to the KDI solely on the strength of its musical style, which was judged “very well done, very successful, though not without the strong influence of Schumann,” and Nikolai Chemberdzhii’s *Sinfonietta* was likewise recommended purely because the *biuro* found it “content-filled and interesting, clear and unique in thematic material.”⁶⁴ In neither case were ideological factors considered. However, when it came to Aleksandr Mosolov’s sketches for his *Cantata on Lenin*, just the type of piece the KDI sought to commission, its very nature demanded ideological consideration. Aesthetically, *biuro* members judged the work to have great potential, saying, “It’s on the right path and will sound good in choral performance,” though as usual they also had notes for the author. But Iurovskii was dissatisfied ideologically. “We compose so many cantatas and oratorios, and they’re all written the same way,” he complained. “I think this is deeply mistaken; it leaves the listener cold from the start, because it doesn’t come from the heart.” For all his aesthetic mastery, Mosolov’s piece was on its way to becoming just another predictable cantata, which surely could not serve the Party’s purposes well. Still, Iurovskii agreed “this work is very much needed and must be

⁶³ Ibid., ll.15-16, 18.

⁶⁴ RGALI, f.2077, op.1, d.263, ll.34ob-35; d.264, l.24ob.

completed.” The *biuro* resolved to recommend the cantata to the KDI, with the provision that Mosolov carefully attend to their commentary as he completed it.⁶⁵

The Symphony and Chamber Music Section *biuro*'s reliance on aesthetic criteria in its recommendations to the KDI must not be misread as an indication of the Composers' Union's deepest priorities in promoting new music. To be sure, the *biuro* would under no circumstances allow a new work past its oversight with shaky aesthetics, as the cases cited here attest. But whereas in recommending works for performance and publication the *biuro* took on equal responsibility for screening their aesthetic and ideological soundness, when it recommended them to the KDI it was partnering with a state censorship agency whose primary task was to vet new musical works ideologically. To be sure, to do their jobs properly, the *biuro* had to keep an eye on ideology and the KDI on aesthetics, but in working together on state commissions, each organization could couch itself more fully within its primary sphere of expertise. Thus, the *biuro*'s greater reliance on aesthetic criteria in these cases does not correspond to a lesser concern for ideological criteria, but rather its confidence that the KDI would take the lead in assessing that aspect of the compositions the *biuro* sent its way. Taken in aggregate, the *biuro*'s recommendations for Union membership, creative grants and resort stays, and performance, publication, and purchase by the KDI clearly demonstrate that aesthetic and ideological criteria were equally important in the consultative sections' assessments, and composers seeking their endorsement would do well to ensure their new works fulfilled both sets of criteria, and to take the sections' advice where their works were found lacking.

Friendship, Fear, and Coercion

As much as composers were invested in the consultative process as an intra-professional activity, a means by which they as a professional group could work together to refine the art of

⁶⁵ RGALI, f.2077, op.1, d.263, ll.22-23.

Soviet classical music composition, they never lost sight of the watchful eye of state. As their equal concern for aesthetic and ideological criteria in their evaluations demonstrates, they maintained an awareness at all times that today's work-in-progress could become tomorrow's major scandal, as happened with Muradeli's *Velikaia družba* in February 1948. Composers' fear of such an eventuality, and their eagerness to do everything in their power to avoid it through preemptive correction, had a definite impact on the tone with which they addressed presenters in consultative meetings throughout this period. With the political stakes high, the "friendly atmosphere" within the Union to which they often paid tribute frequently grew tense, impelling commenters' discourse into more vituperative and coercive territory.

As noted above, by mutual agreement participants in the consultative sections preferred a subjective, direct, even harsh mode of address in their evaluations, with the aim of prioritizing honesty and active helpfulness over mere technical critique or bland praise. Even so, many commenters made an effort to maintain a level of *politesse*, as a sign of their sincere desire to support and work together with their colleagues on improving their works-in-progress. Thus, for example, after listening through Sergei Vasil'enko's fifth symphony in the Symphony and Chamber Music Section in May 1948, Boris Tsukkerman noted circumspectly, "I think the gloomy, tragic images on one hand and the lyrical, bright ones on the other are very different... Of course, one must have contrast, but in the first part a slightly different character might be desirable."⁶⁶ Samuil Urbakh took a similar approach in evaluating Filipp Gershkovich's orchestral *Capriccio on Romanian Themes* five years later. "The orchestration is a bit heavy," he ventured mildly. "There's a great deal of unnecessary doubling here. Clearly, this draws on the tradition of Romanian orchestras. But it would be advisable to lighten it a bit and give some

⁶⁶ RGALI, f.2077, op.1, d.265, ll.9-10.

room to pure timbres.”⁶⁷ In both cases, the commenters managed to convey substantial critical points – that Vasil’enko must brighten his first theme and Gershkovich alleviate his ponderous orchestral unisons – while maintaining a polite tone. By couching their demands in passive constructions and qualifying modifiers, they preserved the straightforward goal-orientation prized in such assessments, while expressing themselves gently enough to convince the authors to accept their advice as sound and well-intentioned, and to see Tsukkerman and Urbakh as caring colleagues who wanted to help improve the quality of the pieces under consideration.

In keeping with this approach, commenters often spoke in terms of incomplete success, rather than outright failure, though these amounted to the same thing. For example, when evaluating Iosif Neimark’s chorale “Lenin Lives!”, set to Vladimir Mayakovsky’s famous poem “Komsomol’skaia,” Dmitrii Shostakovich, a relatively infrequent attendee at such meetings, remarked, “You mustn’t overuse the high register. In A minor, the music sounds not entirely successful. It feels disordered, unconvincing. Overall, the piece is good, and the difficult task of setting Mayakovsky’s words is fulfilled honorably, but you need to revise a bit.”⁶⁸ Such comments could also open the door to more exacting questions. Such was the case in late 1947, when the Consultation Commission audited Aleksei Sokolov-Kamin’s concerto for balalaika, a work in keeping with the ongoing effort to broaden the use of folk instruments beyond the limits of traditional folk music. Apparently, Sokolov-Kamin’s labors in this area fell short of the mark. After Vladimir Enke characterized it as “somewhat unsuccessful,” Max Mazor felt emboldened to raise the larger issue of whether such a work could ever be successful, musing, “The question occurs to me, is it worth writing this kind of thing for balalaika... [which] has well-known

⁶⁷ RGALI, f.2077, op.1, d.874, l.3.

⁶⁸ RGALI, f.2077, op.1, d.265, ll.48-49.

limitations?”⁶⁹ Had Mazor’s remark not been preceded by Enke’s, it would likely have sounded far more hostile to the author. Yet with the benefit of this polite, comradely setup, Mazor was able to convey to Sokolov-Kamin that his piece had little chance of gaining approval without insulting him personally.

Still, wishing to soften the critical blow was not equivalent to lessening critical vigilance. When commenters endeavoring to maintain a polite tone found a work’s success could not even be described as “incomplete,” they did not shy from saying so, but rather turned to the language of regret. This was Gavriil Popov’s technique during the evaluation of Sergei Razorenov’s *Symphonic Fantasia on Slavic Themes*, mentioned above, about which he could only say that while the musical itself was lovely, Razorenov had woven it together with “forgive me for this rudeness, flabby technique.”⁷⁰ Interestingly, the object of regret varied, depending on the commenter. While Popov directed his remorse toward Razorenov, apologizing for having to give such an unpleasant assessment to a comrade-in-arms, during the 1945 discussion of Lev Stepanov’s ballet *Krai rodnoi (Native Land)*, Litinskii focused his regret on the work itself, expressing sorrow that it had turned out so poorly. Noting piously that “ballet is a synthesis of very complex factors, not only musical, but dramatic; in this lies the specificity of ballet and its difference from other genres,” Litinskii lamented in quick succession that Stepanov had “unfortunately” not developed his leitmotifs, “unfortunately” insufficiently developed the work’s musical and dramatic characteristics, “unfortunately” not included enough local folkdances, though the ballet was intended for the national stage of the Kazakh SSR, and “unfortunately” missed opportunities to incorporate elements of Kazakh folk music more

⁶⁹ RGALI, f.2077, op.1, d.171, l.56ob.

⁷⁰ RGALI, f.2077, op.1, d.123, l.9ob. For the earlier mention of this discussion, see page 138.

generally. “As a result of all this, the music to a great extent loses out,” he finally concluded.⁷¹

This litany of compositional missteps left no doubt about Litinskii’s verdict on *Krai rodnoi*. But by repeatedly characterizing these flaws as “unfortunate,” and even pausing mid-assessment to note sympathetically, “It’s a shame it turned out this way,” Litinskii, like Popov, sought to convey that he took no pleasure in pointing out his colleague’s errors. He was simply fulfilling his duty as a member of the compositional collective, to highlight deficiencies from which all could learn.

As hard as participants in the consultative sections tried to maintain a civil tone, however, they did not always succeed. Under the heavy political pressures of the *zhdanovshchina* nerves easily became frayed, and polite commentary shaded into frustration as frightened composers pointedly wondered aloud how their colleagues could have made such dangerously poor creative choices. This harder edge emerged as early as 1945, as composers in the process of reconstructing their Union felt the weight of the state’s expectation that they would achieve a higher standard in the new, postwar era. It was just such stress that caused Shostakovich’s tone to sour during the Consultation Commission’s 1945 audition of Boris Antiufeev’s violin sonata. He began mildly enough, noting the composer’s frequent doubling of the solo line in the piano was “not always desirable.” But as he dug deeper, Shostakovich’s frustration became evident. “There are some places in this sonata that I simply don’t understand,” he continued with aggravation. “I absolutely don’t understand the final two notes in the piano in the finale... You have a full triad, and then the piano plays two notes, which to me is incomprehensible and unjustified... I can

⁷¹ RGALI, f.2077, op.1, d.123, ll.53ob-54.

only wonder... why is that here?”⁷² After such a harsh reproach, Antiufeev managed little more than to stutter that he was unsure what to say, but would try to correct his errors as best he could.

This sense of fear and frustration substantially escalated after the Central Committee’s February 1948 resolution raised the stakes for Soviet composers to an unprecedented level, while demonstrating the collective consequences of individual musical missteps. These tensions burst forth with particular force at a meeting of the new Symphony and Chamber Music Section in May 1948. On the agenda was Moisei (Mieczysław) Weinberg’s *Sinfonietta*. The discussion began positively with first Iurovskii, the rapporteur, then Mikhail Gnesin, a senior Union member, praising Weinberg’s compositional skill and use of Jewish folk intonations. This might have set the tone, particularly given Iurovskii’s close study of the score, Gnesin’s seniority, and the fact that they and the composer were all of Jewish nationality. But then Aleksandr Krein, an equally well-respected member of Gnesin’s generation known for his own use of Jewish melodies, stepped in. Clearly exasperated, he spluttered, “I absolutely, definitely, sincerely, and heartily do not like this work! It gives me a feeling of deepest indignation and outrage. And for all my desire to instruct him what must be done, I just don’t know.” Krein allowed that perhaps the themes could be called Jewish, but Weinberg had set them with “Mendelssohn-ish harmonies so primitive and foreign that it was really unpleasant for me to listen.”⁷³

Krein’s comments triggered other participants’ anxiety. Referencing the still-fresh Central Committee resolution, one young composer ventured nervously, “Insofar as our meetings

⁷² RGALI, f.2077, op.1, d.123, ll.16ob-17.

⁷³ RGALI, f.2077, op.1, d.265, ll.16-16ob. The following summary and quotations are taken from RGALI, f.2077, op.1, d.265, ll.15-23, except Gnesin’s initial remarks, which are absent from this version of the transcript. His comments appear in a second version; see RGALI, f.962, op.5, d.1033, l.122. A native of Warsaw, Weinberg Russianized his name to Moisei Samuilovich when he fled to the Soviet Union in 1939, after the outbreak of WWII. For his personal history, see: David Fanning. *Mieczysław Weinberg; In Search of Freedom*. Hofheim: Wolke, 2010.

now must be different than before and must teach us something, I want to ask a question, as I'm seriously worried." Revealing he hoped to write Jewish music himself and had enjoyed the *Sinfonietta*, he asked Krein to clarify what was so offensive in it. Indeed, a second speaker expressed much the same confusion. He, too, had enjoyed the piece and averring, "Each artist has a right to display themes close to his *narod* as he feels it, through the prism of his own interpretation," he asked "our leading comrades" Gnesin and Krein to elucidate their surprisingly divergent perceptions. But the two titans, now on guard, demurred, saying that on first hearing a piece, as in a consultative section meeting, one could only speak in terms of first impressions. Gnesin observed that the style for setting Jewish melodies had changed with the coming of a new generation, but Krein countered that even in the past such "Mendelssohn-ism" had been employed, by dilettantes. A third speaker then stepped in, asserting the music was very well-written, but "of course there's nothing Jewish here. It's a fantasia on Eastern themes." This was immediately contradicted by the second speaker, who returned to the floor to "affirm with full responsibility" that the music was most certainly Jewish.

At this point, Semen Shlifshtein took a step back and observed that while he disagreed with Krein, "I liked his speech very much, because it was honest and fiery, and clearly expressed his exact feelings about this piece. Such speeches are always valuable, because no frenzied analysis can replace honest speech." Still, Krein's charge against Weinberg was quite serious. Not only could Shlifshtein confirm the music's Jewishness – because, he claimed, Jews always know their own music when they hear it – but in his opinion, Krein only disliked it because "he's one of those musicians who can't and don't want to see anything beyond their own measures." Weinberg's method for setting Jewish melodies might be unusual, but it was far from dilettantism. Veprik strongly seconded this thought, asserting that, as much as he and all present

respected Krein, it was foolish to reproach Weinberg, a member of the younger generation, for not employing compositional techniques that predated him. Perhaps there was an element of “Mendelssohn-ism,” he allowed, but “I see nothing bad in that; we know Mendelssohn was a Jew and his indirect influence here is entirely natural.” For Vepruk, Weinberg’s real accomplishment was in successfully creating Jewish-inflected music without directly using traditional melodies, as Glinka had done with Russian intonation in *Ivan Susanin*.

Though Krein was alone in disliking the *Sinfonietta*, his comments gave another speaker cause for concern. Krein’s implication, this speaker alleged, was that Weinberg had made a mockery of Jewish music, creating the image of “a Jew in frock coat and *peyes*.”⁷⁴ This was a serious charge, which must be evaluated. Here, Gnesin again jumped in, shouting exasperatedly, “One says it’s a Jew in frock coat with *peyes*, and another says there’s nothing Jewish here!” Of course the music was Jewish, he continued, and of course it was created with love, not irony. Hinting at the source of his anger, he concluded, “I, too, have been reproached for ‘jeering’ at the Jews.” Fortunately, Krein quelled his colleague’s ire by confirming he had in no way meant that Weinberg was mocking Jews or Jewishness, only that his technique was poor. Finally, Shekhter, the Symphony and Chamber Music Section’s chair, ended the discussion and wrapped up the meeting, praising Weinberg for moving in a more realistic direction in his latest composition and drawing on his national heritage, albeit in a not entirely satisfying manner. He then gave the floor to the composer, who had the good sense to simply thank the participants for their commentary.

In his closing summary, Shekhter declared, “I’m overjoyed that today our creative meeting proceeded with such an active and sharp manner of discussion... This is completely natural, considering we’re all now unusually agitated about the fate of our further creative path...

⁷⁴ Here, the speaker refers to the traditional dress of Orthodox Hassidic Jews, including long coats and curled side locks in their hair. *Peyes* is the Yiddish term for side locks.

The *Sinfonietta* raises many worrisome questions for us.” Indeed, this spectacle of a group of Jewish composers heatedly debating within the walls of the Composers’ Union whether their colleague’s work was Jewish at all, or Jewish enough, or the right kind of Jewish, is deeply revealing of the extreme tension Soviet composers experienced in this period. Safe within their professional milieu, these composers had no need to put on a performance. What’s more, with the exception of Krein, each of them found much to appreciate in Weinberg’s *Sinfonietta*. Yet even so, their debate was as intense as if it had taken place under the direct gaze of state officials and its outcome would be pivotal for their profession. And this was just the point: for Soviet composers three months after the fateful Central Committee resolution, it felt as though every consultative meeting truly was decisive for the future of their art. True, the majority agreed the *Sinfonietta* was a talented work – but did it answer the heightened demand for realism and *narodnost*? Was it *narodnyi* in precisely the right way to please the state? Or could it lead to a second, perhaps even more destructive scandal? Faced with such tremendous pressure, it is little wonder the members of the Symphony and Chamber Music Section debated Weinberg’s *Sinfonietta* so passionately. Their evident frustration with the piece and with each other was a direct reaction to their fear of the consequences of misjudging any of the musical works auditioned by the consultative sections and their sense of collective responsibility for ensuring each new piece was cleansed of all flaws before reaching the public.

At times, such tensions led participants in the consultative sections to engage in outright malice when evaluating works-in-progress they found egregiously below par. Vituperative comments were not unknown in the consultative sections prior to the Central Committee resolution, but they were the exception. In the wake of the resolution, however, their frequency substantially increased, reflecting commenters’ intensified anxiety, a trend that continued into

the 1950s. Thus, three days after the resolution, on February 13, 1948 during the above-mentioned discussion of Machavariani's first symphony, which the composer described as depicting the "moral and ideological qualities" of a Soviet young man, one speaker remarked sarcastically, "Fortunately, such a Soviet young man I've never seen... It's schematic, completely lacking in fantasy... in no way convincing."⁷⁵ However disagreeable this was for Machavariani, who handled it with admirable equanimity, a month later Chuvash composer Aristarkh Orlov-Shuzym was subjected to far worse when the Opera Section auditioned his operetta *Kogda rastsvetaet cheremukha* (*When the Bird-Cherry Tree Blossoms*). This audition was a special circumstance; as the Section's chair noted, *Kogda rastsvetaet cheremukha* was in fact the first-ever operetta by a Chuvash composer, an achievement made possible by Soviet nationalities policy. It had been approved by local censors and was about to premiere, but after the Central Committee resolution it was banned for exhibiting "servility before the West," a standard *zhdanovshchina* critique. The Section's duty, then, was to determine whether this assessment was valid. Orlov-Shuzym added bitterly that though he had conscientiously used a collection of Chuvash songs as source material, "they said that it's a 'triple-foxtrot,' that it's music for 'bears,' clumsy music."⁷⁶ He asked the Moscow experts for justice.

Unfortunately, Orlov-Shuzym was in for an unpleasant surprise. After quizzing him about his musical education, which was minimal, Knipper asked forgiveness for his harsh words, then launched into a punishing critique. "First of all, I'd say the author needs to study, starting from his ABCs," he announced heatedly.

⁷⁵ RGALI, f.2077, op.1, d.266, ll.40, 41-42. For more on this discussion, see p.142.

⁷⁶ RGALI, f.2077, op.1, d.260, ll.1-2. Here, Orlov-Shuzym (or the Chuvash composer Liskov, whom he is quoting) is playing on the word *medvezhii*, which shares a root with "bear" (*medved*) and can mean "clumsy." ["*On skazal, chto eto 'troinoi fokstrot,' chto eto muzyka dlia 'medvedei,' chto eto 'medvezh'ia muzyka.'*"] My thanks to Irene Belsky for confirming this translation.

There are a lot of elementary orthographic mistakes in the score... The whole thing gives the impression of being written by an autodidact, who never studied anything, learned by ear, is completely ignorant of the literature. In places, you just borrow from foreign films and bad operettas... You always use the same jazz cadence, which is really annoying... Worse, folksongs are arranged in a way that robs them of taste and folk style... We live in the 31st year of the revolution. Our nationalities have every opportunity to develop their folk art... So when I hear music comprised of barely literate imitations of bad Western examples... it's insulting... It's good you came here on your own; otherwise I'd be sorry the state wasted money on your trip.⁷⁷

Knipper assured Orlov-Shuzym he wanted to help him, not ruin his career, especially as the Chuvash Republic was not rich enough in compositional talent to spare him. But his tirade, and the general agreement with it among all participants in the meeting, was surely disheartening. Still, as Knipper was the first to point out, the underlying issue motivating such energetic criticism went beyond Orlov-Shuzym, straight back to the Central Committee resolution. Several speakers referenced the resolution directly in condemning both the operetta's "NEP-like" jazzy intonations and overly-free treatment of folk melodies. In the wake of such a strong statement from above, all agreed, such faulty compositional directions must be decisively stamped out. And they themselves felt responsible for doing the stamping, as harshly as possible, because the Composers' Union simply could not afford another scandal like the one over *Velikaia družba*. In the end, the meeting's participants disagreed with Knipper on one key point: it was in fact very good Orlov-Shuzym had brought his defective operetta to Moscow, because it revealed that closer oversight was crucial to their mutual endeavor. After commanding Orlov-Shuzym to significantly revise his work, they further resolved to ask the Secretariat to appoint a commission to travel to the Chuvash Republic and educate the local Union branch in correct aesthetics.

If anxiety over the Central Committee resolution brought on a more vituperative tone, however, it was not without its limits. During the same meeting that generated such heated

⁷⁷ Ibid, ll.5-7.

debate over Weinberg's *Sinfonietta* in May 1948, the Symphony and Chamber Music also discussed Vasilii Anpilogov's symphonic *Overture Humoresque*, a lighter, seemingly harmless work. Here, once again, Krein was anything but amused, and asserted spitefully, "the second theme is a nice, folk-like one, but surrounded by formalist grimacing. How this is supposed to be 'humoresque,' I'll never understand." Formalism, of course, was one of the big-gun accusatory terms of the *zhdanovshchina*, with roots going back to the 1936 denunciation of *Lady Macbeth* and the battles between RAPM and ASM during the Cultural Revolution. While the members of the Opera Section had studiously avoided addressing the similarly fraught charge against Orlov-Shuzym of "servility to the West," in this case Shlifshtein felt compelled to speak. "Especially now [after the resolution]," he admonished, "when you make this reproach, you really need to substantiate it, and before you say it, verify it, because it's really serious." For his part, Shlifshtein saw no formalism in the work, and thus found Krein's accusation irresponsible. And yet, surprisingly, Nadezhda Briusova disagreed with both of them. She, too, judged the overture formalism-free, but on principle, she asserted, "To say we mustn't so boldly speak of formalism is wrong. No, we can and we must... to provide important creative help through bold, true, and direct criticism."⁷⁸ Ultimately, this was not so much a difference of opinion between Shlifshtein and Briusova as it was a difference of perspective. Briusova defended Krein's right to cry formalism because she thought he did so in good faith, and therefore placed his remarks in the category of the direct, honest criticism so prized by participants in the consultative sections as a means to bring real improvement to their art form. Shlifshtein, on the other hand, thought Krein was simply being reckless, throwing around a dangerous term without thinking it through, potentially causing devastating consequences for a colleague – an explicitly non-communal act.

⁷⁸ RGALI, f.2077, op.1, d.265, ll.16ob, 19ob, 20ob.

For Shlifshtein, if the charge was warranted, of course it must be voiced. But unless Krein was absolutely certain, he would serve his professional community far better by leaving it aside.

It was but a short step from employing such heightened angry rhetoric to taking a more coercive approach to criticizing works-in-progress, from telling composers in no uncertain terms what they had done wrong to instructing them what they must do to correct their errors. Again, such coercion was a factor as early as 1945, but its occurrence dramatically increased after the Central Committee resolution. In its mildest form, coercion might be phrased in terms of helpful suggestion, as when, after the Opera Section audited Vasilii Efimov's ballet *Strekoza i muravei* (*The Dragonfly and The Ant*) in late 1948, Iurovskii advised the composer he "ought to consider" the toll taken on the listener by the work's many rapid tempi.⁷⁹ Even this relatively soft approach could take on firmer undertones. In a similarly timed meeting of the Symphony and Chamber Music Section, one speaker counseled Irina Iordan that while her second string quartet, the evaluation of which by the Section's *biuro* is mentioned above, demonstrated her mastery of the form, "I'd suggest... you ought to... consider setting musical material capable of attracting a significantly larger Soviet audience, because for all its positive qualities, this quartet is limited in audience."⁸⁰ In neither case did the speaker insist his guidance be followed. But given the power dynamics of the consultative process, they hardly needed to. At a later stage, Efimov and Iordan would undoubtedly demonstrate their compositions again, seeking recommendations for performance, purchase, and publication. And the group making those decisions would likely consist of the same colleagues, who would be sure to notice whether their suggestions had been

⁷⁹ RGALI, f.2077, op.1, d.256, l.15.

⁸⁰ RGALI, f.2077, op.1, d.265, l.63ob. For the Symphony and Chamber Music Section's *biuro*'s two auditions of this work, before and after this meeting, see page 160.

implemented. It was thus clearly in the composers' interest to incorporate such advice into their revisions, whether they felt it would improve the work or not.

Participants in the consultative sections were well aware of this dynamic, finding themselves on one side of the power vector or the other in every meeting they attended. Given the realities of their situation, it was not uncommon for their polite tone of suggestion – what a composer “ought to” do – to harden into one of command: what a composer “must” do, to move her piece forward toward completion. This more rigid approach came into play during the Symphony and Chamber Music Section’s April 1953 discussion of Mikhail Magidenko’s piano concerto. Speaking first, Aram Khachaturian noted the piece had some interesting parts, but then itemized its many flaws, and finally concluded, “The author must recreate this not as a concerto,” but a dance suite. To this end, Khachaturian instructed, he must drop the first movement and expand the second, with its dance-like rhythms, into two or three separate dance numbers. “I’m sure my advice won’t suit you,” he concluded. “But I have a good nose for this, and if you take this path, your work will find acceptance.” This was a major change, both in form and substance, transforming Magidenko’s vision of a large-scale work for major orchestras into a compact, lilting suite best suited to light concerts in the park. But Khachaturian spoke authoritatively, and other participants agreed with his assessment, musicologist Mikhail Pekelis even going so far as to declare that unless the concerto became a suite, “this piece has no future.”⁸¹ This discussion left Magidenko, who readily admitted he had been seeking to create a “crowd-pleaser,” with little choice but to acquiesce to such alterations.

In fact, categorical comments like Pekelis’ were a frequent occurrence and reveal another aspect of coercion within the consultative sections. As everyone involved understood, presenters

⁸¹ RGALI, f.2077, op.1, d.874, ll.37-38 42.

brought their work to the sections with the hope of securing a future for them, and the assembled commenters held the key to that future in their hands. Commenters who felt it necessary, or simply enjoyed flexing their professional muscles, were not above using threats to or the promise of such a future to secure a composer's compliance with their creative advice. Thus, for example, in evaluating Lev Koposov's chorus for Belorussian folk ensemble, Ivanov-Radkevich remarked severely that the author had impoverished the choral texture. "This work in this arrangement presents a kind of harmonic simplification," he fulminated. "It cannot be performed in this form."⁸² In other words, if Koposov hoped to see his ode to the 30th anniversary of the BSSR reach its audience, he had better revise it into a richer harmonic construction. Fortunately, not everyone was as inclined as Ivanov-Radkevich to use the stick to get their way. Rather, when the Symphony and Chamber Music Section audited Leonid Feigin's violin concerto in early 1951, Evgenii Makarov preferred to dangle a carrot. He complained that Feigin's musical imagery was too limited and his concerto too influenced by Brahms. Brahms, of course, was a great master, but "a Soviet composer does right when he finds more direct images and sources with which to focus his Soviet music." Still, all was not lost; to save the piece, Makarov advised, "You absolutely must think about drawing from folk music. If you do it right, your music will be interesting and the images will become concrete and attractive."⁸³ Once it had achieved this standard, he implied, the Section would in turn grant its recommendation. Makarov's message was certainly more positive than Ivanov-Radkevich's, but both exerted a strong coercive force. Whether threatening failure, as in the first case, or promising success, as in the second, each speaker made clear that the fate of Koposov's and Feigin's pieces relied on their willingness to revise in line with the advice of the Symphony and Chamber Music Section. Should they choose

⁸² RGALI, f.2077, op.1, d.265, l.72.

⁸³ RGALI, f.2077, op.1, d.603, ll.91-92.

not to make such revisions, their music would find a home nowhere but in the desk drawer, and the composers would have no one but themselves to blame.

This more direct form of coercive criticism was also mobilized by commenters when dealing with repeat offenders, in whose music they recognized compositional sins against which the authors had been warned previously, and those who recalcitrantly protested against the recommendations given them. Such was the case during the 1948 audition of Iurii Levitin's *Suite for String Quartet on Kirgiz Themes*. During the discussion, several speakers expressed dissatisfaction with Levitin's use of folk materials, agreeing he had not delved deeply enough into their substance or developed them in equal measure. Adding his voice to this critique, Shekhter remarked, "Levitin should vey seriously think about and work on... this aspect of his creativity, because we've see it in a very great number of his works."⁸⁴ Though he phrased it as a general observation, with this comment Shekhter signaled to Levitin that the Section had noticed this deficiency often enough in the past to consider it an endemic problem in his creative voice. Furthermore, it would continue to keep a watchful eye on him going forward, and withhold its recommendations from his new works until he finally improved this aspect of his technique.

In fact, Shekhter proved particularly concerned with repeat offenses. A year later, he delivered a similar message to Knipper, regarding his *Poem-Symphony*. Shekhter noted grumpily that the Section had audited a preliminary version in spring 1948 and had judged it a work of great potential. With a revised draft on the agenda, he had "expected the second version to take the notes we gave concerning some flaws," but he saw no evidence of this. The piece could still have a future, he concluded, "but only if Knipper seriously rethinks the scherzo and the first half of the finale. Only on these conditions will it take its proper place in Knipper's *oeuvre*, and... in

⁸⁴ RGALI, f.2077, op.1, d.266, l.113.

what we're now doing in symphonic music after the Central Committee resolution."⁸⁵ This formulation of Shekhter's is rather remarkable. As in any peer review process, Knipper had made use of the comments he found suitable and tacitly ignored the rest. This was not at all strange; in consultative meetings, composers often announced their plan to do just that. But here Shekhter, backed by the coercive power of the Symphony and Chamber Music Section, pushed back, making clear that the piece would not obtain the Section's recommendation and the recognition it deserved until Knipper revised in line with the entirety of the commentary given. What's more, no one protested this imposition. Rather, Ivanov-Radkevich seconded it, saying he was sure such commentary would be helpful to Knipper in his further revisions. With the Central Committee resolution clearly still at the forefront of their minds, the other members of the Symphony Section approved Shekhter's coerciveness as a fitting method for ensuring Knipper's *Poem-Symphony* took on a form acceptable to the professional group in their collective self-representation before the volatile authority of the state.

Ivanov-Radkevich's remark about "helping" Knipper was not a chance one. Even in the most coercive situations, participants in the consultative sections continued to think of their commentary first and foremost as a source of help – of which composers must take note, or be made to do so. Grigorii Frid ran up against this mindset in late 1949, when he demonstrated his string quartet for the Symphony and Chamber Music Section. Several commenters praised the work, while also noting its deficiencies. Sergei Gorchakov spoke most harshly, charging Frid with creating "music in which the sphere of images is limited and revolves around personal, circumstantial moods atypical for our society."⁸⁶ Such a quartet could hardly fulfill the duty of Soviet composers to create music that aided the masses in their struggle to build socialism, he

⁸⁵ RGALI, f.2077, op.1, d.361, l.16ob.

⁸⁶ RGALI, f.2077, op.1, d.362, ll.120ob-121.

concluded, a verdict implying that if Frid wished to prove himself a good Soviet citizen and see his quartet reach the mass audience, he would have to revise it along more “democratic” lines.

On this point, Frid took great offence. Remarking that he, like any young composer, had brought his work to the Section to learn to identify and overcome his mistakes, he asserted that he had learned nothing from Gorchakov’s speech, nor from his comments during Frid’s previous demonstration, when he accused him of irresponsibly composing “trifles” while the Cold War raged. “You can’t drag in such harsh political points and use them to direct the author,” Frid insisted. “May Gorchakov forgive me, but I think he has nothing to say to help authors... I get more help from those who speak clearly about flaws... I’d rather hear concrete analysis.” But though Frid’s plea for substantive commentary was one with which consultative section participants could readily sympathize, in accusing Gorchakov of demagoguery he had gone too far, and Veprik sternly corrected him. “I consider Gorchakov’s speech honest,” he stated stonily, “I think Frid made a mistake accusing him of dishonesty. We’ve known him a long time. He’s an absolutely confirmed comrade, who has helped many and will help many more. And if he says the quartet presents an exceedingly intimate world... that helps our young comrades.”⁸⁷ Indeed, here Frid transgressed two fundamental rules of the consultative sections’ functioning: always accept criticism gracefully in the spirit of helpfulness, and always respect your elders. Whatever the reason for Gorchakov’s apparent reliance on politicized rhetoric, the generation to which he and Veprik belonged genuinely felt responsible for directing the future of Soviet music. And the state also held them responsible; it was members of their generation who were named in the Central Committee resolution and experienced the brunt of its consequences. No doubt, they enjoyed the power leadership in the consultative sections gave them over their younger

⁸⁷ Ibid, ll.123ob-124, 124ob-125.

colleagues. But at the same time, when they said they wanted to help, they meant it, and if a young upstart like Frid was unable to recognize their intent, they saw no problem adopting a coercive tone, as Veprik did, to bring him into line and ensure he heeded their criticism.

Whatever the tone of their commentary, participants in the consultative sections were always working toward the same goal: to raise Soviet compositional practice to an ever-higher standard of perfection, both for the sake of their art, and in hopes of staying safely in the Central Committee's good graces. Ideally, participants hoped to achieve this goal through polite, comradely, thorough discussion of the merits and faults of a particular work-in-progress. And often, they managed to maintain this register in their discussions, finding ways to soften the blow even when the work under consideration fell short of its composer's aspirations. However, given the pressures they were under – the immediate postwar aspiration to create a new and better musical culture befitting the newly victorious Soviet state, the intensified scrutiny brought to bear on the arts with the rise of the *zhdanovshchina* in 1946, and the shocking fallout from the 1948 Central Committee resolution “On the Opera *Velikaia družba*” – they did not always succeed. Increasingly fearful of drawing the state's unpredictable ire, participants became frustrated with their colleagues' perceived compositional mistakes and increasingly took on sarcastic and even vituperative tones in their criticism. From there, it was all too easy to adopt a more coercive approach, making clear to composers that the sections' advice was anything but optional, and thereby ensuring all new works conformed to a unified standard for Soviet music. Throughout these transformations, participants in the consultative sections held fast to the idea that their ultimate aim was not to stifle their colleagues' creativity, but to help guide them toward better aesthetics and compositional methods. Because their intentions were benevolent, and because, fearful of the Central Committee's next move, they desperately needed their colleagues

to follow their direction in their works-in-progress, consultative section participants gave in to the urge to engage in coercive practices when evaluating new music, withholding the necessary recommendations until each work conformed to a safely conservative standard.

Conclusion

From its earliest days, the consultative apparatus constituted the major locus of operations for the Composers' Union. Through various structural changes to the more settled form they adopted from the early postwar years until 1957, the consultative sections were the locale in which composers most often interacted with each other, evaluated each other's works-in-progress, and developed a sense of themselves as a relatively autonomous professional group.

Composers participated in the consultative sections as presenters and commenters in part for practical reasons. Such participation was the best way to establish themselves as solid members of the professional community and the only way to secure the recommendations necessary to move their pieces forward to performance, purchase, and publication. But the consultative sections also tapped into something deeper, which inclined composers to become genuinely invested in their mission. On one hand, they drew on the long history of collaborative compositional practices passed down through successive generations of Russian composers from the mid-19th century, and thus felt like a natural part of the compositional process for Union members. Through their commentary, participants sincerely believed they were helping their colleagues advance the quality of their works-in-progress and raising the overall standard of Soviet music. And on the other, consultative meetings provided all in attendance with a sense of control over their individual and collective fate as creative artists. Sequestered within their professional milieu, in the consultative sections composers made their own determinations about what was and was not best for Soviet music, before the state had a chance to intervene. In service to their investment in the consultative process, participants embraced a highly subjective, direct,

and concrete method of evaluation, believing it the best way to fulfill their duty to help their colleagues improve their compositions. And whether the fortunes of such works rose or fell after they left the Union's halls, participants took mutual responsibility for them, as creative products they had all helped to bring to fruition.

Yet, for all this, Union members never lost sight of the watchful eye of the state. Indeed, as their consistent reliance on both aesthetic and political criteria in their evaluations demonstrates, participants in the consultative sections remained eternally vigilant toward the state's expectations of them, assessing not only whether a particular work-in-progress demonstrated good compositional technique, but also whether it met the official standard of "democratic," ideologically pure music with mass appeal, and granting recommendations only to those that passed the test in both areas. In fact, this pressure from above weighed heavily on consultative section participants. Particularly after the Central Committee's February 1948 resolution on music, they became increasingly anxious about the need to anticipate and fulfill the state's demands, which were primarily ideological but included an aesthetic aspect as well, and thereby prevent another musical scandal and its attendant consequences for individual composers and the professional group. Faced with such fear and uncertainty, participants increasingly strayed from the polite and comradely tone in which they preferred to couch their subjective analyses, turning instead to a discourse of frustration and anger.

However, even in their most acrimonious moments, participants' intent was never malicious. Rather, such commentary was geared toward impressing upon composers the seriousness of their collective situation and the importance of bringing their works-in-progress into line with official standards, as participants understood them. Because they felt so strongly about the danger at hand, participants frequently shifted from causticness to coercion. In service

of the goal of mutual self-protection from the potential wrath of the state, they were not above making pointed suggestions, giving orders, or deliberately reminding composers of their control over a piece's future to compel them to conform to their musical demands. Indeed, when confronting ideological and aesthetic flaws they believed particularly perilous, participants found it all too easy to combine acerbity with coerciveness, as Veprik did in late 1948, condemning a colleague's work for exhibiting "ideological incompatibility, unsuccessful musical material, and banality which we don't want to hear from a composer like you."⁸⁸ As much as consultative section participants genuinely felt a duty to help, they also felt an urgent need to ensure composers complied, for everyone's safety, and they were willing to engage in more coercive forms of rhetoric to ensure the desired result.

In his examination of ideological discussions in the sciences during the *zhdanovshchina*, Alexei Kojevnikov explains, "An important thing about these games was that... their outcomes were not predetermined." Rather, the underlying reason for holding them was "the transfer of the rites of intraparty democracy from Communist political culture to academic life."⁸⁹ Similarly, in the regular meetings of the Composers' Union's consultative sections, the fate of a work-in-progress was never established before its audition. In fact, as participants frequently attested, many of them were hearing the piece, or its latest revision, for the first time and voicing their immediate impressions. But as with the ideological discussions in the sciences, the point of these sessions was not to condemn a particular musical work or composer. Other, much broader and more grandiose meetings were held periodically for that purpose, usually in the wake of a damaging musical scandal. Furthermore, the holding of that sort of meeting was ordered by the

⁸⁸ RGALI, f.2077, op.1, d.265, l.87.

⁸⁹ Alexei Kojevnikov, "Games of Stalinist Democracy: Ideological Discussions in Soviet Sciences, 1947-1952," in *Stalinism: New Directions*, ed. Sheila Fitzpatrick (London: Routledge, 2000), 145.

Party-state, while the consultative sections operated largely on composers' own initiative. Rather, the point of the consultative sections' meetings was for composers to become familiar one another's works-in-progress, assess whether they met the standards to which the professional group held itself, and provide critiques to aid the composer in improving her creative work. In this context, a predetermined outcome would only be counterproductive.

However, while the state had no hand in arranging the consultative sections' meetings, through them it managed to achieve the same goal as in the ideological discussions in the sciences. By making clear to composers through the denunciations of the *zhdanovshchina*, and especially the February 1948 Central Committee resolution "On the Opera *Velikaia družba*," that it demanded of them a high ideological and aesthetic standard, and that it held them collectively responsible for individual transgressions and would not hesitate to impose collective consequences for them, the state effectively injected its rhetoric directly into the consultative sections' evaluations. As the frequent references in these discussions to the 1948 resolution as a watershed moment for Soviet music attest, the state's demands were never far from participants' minds and consistently influenced their rhetoric.

In fact, a significant factor in making this infusion of Party-state discourse into internal consultative section discussions so effective was that composers did experience relative autonomy within their Union. Because they had a space that, to a great extent, they controlled themselves, where they were able to audit one another's music before the state weighed in, composers felt a deep sense of responsibility to protect themselves, each other, and the professional group by dealing with compositional "problems" in-house, before they could cause another scandal outside the Union's halls. The consultative sections were, in effect, the first and only line of defense for the compositional community, and they were determined to function as

effectively as possible. It was with this mutually protective goal in mind that participants in the consultative sections approach one another's works-in-progress, seeking to ensure each new work exactly conformed to the state's demands before granting their imprimatur.

Yet, the state's demands were as notoriously inscrutable as its wrath was unpredictable. As a compensatory measure, consultative section participants erred on the side of caution, mobilizing Party-state discourse in service of imposing a safe, conservative aesthetic across the board, cutting short any innovations that struck them as too adventurous or introspective, or too lacking in the core official values of *partiinnost'*, *ideinnost'*, and *narodnost'*. Because they could never be entirely sure what the state expected of them, only that the consequences for transgression would be severe, and because they felt responsible for one another as members of a tight-knit professional group whose fortunes rose and fell together, participants did not hesitate to use the power afforded the consultative sections to compel their colleagues to revise their compositions in line with this safer, more conservative aesthetic. As a result of this complex web of considerations, their desire to ensure mutual self-protection quickly slipped into the realm of more coercive practices. In the end, Soviet composers' fear of the state's capriciousness and sense of mutual responsibility proved far stronger than their desire for creative self-direction. In an effort to safeguard themselves, each other, and the professional group, within the unique mechanism of the consultative sections they resorted to a form of mutual professional group self-censorship that was far more effective at controlling composers' creative production than the state could have achieved alone.

Chapter 3
Negotiations and Love Songs:
Composers' Correspondence with the Committee on Arts Affairs

Introduction

In the course of their work creating new music, Soviet composers spent a substantial amount of time and energy on their interactions with state and Party censors. While new works were subject to review by the Central Committee Department of Agitation and Propaganda (Agitprop), the Party's primary censorship agency, this was usually more a matter of general oversight. Rather, during the majority of the compositional process, composers' main interlocutor was a key member of the parallel state bureaucracy: the Committee on Arts Affairs (KDI), the Soviet state's primary censorship agency. Ultimately, it was KDI's blessing composers needed if they hoped to be paid for their creative endeavors and see their new compositions performed before Soviet audiences and published.

KDI was created by Central Committee decree on December 16, 1935, in an effort to improve upon its ineffectual predecessor, Glaviskusstvo, and solidify and centralize official control of the arts in a single, powerful agency.¹ KDI slotted into the hierarchical state apparatus just below the Council of Ministers (before 1946, the Council of People's Commissars), while the newly-established creative unions, including the Union of Soviet Composers, were subordinated to it, as were the Union-level operatic and dramatic theaters a year later.² Within its own subsidiary structure, KDI managed a broad array of departments, which exercised censorial control over areas ranging from fine arts to arts education, from performers' tours to the circus.

¹ "Postanovlenie Politbiuro TsK VKP(b) 'Ob organizatsii Vsesoiuznogo Komiteta po Delam Iskusstv' ot 16 dekabria 1935g.," in Andrei Artizov and Oleg Naumov, eds. *Vlast' i khudozhestvennaia intelligentsiia: Dokumenty TsK RKP(b)-VKP(b)-VChK-OGPU-NKVD o kul'turnoi politike, 1917-1953gg* (Moscow: Demokratiia, 1999), 281. On Glaviskusstvo's failure, see Sheila Fitzpatrick, "The Emergence of Glaviskusstvo: Class War on the Cultural Front, Moscow, 1928-1929," *Soviet Studies* 23:2 (Oct 1971), 236-253.

² Artizov and Naumov, 765 n.113.

Most importantly for composers, nested under KDI's wing was the Main Administration for Musical Institutions (GUMU), which effectively served as the gatekeeper for their professional success. After passing through GUMU, new compositions were required to undergo one final check by its sister agency, the Main Administration for Control over Repertoire and Performances (Glavrepertkom). But it was primarily with GUMU that composers interacted on issues of commissioning, contracting, payment, performance, and publication of their works.

As this list indicates, GUMU had an extensive array of responsibilities in governing Soviet musical life. Alongside its work directly with composers, GUMU also devoted substantial energy to working with other agencies within and beyond KDI's bureaucratic structure. GUMU reported to higher authorities, not only one level up to KDI's leadership, but further on to the Council of Ministers and Central Committee. It also communicated laterally with Agitprop, its parallel agency in the Party structure. Finally, GUMU dedicated significant time to managing its affairs with other subordinate agencies with KDI, such as Glavrepertkom and especially the Composers' Union, and in other branches of the vast state bureaucracy, including Muzgiz, the musical arm of the state publishing house OGIZ, and the All-Union Radio Committee (VRK). This entailed a vast amount of paperwork and a keen eye for navigating the labyrinthine structures and overlapping competencies that governed, or failed to govern, Party and state apparatuses, a quality GUMU's censors did not always possess in sufficient measure.

Composers' interactions with GUMU began in one of two ways. For smaller works, such as songs or short dance numbers, composers often completed the music first, then submitted it to GUMU for audition. If GUMU approved it and Glavrepertkom sanctioned it for performance, a contract would be drawn up, and GUMU would purchase the piece from the composer, at a per-genre rate established by KDI. For larger works, such as overtures, cantatas, or symphonies, the

contract was drawn up in the early stages of composition, usually based on GUMU's review of preliminary sketches, though in rare cases it might be based only on a composer's declaration of intent. In this scenario, the composer received an advance to tide her over while the work was in progress, usually 25% of the honorarium specified in the contract, with the balance paid after the final product was received, auditioned, approved for purchase by GUMU, and sanctioned for performance by Glavrepertkom.³ Both types of contracts were classified as state commissions (*goszakazy*) and payments were drawn from a specially designated budget. In either case, after auditioning a new work GUMU censors could accept it, reject it, or instruct the composer to revise and resubmit it. Composers received no payment (other than the advance, if they were granted one) until their work received final approval. As there were no other potential buyers in the closed state system, such revisions were not really optional for those who hoped to make a living. The contracting and auditioning process thus fell squarely within GUMU's duties as state musical censor. Finally, GUMU completed its censorial role by selecting a subset of the pieces it purchased to specifically recommend for performance and, less often, publication.

With so many tasks within its purview, it is perhaps little wonder GUMU often fell down on the job. When it did, composers bore the brunt of its dysfunction, for the simple reason that they were entirely dependent on GUMU for their careers and livelihoods. As this chapter will demonstrate, composers quickly learned GUMU could not be trusted to carry out its duties reliably. In response, they developed a range of extra-procedural strategies for reminding GUMU's censors of their presence and ensuring they kept on track in their dealings with them.

Drawing on a unique collection of GUMU's correspondence dating from December 1947

³ See for example: RGALI, f.962 (Komitet po delam iskusstv), op.5, d.1049, ll.252-252ob, a standard contract between GUMU and composer Boris Aleksandrov for writing a song. Point 8 specifies the amount of the honorarium and the amounts to be paid at each stage of the process.

through November 1949, this chapter will showcase GUMU's often chaotic functioning and explore a variety of tactics employed by Soviet composers to overcome this problem and shepherd their new works through the long censorship process to achieve their desired results of payment, performance, and publication. That Soviet composers managed to exercise such agency and win a modicum of control over their creative lives, constructing a partnership of sorts between themselves and GUMU's censors to see their works through to the finish line, is in itself a certain kind of victory. However, as I will argue, the fact they had to do so, rather than being able to rely on the system to work dependably, is also a significant problem, with troubling ramifications for composers' place in Soviet society.

Function and Dysfunction

At its best, GUMU functioned in concert with its fellow state and Party agencies, a smoothly spinning cog in the bureaucratic machinery. This archival collection reveals GUMU hard at work, reporting to the Central Committee about *goszakazy* for Stalin's 70th birthday and to the Council of Ministers on plans for the Third Plenum of the Composers' Union, held in November 1949.⁴ Further, GUMU kept Agitprop informed about music publications, compositional competitions, and *goszakazy* more broadly; helped the All-Union Society for Cultural Connections with Foreign Countries (VOKS) compile a package of records and scores of new Soviet compositions to be sent to a sympathetic French organization; and fielded a question about appropriate concert repertoire posed by a regional representative of Glavrepertkom, relayed by its Union-level office.⁵

⁴ RGALI, f.962, op.5, d.1123, l.239; RGALI, f.962, op.5, d.1124, ll.22-23.

⁵ Correspondence with Agitprop: RGALI, f.962, op.5, d.1123, ll.306, 87; f.962, op.5, d.1124, ll.108-110. Correspondence with VOKS: f.962, op., d.1124, ll.128-133. Correspondence with Glavrepertkom: f.962, op.5, d.1123, ll.48-49. In this case, GUMU recommended "works by Russian and foreign classics and Soviet composers (with a preponderance of works by Russian

GUMU also corresponded regularly with the music departments of KDI's Union Republic- and Autonomous Republic-level subsidiaries (UDI's), often regarding arrangements for holding local new music festivals (*smotry*), and, periodically, for bringing those festivals to Moscow for ten-day extravaganzas (*dekady*).⁶ A portion of such exchanges was devoted to recommendations of new musical works, sent up the ladder from a republican agency for GUMU's consideration or down from GUMU with its official approval and authorization from Glavrepertkom.⁷ Alongside the Composers' Union's recommendations, GUMU's recommendations were one of the major avenues by which new works reached performance, and they were therefore highly sought after. In addition to republican UDI's, GUMU corresponded at the all-Union level with performance organizations subsidiary to it, like the Moscow State Philharmonic and Moscow State *Estrada*, both of which managed several ensembles; Gastrol'biuro, another subsidiary, which arranged performers' tours; and quasi-independent performance ensembles like the Piatnitskii Folk Chorus, recommending vetted works for performance by them and sometimes soliciting their opinions as part of the vetting process.⁸

classics and Soviet composers),” and for jazz concerts warned, “one should not permit a great quantity of Western dance music.”

⁶ RGALI, f.962, op.5, d.1123, l.79 and d.1124, l.113a (UDI Lithuanian SSR); f.962, op.5, d.1124, l.111 (UDI Armenian SSR), f.962, op.5, d.1124, ll.148-154 (UDI Azerbaijani SSR). While the Union-level agency was called the Committee on Arts Affairs (KDI), its local subsidiaries were called Administration(s) for Arts Affairs (UDI), reflecting their position in the state bureaucratic structure. The phenomenon of *dekady* of national arts and culture is addressed in Terry Martin. *The Affirmative Action Empire: Nations and Nationalism in the Soviet Union* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2001), 440-445.

⁷ RGALI, f.962, op.5, d.1123, ll.63-65 (UDI Ukrainian SSR); f.962, op.5, d.1123, l.120 (UDI North Ossetian ASSR)

⁸ RGALI, f.962, op.5, d.1123, ll.103-107 (Moscow State Philharmonic and Moscow State *Estrada*); f.962, op.5, d.1123, ll.61, 92 (Gastrol'biuro); f.962, op.5, d.1123, l.167 (Piatnitskii Chorus). *Estrada* is a uniquely Soviet genre of entertainment combining far more musical and theatrical elements than the usual variety show. For a detailed description, see Richard Stites. *Russian Popular Culture: Entertainment and Society since 1900* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992), 16-22. While the word “philharmonic” in English often denotes a single

Performance recommendations came with an expectation the work would soon be added to ensembles' repertoire, and they could also serve as a path to publication. For instance, in April 1949, GUMU informed the Composers' Union's in-house publisher, a division of Muzfond, it had recommended Aleksei Muravlev's symphonic poem *Azov-Gora* for performance and asked copies of the score be produced for sale.⁹ Publication was a relatively rare occurrence, given the constant, severe backlog experienced by Muzfond and especially Muzgiz, the state music publisher. For its part, Muzgiz was not bound by GUMU's recommendations and could contract with composers independently. But before such publications were issued, they still had to be vetted by state and Party censors, so pieces already in possession of GUMU's recommendation were more likely to spark Muzgiz's interest and reach music store shelves faster.

In light of the significant benefits of publication – wider distribution, more performances, enhanced royalties, and a greater chance for a piece to become a popular favorite – composers often intervened personally to enlist GUMU's support in this endeavor. That they felt it necessary to do so and were often successful is itself a sign of the extent to which personalization overtook official bureaucratic function within GUMU's operations, especially where resources were scarce. Such instrumental use of GUMU's imprimatur was Aleksandr Egorov's intent when he wrote GUMU Senior Inspector Sofia Gotgel'f in February 1949 requesting she forward Muzgiz his cantata *Song of Russia*, then under its consideration. Egorov, who had held preliminary negotiations with Muzgiz but did not yet have a firm contract, stressed in his letter,

orchestra, Soviet philharmonics were broader bureaucratic agencies that managed the art music concert life of a particular locale. As such, they typically housed several ensembles, including a large symphony orchestra, a chamber orchestra, and various chamber ensembles.

⁹ RGALI, f.962, op.5, d.1123, l.145. In a personal conversation, a librarian at the Moscow House of Composers library informed me that many Soviet compositions, though they had been approved and performed, were never published due to shortages of paper and publishing capacity.

“It’s very important to me this piece sees the light.” Though this was not the same an official publication recommendation, Egorov and Gotgel’f both knew that having the score sent from GUMU’s offices was almost as good, in terms of increasing the piece’s chances with Muzgiz. Gotgel’f sent the score, and in the end, Muzgiz elected to publish four of the cantata’s nine numbers, allowing a fifth could be added if the composer simplified its structure.¹⁰ Thus, for Egorov, personally intervening to secure GUMU’s influence proved a partially, if not entirely, successful tactic. The wisdom of submitting new works to GUMU first was further proven by the experience of Andrei Shtogarenko, who sent three choral songs to Muzgiz directly. He may have skipped over GUMU, but Muzgiz did not; the publisher forwarded his songs to the censor for its assessment before making its decision. Shtogarenko would have been wise to do the same.¹¹

Since the publication backlog made full sets of scores and parts for new works scarce, GUMU also did a swift business in coordinating their distribution, devoting substantial energy to corresponding with republican UDI’s, Union-level and republican philharmonics, Muzgiz, and the libraries of conservatories, opera theaters, and the Composers’ Union to arrange for scores and parts to be loaned out for performances.¹² But even this process did not always proceed smoothly. In October 1949, the director of the Kiev Conservatory wrote GUMU’s chair, Aleksandr Anisimov, saying he had heard GUMU had scores and parts for Vladimir Bunin’s Symphony No.2, in high demand since being awarded the Stalin Prize, second class, earlier that year. The director requested a full set of materials for his institution’s library, but alas, he was

¹⁰ RGALI, f.962, op.5, d.1123, ll.16-18.

¹¹ Ibid., l.166.

¹² Ibid., l.273 (UDI Bashkir ASSR), ll.224-227 (UDI Tajik SSR), l.282 (State Symphony Orchestra of the Moscow State Philharmonic); f.962, op.5, d.1124, l.25 (Dnepropetrovsk State Philharmonic); f.962, op.5, d.1123, l.153 (Latvian State Philharmonic), ll.89, 90, 117 (Muzgiz), ll.124, 135, 269 (Moscow State Conservatory), l.9 (Bolshoi Theater), l.211 (Union of Soviet Composers).

too late. Anisimov replied that GUMU had ordered only 30 copies printed and had already distributed them. Muzgiz would publish the score in January, from which the director could presumably have orchestral parts copied out by hand if he required them.¹³

In a similar procedural misfire, in November 1948 the Moldavian State Philharmonic loaned GUMU scores and parts for Grigorii Ponomarenko's *Suite on Moldavian Themes*, as well as a violin concerto and symphonic poem by Stepan Niaga. Clearly nervous about letting these materials out of his sight, the Philharmonic's director reminded GUMU that they were its only copies and asked the agency to "not hold onto our materials and return them as soon as possible." The following February, with the music still at large, the Philharmonic telegraphed GUMU to request its immediate return. Though the telegram was signed for by GUMU Concert Organizations Department Head Venedikt Boni, it was not until the Philharmonic sent a formal follow-up letter a month later, repeating that these were unique materials very much needed for local performances, that action was taken. And even then, the vagaries of the famously unreliable Soviet postal system interfered. In late April, having still not received its materials, the Philharmonic sent GUMU yet another letter, inquiring with exaggerated politeness to be informed "when we might receive the score and parts." This time Boni replied with alacrity, noting the materials had been dispatched on March 12, just after receipt of the Philharmonic's previous letter, and promising to make inquiries with the postal service. The mystery was finally solved two weeks later, when Gotgel'f scrawled Boni a note that "the materials were found (they came back to us) and have been sent to Kishinev."¹⁴ This example demonstrates the alternate carelessness and concern with which GUMU's censors approached such interactions. Once Boni realized there was a problem, he diligently followed up until the materials were located and

¹³ RGALI, f.962, op.5, d.1124, ll.53, 55.

¹⁴ RGALI, f.962, op.5, d.1123, ll.209- 210, 128-129.

restored to their rightful owner. Yet, it had taken the Philharmonic several attempts to secure his attention and six months to finally get its music back. Presumably, institutions, agencies, and individuals seeking GUMU's support were not always so persistent or so lucky.

The institution with which GUMU worked most closely and successfully was the Composers' Union. The Union played an important part in the process of formulating *goszakazy*, by providing GUMU with a list of works composers had declared their intent to write, which it recommended as worthy of commissions. Composers could also bypass the Union and agree on commissions directly with GUMU.¹⁵ This undermined the Union's role to some extent, but not entirely, as it was an option only for composers who had already built a solid enough reputation to gain GUMU's confidence on their own. In addition to fielding the Union's recommendations and keeping it informed of the works for which *goszakazy* were formulated, GUMU also attended to practical matters like setting pay rates for the musicians who demonstrated new works at the Union's internal auditions. This question arose with a frequency suggesting a certain amount of disorganization on the Union's part, as well. In June 1948, the Union requested permission to pay its regular string quartet triple their concert rate because, in Union secretary Vladimir Kukharskii's words, "as in the majority of cases these works do not enter the repertoire, the substantial preparatory work can in no way be compensated by [the performers'] concert pay."¹⁶ GUMU assented. But seven months later, the Central House of Composers (TsDK) posed the same question again, this time inquiring how much to pay performers without established concert rates for such work. Despite receiving a clear answer from GUMU, five months later a different TsDK official raised the same question yet another time. At this point GUMU had had

¹⁵ RGALI, f.962, op.5, d.1123, l.176.

¹⁶ Ibid., ll.201-205.

enough and snapped that TsDK would do better to simply engage performers employed by the Moscow State Philharmonic and *Estrada*, which already knew how much to pay.¹⁷

Officially, the Composers' Union was subsidiary to KDI, but as Kiril Tomoff has shown, in practice it exercised substantial independence.¹⁸ And in fact, GUMU and the Composers' Union worked together best when they acted as partners. The two agencies regularly invited one another to their respective auditions of new works, and GUMU often consulted with the Union on its recommendations for publication and awards.¹⁹ On occasion, GUMU even used this partnership to distribute favors, or obscure its own incompetence. For example, in January 1949, GUMU wrote the Union it had received information a certain composer was hospitalized in Baku and in serious need of financial assistance. As GUMU had no way to render such assistance to a composer not under contract, it asked the Union to do so through Muzfond.²⁰ On the other end of the spectrum, later that year GUMU wrote the Leningrad Composers' Union it had overrun its budget for contractual fees and asked the Union to inform 11 composers they would have to wait for their honoraria, so it did not have to do so itself.²¹ GUMU also kept up its correspondence with the Union's republic-level branches, enlisting them in its efforts to keep apprised of provincial music scenes. In such letters, GUMU asked for information about local composers, sought assistance in attracting them to particular types of commissions, and requested copies of unpublished compositions.²² Notably, this collection contains no letters of this type between

¹⁷ RGALI, f.962, op.5, d.1123, ll.199-200, 38-39.

¹⁸ See Kiril Tomoff. *Creative Union: The Professional Organization of Soviet Composers, 1939-1953*. Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2006.

¹⁹ RGALI, f.962, op.5, d.1123, l.140 (GUMU to SSK); f.962, op.5, d.1123, ll.80-81, 82, 146 (SSK to GUMU). f.962, op.5, d.1123, ll.36-37, 261.

²⁰ RGALI, f.962, op.5, d.1123, ll.300-301.

²¹ RGALI, f.962, op.5, d.1124, l.99.

²² *Ibid.*, l.48 (Lithuanian SSK); f.962, op.5, d.1123, ll.223 (Ukrainian SSK), 222 (Georgian SSK), 198 (Leningrad SSK).

GUMU and republic-level UDI's, which indicates it preferred to conduct such business through the republican branches of the Composers' Union, rather than its own direct subordinates.

Still, GUMU's superior position in the state hierarchy had its uses. For instance, when preparing for its November 1949 Plenum, the Composers' Union appealed for assistance to KDI Chair Polikarp Lebedev. Noting the event would involve performance of a number of large-scale works dedicated to Stalin's 70th birthday and "demonstration of the creativity of Soviet composers... must certainly... draw the interest not only of musicians and arts workers but of a broad circle of the Soviet intelligentsia," the Union asked KDI to ensure participation by the best ensembles and reserve the best concert halls for its use. Lebedev passed this request to GUMU, which within a week sent letters to the Moscow State Philharmonic, Moscow State *Estrada*, and Moscow Oblast' Philharmonic to secure the performers and venues the Union requested.²³

Similarly, in July of that year Union General Secretary Tikhon Khrennikov, again in a letter addressed directly to Lebedev, complained of insufficiently broad distribution and performance of new music in Moscow and across the Soviet Union. Khrennikov piously averred,

Our first-order task is propaganda of every kind for Soviet music... [and] the Union along with KDI bears fundamental responsibility for the high ideological and artistic quality of the propagandized works, the selection and affirmation of concert programs, and the systematic supervision and control over the content and quality of the music and the professional mastery of the performers.

Khrennikov asserted the Union was doing its part, even going so far as to create a special *khudsovet* to fulfill such tasks. However, he continued, the many concert organizations, philharmonics, and Gastrol'biuro, for which KDI bore responsibility, had dropped the ball, failing to organize regular concerts and lecture-demonstrations of new Soviet music, particularly with composer participation, and often employing substandard performers. Khrennikov asked

²³ RGALI, f.962, op.5, d.1124, ll.207-209.

KDI to order concert organizations to regularly schedule new music concerts, involving composers as frequently as possible, and Gastrol'biuro to arrange frequent, systematic tours with qualified personnel. Lebedev again sent the Union's missive to GUMU, which in turn sent ordered to concert organizations implementing Khrennikov's demands, minus one: that the Union's *khudsovet* have veto power over concert programs.²⁴ Thus, while the Union no doubt preferred to play the role of GUMU's partner, its leaders clearly recognized the value of mobilizing its superior influence when faced with problems it could not solve on its own.

Like any good parent, GUMU also intervened to resolve disputes between the Union and outside agencies. When Secretary of the Union's Choral Commission A.P. Koposov complained its plans for a nine-volume collection of new Soviet choral works had been spoiled by Muzgiz's skinflint director, A.P. Bol'shemennikov, who set such a low fee that all the guest editors quit, Anisimov sent Gotgel'f to Bol'shemennikov for an explanation. After some phone calls, she reported the two parties would sit down with a lawyer to sort things out. Lest Anisimov worry for the Union's interests, she promised, "If they can't agree, then GUMU will intervene." Two days later, the issue had been resolved; under pressure from GUMU, Bol'shemennikov had apparently fallen into line.²⁵ As these interactions show, for the most part GUMU operated exceptionally smoothly in its dealings with the Composers' Union, whether as partner or benevolent superior. Their affinity arose not least from their mutual responsibility for Soviet musical creativity and concert life. Because they had similar goals, and received accolades or excoriation from above for the same successes and failures, it was to their mutual benefit to maintain a close relationship and help each other at every turn, whether dealing with *goszakazy* and auditions, keeping tabs on provincial creativity, or sorting out performance issues. Their

²⁴ RGALI, f.962, op.5, d.1124, ll.202-205.

²⁵ Ibid., ll.17-20.

cooperation was also made easier by their clear relationship within the labyrinthine state bureaucracy. However independently the Union might operate, it was still nested under KDI's wing, and GUMU was deeply protective of it, as evidenced by its immediate decision to take the Choral Commission's side in its dispute with Muzgiz. Thus, when working toward mutual objectives, as when pursuing its own goals, GUMU could be reasonably effective.

However, when these lines became murkier, trouble began. GUMU's correspondence with the All-Union Radio Committee (VRK), which stood atop of its own hierarchy in the state system, reveals this breakdown. Given the similarity of their interests, GUMU and VRK often worked together, or at least with the same composers, but because they belonged to different branches, the overlap in their competencies proved a hindrance more often than an asset. Frequently, their difficulties with one another came down to money. For instance, when VRK and its subsidiary, the Sound Recording House, which produced records for broadcast and general sale, wished to broadcast or record a piece GUMU had purchased from a composer, they were compelled to seek GUMU's permission, as holder of the right to its use.²⁶ On the other hand, if GUMU wanted to have a recording made, because the labor and resources were paid for by VRK, GUMU had to come to VRK hat in hand.²⁷ Last but not least, as VRK could commission works for broadcast only, should it desire to engage a composer to write new music for recording, it had to convince GUMU to commission and pay for the work. For example, in March 1948, the Director of the Sound Recording House wrote KDI first vice chair Nikolai Bespalov to request formulation of a contract with Sergei Prokofiev for "creation for recording of two waltzes... and an overture on Russian themes." Bespalov gave permission, and a GUMU

²⁶ RGALI, f.962, op.5, d.1123, l.91.

²⁷ Ibid., ll.62, 130.

ensor completed the file with a note that the music had been written and purchased.²⁸ Yet, had he decided otherwise, VRK would have had no recourse, and the pieces simply would not have been written. In general, the constant traffic between GUMU and VRK on these issues proceeded relatively routinely, usually ending in assent to each other's appeals. But substantial time and effort went into the conduct of such correspondence, which could easily have been saved by establishing blanket procedural rules governing standard interactions between the two agencies.

In fact, the question of payment to composers proved a significant problem in the relationship between GUMU and VRK, which their frequent contact was not able to overcome. While the case of the Prokofiev record was relatively simple, others were not so easy to resolve. In May 1949, VRK wrote GUMU with a dilemma: a year before, the leader of the Ensemble of Soloists of the State Symphony Orchestra suggested to Aleksandr Golubentsev that he compose a suite based on themes from his incidental music for the play *Oleko Dundich*, for the ensemble's use. This was not in itself unusual, and the suite was well-received. The difficulty was that VRK had broadcast it several times, in live performance and by a recording it had made. However, as the Ensemble of Soloists belonged to KDI's hierarchy (via the Moscow State Philharmonic) and KDI was not allowed to commission recordings, "Golubentsev did not receive an honorarium for his suite, which had in fact been commissioned from him by the State Symphony Orchestra." VRK asked GUMU to clean up the mess by paying the composer. Unwilling to take orders from VRK, GUMU insisted on auditioning the recording before settling accounts with Golubentsev.²⁹

This was far from the worst of the confusion between GUMU and VRK. While Golubentsev was at risk for not being paid at all, in other instances composers managed to get

²⁸ RGALI, f.962, op.5, d.1124, l.175. In a separate letter, the assistant head of VRK's Administration for Musical Broadcasting reminded Anisimov that "VRK... does not have the right to pay an author for recording his work." See RGALI, f.962, op.5, d.1124, l.157.

²⁹ RGALI, f.962, op.5, d.1124, l.157.

paid twice, by both agencies. GUMU suspected this had occurred with Vladimir Iurovskii's symphonic poem for orchestra, chorus, and reader, *Zoia*. The agency wrote VRK that, "according to information in GUMU's possession, the poem, paid for by GUMU, has been paid for a second time by VRK" and asked for verification.³⁰ Though in this case VRK replied it had made no such payment to Iurovskii, the problem was clear: neither GUMU nor VRK had an established procedure for verifying the uniqueness of their commissions, and each was unaware of the other's actions in terms of commissioning and payment of honoraria.

Happily for composers, this perplexity worked to their advantage, and many were not above using it to increase their income. This practice reached such proportions that in January 1949 KDI, on behalf of GUMU, wrote the Composers' Union an angry letter drawing its attention to the "unworthy behavior of some composers... [who] when concluding a contract with one organization hide their already existing contractual relationship with another organization for the same piece." It cited examples of simultaneous contracts with GUMU and Muzgiz, GUMU and Moscow State *Estrada* "though everyone knows we purchase *estrada* songs for MSE's use," and GUMU and VRK. KDI demanded the Union take measures against the guilty parties, who "sully the high title of Soviet composer with their unworthy behavior," and in an early draft of the letter even threatened to take future cases to court. Rattled, Union General Secretary Khrennikov replied that the Union took such behavior very seriously indeed and would discuss the problem at a large-scale meeting, "to not only apply comradely pressure against the [perpetrators]... but also to warn others of the complete inappropriateness of such acts."³¹ Yet, Khrennikov and his compositional colleagues could hardly have been unaware of the possibility of such double-dealing, and of many composers' exploitation of it. Nor is it likely they judged

³⁰ RGALI, f.962, op.5, d.1123, ll.206-207.

³¹ Ibid., ll.275-280.

those who did so too harshly; making a living in the Soviet Union always involved some trickery, even in the arts. Rather, the Union's conscientious reply bespeaks the guilty tones of one caught red-handed, rather than true shock as discovering such practices were occurring.

Ultimately, double payments were only part of the dysfunction in GUMU's relationship with VRK. In a report titled "On the Question of VRK's Work," GUMU laid out four major areas of difficulty engendered by their overlapping competencies. Double payments were first on the list, coupled with the attendant problem that because the two agencies did not communicate regularly about their commissions, a composer whose piece had been rejected by one could easily bring it to the other, where it might be accepted. Rather than see this as a healthy failsafe against potential oversights, GUMU interpreted it as an undermining of its judgment, which must be remedied. The second difficulty was, put simply, "there is no single plan for concerts." GUMU and VRK each arranged concerts as they saw fit, making use of the ensembles allocated to them, often resulting in simultaneous concerts, each poorly attended. Worse still, because VRK was authorized to pay a higher rate, unaffiliated groups and soloists preferred to book with it, rather than GUMU. GUMU's third complaint concerned the allocated ensembles themselves. In most cities, GUMU and VRK maintained parallel ensembles, each housing a symphony orchestra, *estrada* troupe, jazz band, and more, which "gives rise to excess expenditure of state funds and introduces a lack of planning [*besplanovost'*] and unprofitability into the operational activities of the ensembles." While such parallelism might be justified in large metropolises like Moscow, Leningrad, and Kiev, it was certainly not in midsize towns like Sverdlovsk, Baku, and Tbilisi. Finally, even worse than the parallelism, in GUMU's opinion, was that many regional VRK branches housed ensembles their UDI counterparts did not. Again because they belonged to separate hierarchies, if the local philharmonic wished to book the Petrozavodsk VRK

symphony or the Vladivostok VRK folk orchestra, it had to pay full price, which was prohibitively expensive. Furthermore, as a rule, VRK branches did not schedule as many events as philharmonics, so in such locales, on any given night audiences might find themselves with no concerts to attend, though the musicians sat idle.³² Perhaps predictably, given its adversarial stance toward its bureaucratic cousin, GUMU's proposed solution was to centralize all *goszakazy*, concert planning, and ensembles under KDI, removing them from VRK's purview entirely. As a concession, the ensembles now subordinated to KDI would be obligated to serve VRK's needs. VRK surely thought little of this plan, and it seems not to have been enacted. But that only left the problems outlined by GUMU to continue unhindered.

As GUMU's rocky relationship with VRK demonstrates, its daily operations were often confused and irregular, leaving plenty of space for matters large and small to fall through the cracks. Such problems were at their worst in GUMU's dealings with separate arms of the Soviet bureaucratic beast, like Muzgiz or VRK. But they also cropped up from time to time even in its usually smooth interactions with its own subsidiaries, like the Composers' Union and republic-level UDI's. For example, in addition to castigating the Union for allowing members to engage in double-payment schemes, in 1949 the Azerbaijan UDI had to telegraph GUMU twice, in June and August, to get an answer to how much it could pay composer Niiazi for a work in the newly-invented genre of symphony-*mugam*. The UDI suggested an honorarium equivalent to a symphony; when it finally replied, GUMU downgraded this to the (smaller) symphonic poem rate.³³ This discounting was bad enough, but worse, while the issue was being sorted out, Niiazi was left in the lurch, waiting to be paid for work long since completed and approved for purchase. This not uncommon situation sent composers a clear message: GUMU could not be

³² RGALI, f.962, op.5, d.1123, ll.45-47.

³³ RGALI, f.962, op.5, d.1124, ll.156, 195-196.

trusted to conduct its work in a correct and timely manner. If they wished to get a fair hearing and their share of the benefits of membership in the Soviet creative intelligentsia, they would have to advocate for their interests beyond the normal pathways of the official system.

Grappling with GUMU

A review of composers' correspondence with GUMU regarding new compositions quickly reveals the range of irregularities that arose in its daily operations. To be sure, GUMU had a substantial array of functions to manage, fielding submissions from professional composers and amateurs, auditioning those works and informing the authors of their fate, formulating contracts and processing requests for extensions, paying out advances and honoraria, and dealing with issues related to performance and publication. And the agency was not incapable of performing these tasks with relative efficiency. In January 1949, when N.N. Sherstobitova submitted an *a capella* choral suite, GUMU auditioned it and sent her a rejection within six weeks.³⁴ A symphonic poem by Kara Karaev the same year proved more complex to manage, but far from impossible. Karaev pitched the piece to Anisimov, who forwarded his letter to Repertoire Department head A.A. Kholodilin, Kholodilin sent Karaev a contract, Karaev returned it with his signature, and Kholodilin dispatched his advance. Three months later, Karaev wrote to inform Anisimov his progress had been delayed by other work and ask for an extension on his contract. This time Anisimov passed his letter to GUMU vice chair Ion Os'kin, who sought KDI's permission, received it, and informed Karaev of his new deadline.³⁵ The entire procedure was conducted smoothly and within a reasonable timeframe. But this was far from always the case in GUMU's interactions, and composers could not count on such efficiency.

³⁴ RGALI, f.962, op.5, d.1123, ll.234-235.

³⁵ RGALI, f.962, op.5, d.1123, ll.109-110; RGALI, f.962, op.5, d.1124, ll.100-102.

Interestingly, GUMU was especially careful in its dealings with amateur composers, seeing in such work a duty to educate and encourage those with more enthusiasm than training. For the most part, such exchanges consisted of two parts: the initial submission and a polite reply from a GUMU censor explaining why it could not purchase or recommend the piece (usually a song or march) and suggesting the author contact the Krupskaja All-Union House of Folk Creativity, or occasionally the Composers' Union, for further consultation.³⁶ GUMU's seriousness about this task is reflected in the case of Anatolii Navrotskii, who submitted a song in honor of Marshal Semen Budennyi. The initial draft of GUMU's reply turned down the piece because "the text and music have major flaws, and on the whole the song is of little interest and presents neither professional nor artistic value." However, this did not suit Anisimov, under whose signature the letter would be sent. He reprimanded the subordinate who drafted the letter, "You must more fully and *professionally* explain... the song's shortcomings, all the more so as he's probably little experienced." She did so, and a new version of the letter was sent, providing Navrotskii with a more enlightening, if no less harsh, explanation of GUMU's rejection.³⁷

But even in routine cases involving amateur composers, the cracks in GUMU's façade become apparent. For instance, in April 1949, V.P. Barshinov submitted to KDI Chair Lebedev three songs, with an enthusiastic letter declaring, "Only in our country could I achieve my goal and substantiate my dream to glorify the flowering of our Great Motherland!" He asked Lebedev to reply with his evaluation, and "I will validate your trust with honor." Barshinov's materials were quickly passed on to GUMU, but there they languished for three months, until he sent a second set of songs and a renewed plea for evaluation. Lebedev again forwarded the materials to

³⁶ See for example: RGALI, f.962, op.5, d.1123, ll.177-180; 160-161; f.962, op.5, d.1124, ll.145-147; 143-144, 159; 160-165 (in this case, the composer sent two songs to *Pravda*, which forwarded them to GUMU).

³⁷ RGALI, f.962, op.5, d.1124, ll.75-80a. Emphasis in the original.

GUMU, admonishing Kholodilin to reply to both letters. This time, Barshinov got his response: a brief note to seek consultation at the Union, to which Kholodilin forwarded his songs the same day.³⁸ Ultimately, GUMU behaved conscientiously in Barshinov's case, but it took extra persistence on the part of the author, for whom it had already taken some daring to make his initial submission. Many amateurs lacked the gumption to make the extra effort in advocating for themselves and their work. As a result, there was a decent chance their letters would get lost in the vast flow of paperwork, and GUMU, disorganized as ever, would fail in its pedagogical duty toward them and thus lose the opportunity to discover potential new Soviet musical talent.

This trend toward disorganization, haphazardness, and even outright bungling was even more evident in GUMU's interactions with professional composers. At the same time, this group pushed harder for its own interests, being possessed of the confidence attendant on their long years of training and the drive engendered by their need to make a living and a name for themselves through their work. This combination of forces resulted in a substantial amount of correspondence, as composers and GUMU hashed out their relationship to one another. Wherever problems cropped up, composers assertively intervened, in an effort to draw censors' full attention to themselves and their pieces, build bridges toward them, and enlist their support in successfully shepherding their music through the censorship process.

GUMU's procedural difficulties began at the beginning of its dealings with professional composers: contracts and payments. The agency itself knew all too well it was falling behind in this area. In January 1949, head bookkeeper M. Pustov wrote the deputy chair about an accounting problem. Ten years earlier, GUMU had contracted with Nikolai Rakov for a symphonic suite and paid him an advance. Rakov never submitted the work, and GUMU had

³⁸ RGALI, f.962, op.5, d.1123, ll.1-6.

only just gotten around to canceling the contract, having discovered while canceling a more recent one with the same author. GUMU's standard method for recouping the advance in such cases was to threaten to take the author to court; however, that was not possible here, because the statute of limitations had expired. Pustov lamely suggested GUMU "lean on Rakov, so he voluntarily deposits his debt with the cashier" – hardly a viable solution. In the end, Gotgel'f convinced Rakov to "sell" a new salon romance to GUMU for the exact amount of his previous advance, with GUMU keeping the fee as payment of his debt. Of course, this required auditioning the piece, which fortunately met GUMU's standard. Had it not, GUMU, not the composer, would have been out of luck.³⁹ There is no indication any of the participants in this exchange found it shocking or unusual. Rather, the ten-year oversight of Rakov's advance seems to have been regarded all around as a relatively normal error, just another of the many loose ends in GUMU's operations, of which Rakov had managed to take advantage for a full decade.

On the other hand, when not busy avoiding GUMU's notice, composers turned to the agency about a range of contractual issues it had bungled in one way or another. At their simplest, such letters might result from GUMU forgetting to send contract forms to composers, many of whom did business through the central Moscow office though living in the provinces. Such was the case for Semen Zaslavskii, who wrote Gotgel'f from Rostov with polite insistence, "Forgive me for disturbing you. I earnestly ask you, if it's possible, to inform me... about the contract for my polka." The latter hastily sent the contract to Zaslavskii for signature.⁴⁰ Even getting the contract signed by both parties might require persistent follow-up by composers, as when Vitalii Geviksman wrote to sort out the contract for his string quartet. Geviksman explained he had signed the contract before leaving for an ethnographic folksong-collecting trip

³⁹ RGALI, f.962, op.5, d.1123, ll.297-298.

⁴⁰ Ibid., l.260.

in the Sverdlovsk region, but the transaction could not be completed because Anisimov was in Leningrad that day. Anisimov having returned, Geviksman asked him to sign the contract and send the advance to Sverdlovsk, so he would not have to cut short his collection of folk materials “necessary for the quartet’s finale and in general for my creative work.” Anisimov duly signed and sent the contract, promising the advance soon.⁴¹ But again, were it not for Geviksman’s perseverance, his paperwork, set aside for Anisimov’s signature, might easily have fallen through the cracks. That would have left him with neither contract nor advance, only an oral agreement – a tenuous prospect at best, given GUMU’s scattered approach to management.

While Geviksman benefited from his intervention, Natalia Levi suffered for her more passive approach. In June 1949, she met with Kholodilin in Leningrad and signed a contract for a choral-orchestral work, *Russkii sever (Russian North)*, which the latter took back to Moscow for Anisimov’s signature, promising to send Levi a copy shortly. When the document did not arrive after three weeks, rather than write Kholodilin, she assumed their agreement was nullified and went to Karelia for the summer. In October, she returned to a letter from Anisimov that she had missed her submission deadline. Surprised, Levi replied, explaining the situation and asking GUMU to pay for her ticket to Moscow to personally audition the work, which she had in fact completed. Though she had received no advance, Anisimov refused to pay her way. He suggested she ask the Union to buy her ticket, or failing that, bring the score with her to the Union Plenum in November.⁴² Thus, Levi was doubly punished for trusting GUMU to attend to its own business rather than keeping watch over its work by regularly communicating with its censors: she lost out on the advance she should have received initially, and final payment of her honorarium was delayed until she could fund her own trip to Moscow to demonstrate her piece.

⁴¹ RGALI, f.962, op.5, d.1123, ll.95-96.

⁴² RGALI, f.962, op.5, d.1124, ll.12-13, 16.

As Geviksman's and Levi's experiences indicate, composers had a vested interest in staying on top of GUMU's censors until their contracts were signed and processed, for it was only at that point they could receive their advance. But even then, composers could not count on smooth sailing. Pavel Panchenko discovered this the hard way in 1949. Early in the year, he submitted several songs in complete form. After an audition, GUMU decided to purchase them and formulated a contract. There was no need for an advance, but Panchenko should have received his honorarium shortly after. By August, it had still not arrived, so he wrote Gotgel'f, noting with some annoyance, "Plenty of time has passed since I signed and returned my contract to Moscow, but the honorarium still hasn't come. I very much ask you to hurry whomever you must in sending the honorarium, which, if you recall the date on which KDI purchased the songs, I should have received long ago." Gotgel'f replied, assuring him that "for various reasons" the honorarium would be sent in September. But indeed it was not. On October 1, Panchenko, now truly irritated, wrote her again that September had passed with no honorarium, which "compels me to again bring myself to your attention. I most earnestly ask you to take measures to be done with this question." Mistrustful, he also asked for a copy of his contract, which he had not previously received. Gotgel'f again assured him the money would be sent, and it was finally dispatched a week later.⁴³ In all, it took Panchenko several months and several letters enlisting Gotgel'f's aid to compel GUMU to perform one of its most routine functions.

Despite such glaring oversights in its operations, GUMU could also be surprisingly strict in its enforcement of contractual details. In January 1949, the agency contracted with Leon Khodzha-Einatov to write a cantata in honor of May Day and paid him the standard 25% advance. In the course of writing, the composer found the cantata form did not suit his vision and

⁴³ RGALI, f.962, op.5, d.1124, ll.200-201, 68, 70.

wrote a symphonic fantasia on the same theme instead. Based in Leningrad, he auditioned the work for GUMU's Leningrad office, which approved it for performance, after which it was premiered by the Leningrad VRK orchestra. Because this situation was somewhat irregular, Anisimov wrote his superior, Lebedev, to explain and suggest that as VRK had paid the composer a hefty fee for the premiere, GUMU should subtract that amount from his honorarium. As far as Anisimov was concerned, Khodzha-Einatov had essentially done his job, and only details remained to be settled. Lebedev, on the other hand, unexpectedly became incensed, and scrawled back, "Seek return of the advance, because he did not fulfill his obligation to KDI." Though he surely found this decision strange, Anisimov obediently dispatched a standard contract cancellation letter, asking the composer to return the funds he had received. Meanwhile, Leningrad Composers' Union secretary Vasilii Solov'ev-Sedoi, assuming all was well, wrote Anisimov about altering the contract to reflect the change in genre and invited GUMU to send a representative to hear the piece performed. Anisimov could only reply the contract had been canceled on Lebedev's instructions, though he allowed, "the question of purchasing the fantasia can be decided after its performance at the Plenum in Moscow" a few weeks hence.⁴⁴

That Anisimov and Solov'ev-Sedoi both assumed GUMU was flexible enough to accommodate the difference in musical form, which after all was not so great, indicates this would normally have been the case. Yet Lebedev was able to change the rules on a whim, leaving the composer with no recourse but to return his advance and hope an entirely new contract would result from the Plenum performance. Lebedev's actions serve as yet more proof of GUMU's arbitrariness in its dealings with composers. The lesson for Khodzha-Einatov and his colleagues in the above cases was clear: proactively keep informed of GUMU's actions,

⁴⁴ RGALI, f.962, op.5, d.1123, l.157; f.962, op.5, d.1124, ll.63-64, 87, 91.

including its lapses, and make sure a friendly censor at GUMU is apprised of your progress and your every creative decision. If Khodzha-Einatov had written Anisimov about the genre alteration sooner, the latter might have been more able and willing to plead his case before Lebedev. Only through such persistence could composers manage to secure their livelihood and shepherd their pieces through GUMU's contracting and payment process.

Lebedev's unexpected cold-shouldering of Khodzha-Einatov illustrates another frustration for composers: the uneven treatment they received from GUMU's censors. A lucky few, usually the cream of the compositional crop, might receive star treatment, as Dmitrii Shostakovich did when GUMU sought to entice him into a contract for a new oratorio, which would become his Stalin Prize-winning *Pesnia o lesakh* (*Song of the Forests*). In July 1949, Kholodilin sent him an unusually solicitous missive, noting Evgenii Dolmatovskii, the librettist, had conveyed Shostakovich's willingness to make such an agreement and asking him to sign the enclosed contract, upon receipt of which GUMU would immediately send his advance. Kholodilin assured Shostakovich the honorarium was the maximum allowed and inquired daintily, "Would you consider it possible to inform us how your work is going, and whether you are satisfied with Dolmatovskii's poetry? I wish you and your family every happiness and success."⁴⁵ This was certainly a far cry from the curt, businesslike notes Kholodilin and his fellow censors usually wrote. Yet, on the other hand, even a less celebrated composer like Andrei Shtogarenko could find himself the temporary object of such attentiveness, if GUMU's censors

⁴⁵ RGALI, f.962, op.5, d.1123, l.7. *Pesnia o lesakh* was composed as Shostakovich's penance for the musical sins for which he was criticized in the Central Committee's 1948 resolution "On the Opera *Velikaia Druzha*" (see chapter 4). In her biography, Laurel Fay explains Shostakovich and Dolmatovskii began the project together in spring 1949, after a chance meeting on a long-distance train. Work was well under way by the time of GUMU's solicitation, though the agency was apparently unaware of it, and Shostakovich finished the piece on August 15. See Laurel Fay. *Shostakovich: A Life* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000), 174-176.

happened to want something from him and be in a particularly favorable mood. In April 1949, GUMU vice chair Os'kin wrote Shtogarenko, reminding him that the previous year GUMU had suggested he write an oratorio about Stalin, but the composer had been busy with other projects. Having learned from the Union he was now available, Os'kin invited Shtogarenko to submit an outline and even name his own timeframe for completion.⁴⁶ While this was no doubt pleasant for the composer, it was also unusual, and he surely knew better than to become accustomed to it. With his next piece, or even while writing the current one, Os'kin might suddenly become far more strict, or forget him altogether. For Soviet composers, weathering such shifts was as much part of the job as staying on top of censors' handling of their contracts and payments.

GUMU's uneven behavior toward composers is most evident in its handling of expired contracts. In such instances, the agency had the option either to cancel the agreement or extend the deadline for submission. This collection includes both outcomes in equal numbers, with little indication of why one was chosen over the other in each case. For example, Mikhail Grachev's contract was canceled because "the work presented does not answer the conditions of the contract and does not satisfy GUMU," while Georgii Sviridov's was canceled even though his work did satisfy GUMU, because Glavrepertkom flagged it.⁴⁷ In neither case was the composer given a chance to revise his work, though GUMU could easily have done so. Meanwhile, GUMU canceled Modest Tabachnikov's and Abram Lobkovskii's contracts before either had submitted a note, simply because their work was overdue.⁴⁸ This last circumstance might not seem so strange, were it not for the fact that GUMU regularly extended overdue contracts, with no greater reason than Tabachnikov and Lobkovskii presented. In fact, the same day Anisimov informed

⁴⁶ RGALI, f.962, op.5, d.1123, l.156.

⁴⁷ RGALI, f.962, op.5, d.1123, l.267; RGALI, f.962, op.5, d.1124, l.99.

⁴⁸ RGALI, f.962, op.5, d.1123, ll.266, 101.

Tabachnikov his contract was canceled due to non-fulfillment, he also wrote Dmitrii Kabalevskii and Vladimir Iurovskii that their contracts had expired, Kabalevskii's a month before and Iurovskii's the previous September. Yet in these letters, rather than presenting canceled contracts as *fait accompli*, he politely asked each composer to explain the delay and inform him when they expected to complete their work.⁴⁹ Granted, Anisimov specified Kabalevskii's new deadline should fall within a month and Iurovskii's within two weeks, but this was still an opportunity they received while others did not. Again, there is no indication why these two were politely granted leniency while Tabachnikov and Lobkovskii were sternly punished. Three of the letters went out in Anisimov's name, and the fourth in that of his direct subordinate, Os'kin. Whether these letters were actually written by Anisimov and Os'kin or by junior censors and sent up for signature, they represent the same procedural problem: the treatment composers received from GUMU was largely unpredictable. To safeguard their prospects, all four would have done best to intervene proactively and ask Anisimov for extensions before their contracts ran out.

In fact, when composers did take charge of their interactions with GUMU's censors and ask for extensions, they were rewarded for it. After conceiving the idea for his Symphony No. 3 ("Symphony-Song"), Aleksandr Mosolov contracted with GUMU to deliver the piece by October 1, 1949. The day before this deadline, he wrote Anisimov that he had only just returned from a trip to the Kuban' region, where he gathered the folksongs on which the symphony would be based. "At this time I am setting to work on the symphony," he reported dutifully, "and I will fulfill my contract with GUMU by December 1." Given that the trip had run long and set him behind schedule, Mosolov asked his contract be prolonged until this date. Upon receipt of this straightforward request, Anisimov took it to Lebedev, whose permission was required for all

⁴⁹ RGALI, f.962, op.5, d.1123, ll.264 (Kabalevskii), 263 (Iurovskii).

contractual amendments. Lebedev, in turn, approved the extension, and Mosolov was informed of the positive outcome.⁵⁰ The entire process took eleven days. Thus, Mosolov reaped the benefits of his proactive approach to dealing with GUMU. In one sense, it was a gamble; Lebedev, or even Anisimov on his own, could have refused him. But by stepping forward and advocating for his own interests, he won Anisimov's trust and support, and negated the possibility of finishing the symphony only to discover GUMU had already canceled his contract.

In rare cases, GUMU's benevolence could stretch even beyond the extensions granted Kabalevskii, Iurovskii, and Mosolov. In February 1949, Anisimov wrote Ivan Dzerzhinskii regarding his symphonic poem *Ermak*. Though this piece had been specifically named in KDI's letter to the Union the previous month condemning double contracting – Dzerzhinskii had sold *Ermak* to both GUMU and Leningrad VRK – Anisimov did not mention this incident in his communiqué. Rather, he politely reminded Dzerzhinskii his contract with GUMU had already been extended once, to a date now past, and asked when the agency could expect the final draft.⁵¹ There is no question Anisimov knew of KDI's letter to the Union; after Besimalov sent it, he forwarded it to Anisimov and two of his subordinates, Konstantin Sakva and Sofia Gotgel'f, for their information.⁵² That he did not mention it in his letter to Dzerzhinskii indicates either KDI recovered from its anger surprisingly quickly or Anisimov's office was so disorganized that Besimalov's letter was soon lost in the shuffle and forgotten, despite its direct relevance.

In an even more remarkable case, GUMU went to extraordinary lengths to accommodate Boris Mokrousov, who had similarly overrun his deadline without communicating with the agency. In February 1949, Anisimov wrote Mokrousov to ask when he expected to finish his

⁵⁰ RGALI, f.962, op.5, d.1124, ll.60-62.

⁵¹ RGALI, f.962, op.5, d.1123, l.265.

⁵² Ibid, l.276. This note was sent on January 12, 1949, one week after the date of the final version of KDI's letter to the Union, January 6. See: RGALI, f.962, op.5, d.1123, l.277.

symphonic poem *Volga*, for which GUMU had contracted with him the previous June. This letter could only have been motivated by a missed deadline, since Anisimov would otherwise have known when to expect the piece's submission. Apparently, Mokrousov then negotiated an extension until late spring; the following June, Anisimov informed him his deadline had once again passed. After that, GUMU completely lost track of him. On September 30, a frustrated Anisimov wrote once again, reprimanding him, "in the past three months, GUMU's workers have phoned you more than once, but they couldn't reach you." He informed Mokrousov GUMU was unwilling to further prolong his contract and, as the commission was now canceled, he would have to return his advance.⁵³ In the end, the uncommunicative Mokrousov lost out, though he hardly seems to have wanted this commission, and Anisimov's tone in his final missive was far from friendly. But even so, Anisimov and his colleagues had waited more than six months and expended substantial effort to work things out before finally giving up. In this case, GUMU's arbitrariness was on full display: though Mokrousov was no more famous or valuable to GUMU than Khachaturian or Lobkovskii, Anisimov devoted far more time and energy to him than it had to the others, though they missed their deadlines only once, and by less time.

Here again, while GUMU's behavior was plenty unpredictable, a composer's response could make a substantial difference. Mokrousov, for all intents and purposes, fled the scene, leaving Anisimov to eventually grow tired of pursuing him. Iurii Shaporin, on the other hand, a well-known master of the deferred deadline (see chapter 5), took a different approach. In January 1949, Os'kin wrote him that the contract for his piano concerto, which had apparently been prolonged at least once before, could no longer be extended and would now be canceled, obligating him to return the substantial advance he had received. There is no indication what

⁵³ RGALI, f.962, op.5, d.1123, l.262; RGALI, f.962, op.5, d.1124, l.82. GUMU's June letter was not preserved, but is referenced in its September letter.

magic Shaporin worked in the next few months, but he certainly took some action. Os'kin next wrote him in June, to say his "declaration" had been received, and KDI chair Lebedev had personally sanctioned prolongation of *two* outstanding contracts, albeit "for the last time." In view of his work on the opera *Dekabristy* (*The Decembrists*), Shaporin was given until November 1 for an in-progress cantata and February 1950 for the piano concerto. Os'kin closed his letter with a warning that if Shaporin missed his deadlines again, the contracts would be canceled and he would have to return his advances.⁵⁴ However, one might imagine this threat held little meaning for a composer so adept at pulling the strings with GUMU's leadership to his own advantage.

The issue of returning the advance upon cancelation of a contract was a significant one, though GUMU's handling of it was no more regular than in any other area. Some cancelation notices, like the final one sent to Mokrousov and the initial one sent to Shaporin, included an explicit request for return of the advance and a deadline, but others, like those sent to Khachaturian or Tabachnikov, did not. This certainly did not mean GUMU was content to let those composers keep their partial fee; rather, it is simply another sign of the agency's disorganization. Taking advantage of this trait, composers could and often did avoid returning their advances for long stretches of time, as demonstrated above by the case of Nikolai Rakov, who managed to hold on to the advance for his never-composed symphonic suite so long without GUMU noticing that it could no longer seek redress through the courts. Still, Rakov was an outlier. More often, such oversights were caught when the bookkeeping department finalized its accounts at the end of the year. Thus, in October 1949, Anisimov and head bookkeeper Pustov sent several letters to delinquent composers, each beginning, "In light of the coming conclusion

⁵⁴ RGALI, f.962, op.5, d.1123, ll.304, 94.

of the year, GUMU asks you... to return your outstanding debt,” followed by the amount of an advance for a canceled contract.⁵⁵ Most of these contracts were relatively recent, concluded in 1947 or 1948, but one dated back to 1942 and had apparently only been caught seven years later. As in Rakov’s case, GUMU’s priority was not so much cash as balanced books. Its censors were therefore willing to engage in a certain amount of horse-trading, keeping advances for new compositions by the same composers as partial payment of old debts, which also indicates they were not overly concerned with individual track records when formulating new contracts. Nevertheless, once GUMU had caught an outstanding debt, it meant business, seeking a debt as low as 50R in one case.⁵⁶ Moreover, each of Anisimov and Pustov’s letters ended with the same threat: “If you do not extinguish your debt on time, GUMU will be compelled to bring legal suit against you without notice.” Thus, again, composers’ best bet was to intervene early and often in their dealings with GUMU, checking that contracts were signed and advances received in a timely manner, and proactively convincing censors to grant them extensions as their submission deadlines neared. GUMU was disorganized enough that one might successfully hide from it, as Rakov did for ten years. But such evasion could also lead to censors taking a special interest, as Anisimov did with Mokrousov. Either way, the most likely outcome was that the debt would eventually have to be paid, so composers were better off enlisting censors’ help in getting extensions, rather than risking angering them by allowing their contracts to expire.

As with contracts and payments, GUMU’s haphazardness also compelled composers to take an energetic approach to seeking censors’ assistance in shepherding their pieces to performance and publication. Especially in the realm of securing performances, not only was GUMU’s recommendation more or less necessary, the agency could also provide significant

⁵⁵ RGALI, f.962, op.5, d.1124, ll.33, 43, 45-47.

⁵⁶ Ibid., l.33.

concrete aid. For instance, in March 1949, having approved *Kantata o rodine* (*Cantata of the Motherland*) by Aleksandr Arutiunian, a young composer who had just completed his studies, Anisimov decided it ought to be performed by the Latvian State Philharmonic and Academic Capella. In service of this goal, he dispatched the composer from Moscow to Riga with a specially issued certificate stating GUMU had instructed him to acquaint those ensembles' leadership with his work. The trip was apparently a success; a month later, Anisimov wrote the Latvian Philharmonic directly that it "has information of your intention to perform Arutiunian's cantata" and would send the score and parts shortly.⁵⁷ To be sure, Arutiunian would likely have found other groups to perform his first major large-scale work, after GUMU had approved it. But for a young composer just beginning to build his reputation, GUMU's special support helped to secure the attention of a major ensemble and promote the cantata's distribution more widely across the Soviet Union. There was thus a clear benefit for similarly ambitious composers in exerting themselves to draw attention of this kind from GUMU.

A true master of the art of enlisting censors' assistance in shepherding a new composition to performance was Sofia Chicherina. Tenacious to the point of exhaustion, Chicherina consistently wore down the defenses of GUMU's censors with a steady stream of passionately scrawled letters, which did not let up until her aims were achieved. For example, in 1947, she signed a contract with GUMU for an orchestral work titled *Prazdnichnaia uvertiura* (*Celebratory Overture*). Though she completed the commission, after auditioning it GUMU declined her request for a performance recommendation. As Chicherina was not an up-and-

⁵⁷ RGALI, f.962, op.5, d.1123, ll.212, 153. Composed in 1948, *Kantata o rodine* received its official premiere in Moscow in autumn 1949. In late spring of that year, it was awarded a Stalin Prize, first class. However, while the Stalin Prize Committee had likely already decided to honor the piece at the time of GUMU's exchange with the Latvian Philharmonic, the prize had not yet been awarded and the Latvian Philharmonic probably did not know of the SPC's decision. See Izabella Eolian. *Aleksandr Arutiunian* (Moscow: Sovetskii kompozitor, 1962), 20-34.

comer like Arutiunian, this decision made it unlikely the piece would ever be performed, and as a consequence, deprived her both of the satisfaction of seeing her piece reach the public and the attendant fees, a not insubstantial portion of Soviet composers' income. In most cases, this would have been the end of the story, but Chicherina was not willing to concede defeat. In January 1949 she wrote Anisimov, acknowledging GUMU had judged the piece "unremarkable" but persisting, "Considering this work serious and worthy of being conveyed to listeners, I ask your assistance in its recommendation for performance." She further attested that several "authoritative specialists" to whom she had showed it, including Shostakovich, had expressed favorable opinions. Not convinced, Anisimov passed her letter to Gotgel'f, without further instructions.⁵⁸

A month later, unaware Gotgel'f had seen her original letter and filed it without taking action, Chicherina wrote a second one, this time addressed to Gotgel'f. Having received no reply to her petition to GUMU's head, she apparently thought she might find a more sympathetic ear on a lower rung of its bureaucratic ladder. Chicherina explained she had made a formal request to GUMU to include her overture on the list of recommended works, omitting that this request had already been denied. Taking a more personal tone, she wrote, "If you can help with this, help me. At a distance it's very hard for me to do anything about it. Sakva [Gotgel'f supervisor] probably won't protest." She concluded with a nod to the personal cost of the overture not being performed, lamenting, "I'm exhausted from need." This missive, by turns pleading, bold, and pathetic, had its desired effect. A week later, Chicherina finally received a reply from Anisimov, possibly drafted by Gotgel'f. While repeating that GUMU had already made its decision and Chicherina's overture would not be performed in the capital, Anisimov conceded the agency

⁵⁸ RGALI, f.962, op.5, d.1123, l.254.

could see send the score to a few provincial orchestras and let her know if any were interested. It was hardly A-list treatment, but it was all she required. Chicherina followed up carefully on these leads and three months later triumphantly announced to Lebedev her overture was finally being prepared for its premiere.⁵⁹ Chicherina's case is instructive: not only did she start the process by specifically asking GUMU to recommend her piece for performance, she followed up consistently, enlisting support from Gotgel'f and eventually Anisimov, until she achieved her goal. If at any point she had been less assertive or taken "no" for an answer, her overture would have gone quietly into her archive, never to be heard by a Soviet audience. But "no" was not in Chicherina's vocabulary. She steadfastly pursued GUMU's recommendation, writing to individual censors again and again until they finally gave in and did what she asked. As a result, the piece received its premiere, and Chicherina's career took a hard-won step forward.

Struggles like Chicherina's were mainly the province of the rank-and-file. Leading lights like Shostakovich or Prokofiev, for all their other struggles with Soviet censorship, did not require such tenacity to convince GUMU to recommend for performance the works it commissioned from them. Yet, even once this coveted recommendation was secured, actually achieving a premiere could still be an uphill battle for a composer whose name was not well known. Such was the case with Varvara Gaigerova's 1943 vocal-orchestral suite *Dnevnik frontovika* (*Diary of a Frontline Soldier*). After the composer's untimely death in 1944, her mother took over in seeking GUMU's recommendation, writing specially to then-KDI head Mikhail Khrapchenko in July 1947. The recommendation was granted soon after, along with one from the Composers' Union, and it was agreed the Union would arrange a premiere early in the 1947-1948 season. However, as the senior Gaigerova wrote in separate appeals to Khrapchenko

⁵⁹ RGALI, f.962, op.5, d.1123, ll.253, 251, 116.

and then-GUMU head Georgii Orvid at the close of 1947, the performance had not come together. The problems, as she recounted with frustration, were myriad: “Preparation dragged on and the performance was put off for lack of necessary conditions: first there was no orchestra, then no chorus, then the hall couldn’t accommodate the orchestra, chorus, and soloists together. It’s been going on six months already, and who knows when the necessary conditions will be found.” She asked Khrapchenko and Orvid to push the performance forward, even suggesting alternate venues and a particular choral ensemble, which “having become acquainted with the work, thinks it very suitable and desirable to perform.” Of course, the ensemble would have to be paid, which Gaigerova also asked Khrapchenko to undertake, since the Union seemed to be falling down on the job.⁶⁰

Gaigerova-*mère*’s employment of standard Russian-mother tropes – lamentation for her “untimely deceased” daughter, disappointment with KDI and the Union for delaying performance of “this final work of Gaigerova’s,” unsolicited kibitzing about venues and musicians – was highly effective. Within days, Khrapchenko forwarded her letter to Os’kin, noting, “We must perform the suite. Follow up on it.” At the same time, Orvid forwarded his version to Gotgel’f, asking her to “clarify the state of affairs with performing Gaigerova’s suite. The Union promised.” If lack of space was the problem, he suggested adding it to an upcoming concert in the Conservatory’s Great Hall. Orvid then wrote Viktor Belyi, a member of the Union’s Orgkom, asking him “in accord with Khrapchenko’s instructions” to include the piece in an upcoming concert. Finally, Gotgel’f reported she had “conveyed Khrapchenko’s and Orvid’s instructions” to Belyi by phone, and he had promised to add the suite to the Great Hall concert.⁶¹

⁶⁰ RGALI, f.962, op.5, d.1123, ll.249-250.

⁶¹ RGALI, f.962, op.5, d.1123, ll.248-250, 245. Khrapchenko and Orvid were both fired as a result of the *Velikaia druzhba* scandal in February 1948 (see chapter 4).

Thus, by convincing Khrapchenko and Orvid to aid her cause, in a week the senior Gaigerova managed to secure the long-delayed premiere of her daughter's suite. Once again it had taken boldness, persistence, and perhaps most importantly, the assumption GUMU would not do its job properly if left to its own devices, but could be made to do so through personal intervention.

If composers' intercessions with GUMU's censors were often successful in securing performances, they were less so for publication, though here, too, a certain amount of inconsistency reigned. This division repeats the overall picture of GUMU's relationships to the Composers' Union and philharmonics on one hand, and Muzgiz and VRK on the other – the former being close members of its bureaucratic family while the latter resided further afield, in other branches of the state apparatus. Aside from Egorov's partly successful effort noted above, this collection contains only one other example of GUMU actively assisting with publication. And even this case is an outlier. While GUMU's role within KDI was to exercise control only over musical institutions, this definition was slightly expanded in the case of its *Estrada* Department, which controlled all forms of light entertainment, including dance bands, popular songs, and humorous sketches and monologues. At the close of 1948, Viktor Ardov, a sketch-writer, wrote Lebedev with a special request. The coming year marked the 25th anniversary of his *estrada* career, and Ardov sought KDI's support in publishing a collection of his works. Acknowledging it was unusual to write to KDI rather than the publisher, he explained, “[They] usually produce collections of various authors. That's reasonable; to the reader it's important to get more varied material. But maybe my quarter-century of work deserves a single-author collection?... If you consider it possible, I very much ask you to give instructions to the publisher.” Ardov also secured support from the Writers' Union's Drama Commission, which wrote Lebedev with the same request. Lebedev passed both letters on to the Estrada Department,

where they received favorable attention. A month later, Estrada head V. Endrzheevskii replied to the Union the question had been “decided positively.” Ardov was to gather materials for the collection, which, “after review will be transferred to the publisher.”⁶² Ardov no doubt garnered both satisfaction and extra income from this publication. But as he was the first to admit, it had no chance of being issued without special intervention by Endrzheevskii, which in turn was motivated by the special intervention of the author himself.

Despite the positive outcome for Ardov, who had built a solid reputation over 25 years and, significantly, had a letter of support from his union, most others were not so lucky. More often, when composers sought GUMU’s help in securing publication of new works, the agency declined to play such a role. In the case of Vladimir Kriukov’s opera *Stantsionnyi smotritel’* (*The Stationmaster*), based on a tale by Pushkin, GUMU was willing to take one positive step, but no more. In February 1949, the composer wrote Anisimov in an effort to rescue his opera from obscurity. Though *Stantsionnyi smotritel’* had been successful after premiering at the Stanislavskii Opera Studio in 1940, Kriukov complained it had been “removed from the repertoire without any reason” when the Stanislavskii united with the Nemirovich-Danchenko Music Studio the next year. The new SND Theater had only returned to the opera the previous month, and though it had also recently been performed in Bulgaria, where it served as “a bright demonstration of Soviet-Bulgarian friendship” and was slated to do the same soon in Romania, the score had still not yet been published. In view of its achievements and Pushkin’s approaching 150th birthday, Kriukov asked Anisimov to advocate for this step. Moderately impressed, Anisimov asked Muzgiz director Bol’shemennikov if publication might be possible. However, when the latter replied in the negative, Anisimov declined to not pursue it further, and only

⁶² RGALI, f.962, op.5, d.1123, ll.270-272.

informed Kriukov of the result.⁶³ Doubtless, Anisimov could have advocated more strongly for Kriukov, though he might still not have won the day. But in dealing with Muzgiz, he simply was not willing to do so.

Even so, Kriukov might count himself relatively fortunate. In many cases, GUMU refused to take any action toward publishing. When Nikolai Gan submitted a song for audition, Anisimov replied firmly that GUMU would neither purchase the work nor recommend it for publication.⁶⁴ And when Nikolai Sizov offered his orchestral transcription of Bach's Italian Concerto specifically requesting a publication recommendation, GUMU vice chair Konstantin Sakva informed him "the question of publication may be resolved by Muzgiz independently."⁶⁵ Despite the divergent phrasing, both letters show GUMU's censors refusing to speak to the publisher on a composer's behalf. In a more striking example, Max Gotbeiter wrote Sakva seeking not GUMU's recommendation, but merely its help in prodding Muzgiz to answer his letters. As he explained, he had sent Muzgiz four songs set to Pushkin texts more than six weeks prior, hoping to see them published as part of the 150th birthday celebrations. Yet, "though I sent, after the music, three requests to be informed of its receipt, *Muzgiz for some reason doesn't answer*. I ask for your intervention." This was not an unreasonable petition; it cost Sakva nothing to send a note, and doing so had a far better chance of getting Muzgiz's attention than Gotbeiter did on his own. Still, Sakva refused, again repeating, "Muzgiz will answer independently."⁶⁶ Gotbeiter's complaint suggests Muzgiz in fact had no intention of answering him, but this apparently did not sway Sakva, who preferred to wash his hands of the whole business.

⁶³ RGALI, f.962, op.5, d.1123, ll.228-229.

⁶⁴ Ibid., l.174.

⁶⁵ Ibid., ll.286-287. In its original version, the Italian Concerto, BWV 971, is performed solo by a two-manual harpsichord.

⁶⁶ Ibid., ll.164-165. Emphasis in the original.

Considered as a whole, the correspondence between composers and GUMU on contracts and payments, deadline extensions, and recommendations for performance and publication demonstrates that the most reliable thing about the agency's behavior was its unreliability. This being so, it was manifestly in composers' best interest to assert themselves early and often in their interactions with GUMU, always seeking to engage its censors as partners in the censorship process. At worst, these censors might decline composers' requests, as they were particularly disposed to do in the case of publishing. But even here, their answer was not always no. And the benefits to a composer's career of keeping oneself on GUMU's radar, updating a particular censor on one's progress, and asking her for whatever assistance one required were simply too great to overlook. Thus, the lesson for composers was clear: communicate with GUMU early and often, and build strong relationships with its censors. Though GUMU held the power, it was a relatively open-minded, if scatterbrained, master, and gaining the support and partnership of its censors was one of the few paths available for taking charge of one's career.

Tones and Tactics

In their efforts to attract the attention and assistance of GUMU's censors, composers employed a range of voices and techniques. The mildest was a tone of polite but firm distrust, an implicit assumption that GUMU would most likely fail to follow through on its duties if left to its own devices, and the consequent tactic of checking in at every step of the process. Such distrust was plainly on display in May 1949, when Aleksandr Kas'ianov wrote GUMU about his *Overture on Russian Themes*, which it had commissioned. In an official declaration, Kas'ianov noted he had contacted GUMU in March asking for an extension to May 1 and had now met his deadline, though he would be unable to travel to Moscow for the audition before the 20th. He closed with a request: "Please be so kind as to inform me by post of your receipt of this letter." This would seem straightforward enough, but for the fact that the same day he also dispatched a

postcard addressed to Gotgel'f and another inspector. Here, Kas'ianov's altered tone indicated his distrust more clearly. "I write to you both because two chances are always better than one," he began dubiously, before explaining he had been "promised" an extension in March – apparently never formalized, which left the overture's future in doubt – and had now sent a declaration the work was done. Seeking a firm answer on whether his situation was still more or less on track, he concluded, "I very much ask you to answer me about my declaration. Otherwise I'll worry."⁶⁷ Surely, if Kas'ianov trusted GUMU to carry out its affairs correctly, this postcard would not have been necessary. That he sent it, and on the same day as his declaration, without waiting to see if the declaration got a reply on its own, is as clear an indication as Kas'ianov's doubtful tone that he had no faith in GUMU's procedural competence. And in this case, his distrust was rewarded. Though Gotgel'f did not respond herself, she likely spoke to Kholodilin, who wrote Kas'ianov the following week to extend his contract to accommodate his proposed audition date. The extraneous postcard was not mentioned, which suggests Gotgel'f and Kholodilin were accustomed to such duplicate missives.⁶⁸

Another example of a composer distrusting GUMU is provided by Aleksei Kozlovskii, who submitted his commissioned orchestral suite *Prazdnik urozhaia (Harvest Festival)* by mail from Tashkent. Because duplicating a large score had to be done by hand, which was labor-intensive, or expensive if one hired a copyist, composers often skipped this step, resulting in the necessity of depositing the sole copy of a new work in GUMU's hands. This was understandably nerve-racking for those who distrusted GUMU to begin with. After dispatching his score by registered mail, Kozlovskii sent GUMU no less than two letters and a telegram, all the same day. The telegram informed Anisimov the manuscript had been mailed, and the first letter explained

⁶⁷ RGALI, f.962, op.5, d.1123, ll.111, 119.

⁶⁸ Ibid., l.118.

to him its slight tardiness. The second letter, sent in the same envelope as the first, repeated this information to Gotgel’f, presumably in case Anisimov ignored or lost the other missives, and to enlist her assistance in making sure his suite was properly processed. All three communications stressed the score was the sole existing copy and asked the author be informed of its receipt. Once again, this tactic worked; Anisimov soon telegraphed Kozlovskii his music had arrived safely.⁶⁹ Nor did the composer stop there. Three months later, in August 1949, safe in the knowledge the score had reached its destination and been processed, but still short his fee, Kozlovskii followed up again, this time with the assistance of the All-Union Agency for Protecting Authors’ Rights (VUOAP). In response an inquiry from VUOAP, Os’kin promised Kozlovskii would be paid his honorarium in late September. Yet, apparently this did not take place. In October, replying to yet another query from Kozlovskii, Anisimov informed him the overture’s fate was still undecided. He advised the composer to revise and resubmit, making use of commentary provided during the May audition, and “KDI will resolve the question of purchasing this work after its demonstration at the Union Plenum in November.”⁷⁰ Hence, it seems Kozlovskii’s distrust was justified. Had he not nudged GUMU’s censors regularly, they might never have gotten around to making a final determination about his overture. Indeed, even with such prodding, they could not manage to do so in less than six months.

Kozlovskii’s Tashkent colleague, Suleiman Iudakov, had better luck when managing his distrust with this tactic. In mid-May 1949, he sent four salon romances to GUMU, with an accompanying letter to Gotgel’f. In the politest of tones, he asked her to ensure GUMU moved forward quickly in auditioning and deciding on them, especially as he hoped to submit them to the upcoming competition for vocal works set to Pushkin texts. “Unfortunately,” he noted, “I

⁶⁹ RGALI, f.962, op.5, d.1123, ll.125, 126, 131, 132.

⁷⁰ RGALI, f.962, op.5, d.1124, ll.178, 50.

don't know whether the competition has been announced... I hope you'll inform me, or you can send them to the jury yourself." Of course, the romances were not submissible without GUMU's approval, marking this last comment as a subtle play on Iudakov's part to bring about that result. Continuing in the same vein, Iudakov even suggested a particular vocalist, though "I won't protest if you give them to other performers to look over." He asked to be informed of the music's receipt and GUMU's decision.⁷¹ Gotgel'f replied that GUMU had received the romances and would audition them at the start of June, but once again this apparently did not take place. Undeterred by receiving no further communication, Iudakov pressed on. On July 11 he wrote with continued politeness that he had received Gotgel'f's note, but "a month and a half has passed without [further] answer. Perhaps you wrote me, but I didn't receive it, or GUMU for some reason until now has not reviewed my romances." Without pressing further, he simply asked again to be informed of GUMU's decision. And again this tactic worked. Kholodilin replied within days, tacitly admitting the audition had already been held by providing Iudakov its result: GUMU wished to purchase one romance and would send a contract for signature.⁷²

Still, this did not conclude the affair. The distrustful Iudakov was compelled to write one last time, in September. Again addressing Gotgel'f, he assured her he had signed the contract and returned it the same day, but "since then two months have passed without results." He asked her to verify whether Kholodilin had received the contract. Not surprisingly, he had; after checking into the matter, Gotgel'f replied the delay had been caused by a "lengthy business trip" taken by Anisimov, the only person who could sign contracts on GUMU's behalf. He would soon return, she assured the composer, and the contract would be finalized and the honorarium sent.⁷³ At

⁷¹ RGALI, f.962, op.5, d.1123, l.30.

⁷² Ibid., ll.27, 29.

⁷³ RGALI, f.962, op.5, d.1124, ll.74, 72.

every step of this exchange, Iudakov did not waver from either his suspicion or his unfailing politeness, and he was rewarded for both. By addressing Gotgel'f as an ally rather than an adversary, he earned her personal attention and help in shepherding his romances from receipt, to audition, to contract and payment. At each stage, his gentle but firm prodding moved the otherwise stalled process forward, resulting in compensation and a chance to bring his work to Soviet audiences. For composers like Iudakov, it was unquestionably worth the effort.

Not all composers were so high-minded however. Those who lacked Iudakov's finesse were known to resort to trickery, for which GUMU's ever-preoccupied censors quite often fell. This was a favorite tactic when composers, rather than hoping to push their affairs with GUMU forward, sought to distract and delay it until they had settled matters on their end. Such was the case for Boris Gibalin, from whom GUMU commissioned a suite for folk orchestra on Urals themes, due in October 1948. Gibalin failed to complete his work on time and unwisely, did not proactively seek an extension. Having heard nothing from him, and with the suite three months past due, in January 1949 Sakva wrote Gibalin giving him two weeks before his contract would be canceled. As we have seen, GUMU sometimes kept its word on such threats, but other times did not, and Gibalin was fortunate to fall into the latter category. A month later, with this second deadline also past, Anisimov wrote him again, this time simply stating the suite was overdue and asking when he expected to have it ready.⁷⁴ Finally, Gibalin answered, adopting Iudakov's polite tone while feigning ignorance. "I received your letter," he confirmed, "but it wasn't a second one," as Anisimov claimed. "Clearly, some letter of yours didn't reach me. It worries me terribly!" He explained he had in fact finished the suite in October, but only in piano score. Then he had stalled, through no fault of his own, of course. The problem was, he wished to score the

⁷⁴ RGALI, f.962, op.5, d.1123, ll.299, 236.

suite for the Osipov State Orchestra of Russian Folk Instruments, an unusually large ensemble. Though he had written its assistant director for advice, he had received no answer and had thus been unable to proceed. However, Gibalin promised, he would be in Moscow shortly in his role as artistic director of the Sverdlovsk Philharmonic and would then demonstrate the suite, “and together we’ll decide the issue of orchestra size.” Then he would need three weeks to complete work. Gibalin concluded with utmost politeness, “If this suits you, please inform me.”⁷⁵

In fact, this new plan suited GUMU fine, but for one problem: Gibalin never showed. In June, Os’kin wrote, reprimanding him, “You were unable to come and gave no information about the state of the work.” However, already on Gibalin’s hook, rather than cancel the contract, as GUMU would have been within its rights to do as far back as the first missed deadline, Os’kin asked whether he was working on the orchestration and when he expected to finish. As for the ensemble size, “You may make score it for the State Orchestra or a usual folk orchestra.” Once again, Gibalin stalled for time by playing the polite fool. “I received your letter with its deserved reproach,” he replied. “But my silence was provoked only because all the time I’m trying to get to Moscow.” Philharmonic business had kept him so busy, he averred, he was unable to get away even when the works of Sverdlovsk composers were auditioned for the coming Union plenum. Fortunately, this same business would bring him to the capital in early July, truly this time. Meanwhile, he had begun orchestration and promised to have it done in time to demonstrate it during his upcoming visit. Gibalin apologized for the delay, again explaining it was caused by his desire to score the suite for the State Orchestra, which required a visit to Moscow, which

⁷⁵ RGALI, f.962, op.5, d.1124, ll.181-182. It is common practice for composers to begin their writing process at the piano, sketching the work on two staves. The resultant piano score is then elaborated and arranged on as many staves as necessary for the intended ensemble. Here, Gibalin was unable to begin orchestration because he did not know the exact the number of instruments for which he was to arrange his piano score.

never seemed to materialize. As before, this tactic proved effective. Anisimov sought and obtained Lebedev's permission to extend Gibalin's contract for another month, and at the end of August – rather than the start of July – the composer finally arrived in Moscow and auditioned the piece.⁷⁶ All in all, Gibalin's strategy worked beautifully. Though he erred in not asking for an extension initially, by means of stalling and subterfuge he managed to convince Os'kin and Anisimov not to cancel his contract, but wait for what turned out to be a full eight months while he finished his suite. Did he really complete the piano score in October 1948? Was he really kept in Sverdlovsk by philharmonic duties? We will never know, and it hardly matters. Gibalin's triumph lay in beating GUMU's censors at their own haphazard game: combining absent-mindedness, lost correspondence, and unexplained delays with a nice-guy attitude, he took control of his situation and contrived to work on his own schedule rather than GUMU's.

Such tricks were fine for Gibalin, but not all composers were comfortable with his methods. Many others sought to mobilize the language of rights, legality, and fairness when managing affairs with GUMU's censors. At its most basic, this formal, legalistic tone might be manifested in use of bureaucratic terminology and an implicit assumption official procedures would be followed – though composers knew all too well they easily might not be. Such was the tone of Daniil Frenkel's letter informing Gotgel of he would be staying at the Composers' Union's resort in Sortavala, Karelia and asking “the advance *due to me* for my dance suite” be sent him there.⁷⁷ By not asking for the advance as though it were a special favor, but instead noting straightforwardly that GUMU owed it to him as a matter of contract, thereby indicating his presumption that of course such a legal obligation would be met, Frenkel made a play at compelling Gotgel to also handle their interaction by the book, as there was no reason not to.

⁷⁶ RGALI, f.962, op.5, d.1124, ll.179-180; RGALI, f.962, op.5, d.1123, ll.84-85.

⁷⁷ RGALI, f.962, op.5, d.1124, l.199. Emphasis mine.

But such exchanges were rarely so simple. For instance, in July 1949, Dmitrii Solov'ev received a letter from Kholodilin instructing him to sign the enclosed contract for a salon romance and "inform us whether your romance has been purchased by any other organization." As noted above, such double-selling was a significant problem for GUMU. But it was also deeply frowned upon and potentially illegal, which made Kholodilin's question rather offensive. Nevertheless, Solov'ev kept his cool. Adopting a formal, dignified tone, he replied, "In answer to your letter of 9 July no. MU/2036/19, I inform you my romance... has not been purchased by any other organization. I also send you the signed contract. I have familiarized myself with its points."⁷⁸ In fact, it turned out to be good that he did. True to form, rather than processing the contract as it ought, GUMU completely forgot Solov'ev for the next two months.

In September, Solov'ev wrote Kholodilin again, still using a formal, bureaucratic voice. He asked whether he had received his signed contract, again referencing the date and number of Kholodilin's original letter. Then he continued, "In accordance with... the contract, all deadlines for fulfilling [GUMU's] duties have passed, and in accordance with the contract, the work must be accepted, and consequently purchased."⁷⁹ This was a bold assertion, but Solov'ev was right; according to standard contract terms, GUMU had 30 days from receipt of a submission to inform its author in writing whether it would be accepted, rejected, or required revision and resubmission. If GUMU missed this deadline, "the work is considered accepted and KDI takes on the obligation to settle accounts with the author."⁸⁰ This collection is rife with examples of GUMU missing its contractual deadline, and most composers dealt with this problem by prodding GUMU more or less gently for its answer. But Solov'ev took the rare step of reading

⁷⁸ RGALI, f.962, op.5, d.1123, ll.15, 12.

⁷⁹ RGALI, f.962, op.5, d.1124, ll.27-28.

⁸⁰ See for example: RGALI, f.962, op.5, d.1049, ll.252-252ob, points 3, 5, and 6.

his contract and treating it as a legally binding document, which put Kholodilin in a tough spot indeed. To be sure, Solov'ev was not so brazen as to demand payment outright. After noting this contractual point, he merely reminded the censor his romance had already been auditioned – though he knew of it not from GUMU, but from a colleague who had taken part – and asked to be informed of the decision and expected date of payment. Still, Solov'ev had Kholodilin over a barrel, and he knew it. GUMU took its time replying, but the composer was surely not surprised when, six weeks later, Gotgel'f finally wrote him his contract had been received and finalized, and his honorarium would be sent in a few days.⁸¹ Thus, by behaving as if composers' rights relative to GUMU were as clear in practice as in theory, Solov'ev, too, met with success. By referring to the terms of his contract and keeping all dealings above board, he intimated to Kholodilin that he, unlike Kozlovskii or Iudakov, *did* trust him to handle matters according to procedure (albeit with some nudging), and thereby compelled him to do just that.

Solov'ev's technique worked well for composers whose pieces were subject to *goszakaz*, but for those submitting completed works in hopes GUMU would purchase them, the available tactics were somewhat different. In such cases, composers seeking to mobilize the language of rights, legality, and fairness often made an effort to bring in outside “evidence” to bolster their cases. For example, when submitting a duet and two romances set to Pushkin texts, Azerbaijani composer Zhanna Zal'tsman-Zorina included a resolution drawn up by the Consultation Committee of the Azerbaijani Composers' Union, which heartily praised all three and “recommends [them] for performance, as full-value artistic productions, written on timely themes and deserving of attention for their quality.” In her cover letter to Os'kin, Zal'tsman-Zorina stressed that not only did her local Union value her works, but they had garnered “even

⁸¹ RGALI, f.962, op.5, d.1123, l.26.

higher esteem from the best local singers, who look upon them as ‘a gift to vocalists.’” Though, as she reminded Os’kin, she had received no word about the previous *eight* pieces she submitted to GUMU, she asked the three new ones be auditioned and if possible, recommended for publication. At the same time, she sent a second letter directly to Muzgiz, offering her duet and songs. Unfortunately, though such evidence would likely have been enough to convince Os’kin to support her cause had it come from the Union-level Composers’ Union in Moscow, its origin in distant, provincial Baku downgraded its status, and he declined to help. Still, Zal’tsman-Zorina’s evidence-based approach to advocacy for her pieces was not entirely without result. When Anisimov finally replied six months later, he at least felt compelled to provide a more thorough explanation than usual for his rejection. Anisimov assured Zal’tsman-Zorina her pieces had many fine qualities, but they did not stand out among the recent spate of compositions set to Pushkin texts and therefore could not be recommended for publication.⁸² This may at least have given her some consolation, while validating her technique in dealing with GUMU. In provoking a reply at all, this method was already more effective than her previous, simpler submission, which remained unanswered. Next time, she would simply have to gather better evidence.

When relying on the language of rights, legality, and fairness, composers who felt these norms had been violated at times adopted an offended, even indignant tone in addressing GUMU’s censors. Such indignation was evident in Leonid Gurov’s lengthy exchange with the agency. Gurov’s case provides a comparatively rare example of star treatment, beginning as it did with GUMU soliciting him to compose a short symphonic work – an overture or rhapsody – on musical themes from his native Moldavia. In his pitch, Os’kin requested written confirmation of Gurov’s intent to take the commission and invited him to set his own deadline. Gurov, in turn

⁸² RGALI, f.962, op.5, d.1124, ll.29-31.

replied with a formal, bureaucratic tone that he agreed to compose a work provisionally titled *Moldavian Capriccio* and suggested a completion date seven months hence, in March 1949.

Gotgel'f sent him a contract for signature, and the project appeared to be on track.⁸³

By the time GUMU checked in again in February, however, things had gone off the rails. Though Gurov never signed and returned his contract, GUMU assumed it was in force and he was hard at work. Often, this would have been a safe bet, but not where Gurov was concerned. As the deadline approached, Anisimov became nervous about Gurov's silence and wrote asking whether the project was still active. The composer responded, again with a formal tone, explaining the capriccio, as he envisioned it, was to be a large symphonic work, "corresponding in scope to at least half a four-movement symphony." Yet, the honorarium stated in the contract was only 7,000R, "which in my opinion does not match to the size of the composition and, consequently, cannot satisfy me." Gurov claimed he had written all this to Os'kin months ago, and "not receiving any answer, I drew the entirely natural conclusion the contract must be considered annulled (the more so as I never signed it)." Indeed, from a legal perspective, this was indisputable; a contract signed by neither party could hardly be considered binding. Gurov's initial letter of intent did not obligate him to sign a contract he felt was unfair, and what's more, not having signed it put him in an excellent position to negotiate better terms for a piece to which GUMU had effectively already committed. Sensing he had the upper hand, Gurov held firm, even refusing a second time to sign the contract while visiting Moscow later that month.⁸⁴

Unfortunately Gurov failed to take account of GUMU's stubbornness on monetary issues, as opposed to its flexibility with deadlines. In March, Anisimov replied that Os'kin had never received Gurov's complaint about the fee. (More likely, he had lost or ignored it). GUMU, he

⁸³ RGALI, f.962, op.5, d.1123, ll.22-26.

⁸⁴ *Ibid.*, ll.21, 193.

continued, had set the honorarium based on the length of the capriccio as it envisioned it, “a not-large symphonic work,” and was not to blame if the composer had other ideas. Nevertheless, while he would not consider a raise, Anisimov was willing to deal. As a solution, he offered, “GUMU again suggests you write a not-large symphonic work on Moldavian folk themes. On receipt of your answer, we will send the contract a second time.”⁸⁵ In one sense, Gurov overplayed his hand; standing on his right to be paid what his music was worth had not enabled him to enlist Os’kin’s or Anisimov’s support in negotiating higher payment. But in another sense, relying on the legal standing, or lack thereof, of an unsigned contract had at least enabled him to reject a fee he found unfair. In the end, Gurov maintained a dignified position from which he could choose for himself whether to compose a shorter work or walk away entirely.

Sadly, Gurov’s colleague Aleksei Zhivotov was not so lucky. In May 1949, following a *smotr* of new works by Leningrad composers, GUMU decided to purchase Zhivotov’s set of seven salon romances on texts by Soviet poets. In the interest of settling things expeditiously, the composer made the mistake of signing a contract in which the amount of the honorarium was not specified, though Kholodilin assured him he would receive 1,500-2,000R apiece. However, Zhivotov later learned, not through official channels of course but from a friend who had been in Moscow, that his honorarium had been reduced to 7,000R total, roughly half what Kholodilin had promised. Incensed, he fired off a lengthy missive to Anisimov. Combining his indignation with an appeal to legal norms, Zhivotov asserted the 2,000R per romance figure was the only legitimate one, because it “conforms to Order no. 490 of September 7, 1944 on the scale of payments for musical works purchased by KDI.” Not only should he have received his honorarium months ago, Zhivotov continued, but to add insult to injury, his initial complaint to

⁸⁵ RGALI, f.962, op.5, d.1123, l.192.

KDI's legal department had been answered with the claim that 7,000R was standard payment for a song cycle. "You yourself, Aleksandr Ivanovich, are a musician," he fulminated.

I don't have to explain to you that writing seven romances united by a general theme means not simplifying, but broadening, deepening, and at the same time, complicating the task of composing Soviet romances... So I can in no way agree to such a lowered rate, and I request you review this unfair decision.⁸⁶

He further noted GUMU ought especially to value and properly compensate his work because so few composers were willing to take on the task of setting Soviet texts, rather than classical ones. Zhivotov signed off with a final legalistic parting shot that the "'wholesale' principle" that had been employed was not only unscrupulous, but also had no basis in Order no. 490. Trusting Anisimov would help him fix this grievous error, he offered to sign a new contract if necessary.

Alas, this tour-de-force was to no avail. Certainly, Zhivotov pricked the conscience of Anisimov, who asked Gotgel'f to find out what could be done. But here Zhivotov's impassioned legal logic ran up against the brick wall of GUMU's bureaucracy. As Gotgel'f reported, the bookkeeper had already recorded Zhivotov's original contract, with 7,000R written in as his honorarium, and it could not be altered without special permission from Lebedev, which there was not a fit basis to request. Apparently, as there was no technical difference between a song cycle and a series of romances on a unified theme, 7,000R was not an incorrect fee, only an unfair one. Anisimov helplessly replied to Zhivotov that the contract could not be amended. "I'm very sorry GUMU did not inform you of the alteration to the honorarium in a timely manner," he added lamely.⁸⁷ By relying on the language of legality and even citing the order specifying pay rates for various types of compositions, Zhivotov made a strong case for himself, and his appeal to professionalism and fairness earned him Anisimov's attention and support. Unfortunately, in

⁸⁶ RGALI, f.962, op.5, d.1124, l.106.

⁸⁷ RGALI, f.962, op.5, d.1124, ll.104-105.

this case, even such assistance was not sufficient. Like Gurov, he found GUMU was at its most unmovable where money was concerned. Given Anisimov's sympathy, had he forged this partnership sooner, he might have been able to negotiate up to some extent. But because he signed the contract, waited too long to clarify it, and most importantly had already completed the work, he was left with no alternative but to accept what GUMU had decided to pay him.

For composers less well versed in the legal ins and outs of their relationship with GUMU, another favorite tactic was to adopt a long-suffering tone and apply a heavy layer of guilt in their letters. Tashkent-based organist and composer Arsenii Kotliarevskii took this approach when seeking GUMU's permission and backing for a tour of lecture-concerts of his new organ compositions, traveling to Moscow, Leningrad, Tbilisi, Riga, and even Prague. Kotliarevskii began his letter to Anisimov in high style, sermonizing, "Each of us gives all his strength to our common affair of developing Soviet music, while being an ardent patriot of his own, perhaps narrow, area. So too, I, whatever I have done or undertaken, always remain a patriot of the organ... freeing it from religious tradition and making it a participant in our Soviet musical life." In service of this noble mission, he had selflessly abandoned Leningrad for Tashkent, where his talents were more needed. He built the city's first organ "literally with my own hands" and created a new Soviet Uzbek organ tradition from whole cloth, composing "organ works sprouting from this soil, for the first time connecting the organ with Eastern intonations." Such significant service to Soviet music, Kotliarevskii asserted, "gives me the right to ask you for help," in the form of arranging the tour for himself and his assistant, Vera Bakeeva. Though it was no small undertaking, he continued with more than a hint of martyrdom, "I think our long

years of service to organ culture, our concert experience ... and achievements in the organ field give us no less right to concertize than those organists who try to monopolize this area.”⁸⁸

In the midst of all this verbiage, Kotliarevskii’s guilt-driven message to Anisimov came through loud and clear: he had given a lifetime of service to Soviet organ music, leaving the comforts of the cultural capital behind and venturing to a strange and distant realm for the sole purpose of sowing the seeds of Soviet organ culture in the vast wastelands of Central Asia. Though his area of endeavor was slender and often overlooked, Kotliarevskii had devoted all his energy to it, asking no thanks from anyone, and as a result of his tireless labors, the virgin soil had finally blossom with Uzbek-inflected Soviet organ music. Surely, after all his unsung heroism, the least Anisimov could do was support his tour. In fact, Anisimov was swept up in this emotional onslaught. He promised GUMU would audition Kotliarevskii’s compositions in October, when Bakeeva would be in Moscow, and resolve the question then.

Kotliarevskii was a skilled practitioner of the guilt technique, but this method reached its apotheosis in the hands of the indefatigable Sofia Chicherina. In the midst of pushing for GUMU’s performance recommendation for her *Prazdnichnaia uvertiura (Celebratory Overture)*, she embarked on a second project: enlisting its support for her new symphony, hopefully with Gotgel’f aid. Already in February 1949, in her letter to Gotgel’f about the overture, Chicherina began laying the guilt-ridden groundwork. After declaring she was “exhausted from need,” she assured Gotgel’f, who was already aware of the symphonic project, that she was “developing the cultivation of the symphony, slowly but well. Before, there was no support at all. Now there is moral support, though unfortunately to me that’s little. But I intend to do it as it should be

⁸⁸ RGALI, f.962, op.5, d.1123, ll.40-41.

done.”⁸⁹ This well-placed barb, with its undertones of martyrdom and perseverance, served to ensure Chicherina’s case stood out in Gotgel’s mind as one in which the composer had already patiently put up with a great deal of GUMU’s disorganization and therefore deserved special consideration going forward. In early May, GUMU auditioned sketches for the first movement and signed a contract with Chicherina. In her final letter about the overture later that month, she assured Lebedev she was already seriously setting to work on the symphony. A month later, Kholodilin informed her the contract had been confirmed and her advance would be sent at the beginning of August.⁹⁰

This was all fairly straightforward, but as usual with GUMU’s operations, irregularities soon crept in. In June, after receiving Kholodilin’s confirmation, Chicherina wrote a special letter to Lebedev seeking early disbursal of her advance. She recounted in wounded tones that she had contracted with GUMU for the symphony, but “as an unknown composer, I presented a guarantee note. So far, I have not been sent material support, in consequence of which it’s already very hard for me to work.”⁹¹ In other words, not only had she been humiliated by GUMU’s distrust, she had also been left in dire financial straits, punished doubly for not having achieved the fame of some contemporaries. Nevertheless, she assured him, she had soldiered on, completing the first movement and beginning the second. Far from complaining, she accepted her fate and asked only that Lebedev instruct GUMU to settle accounts with her. Strictly speaking, Chicherina was not within her rights to request her advance before the date Kholodilin had promised it. However, as a composer who dealt regularly with GUMU, she was only too

⁸⁹ RGALI, f.962, op.5, d.1123, l.253.

⁹⁰ Ibid., ll.116, 20.

⁹¹ Ibid., l.10.

aware of the unevenness of its procedures. Being short of cash and seeing an opportunity to use the guilt tactic to secure early release of much-needed funds, she understandably gave it a try.

Unfortunately, this time she was unsuccessful, though not for lack of continued effort. Although her June lament generated no result, Chicherina stayed on top of GUMU, telegraphing Anisimov in mid-July to ask when the advance would be sent and the same day composing another guilt-driven missive to Lebedev. Feeling GUMU had abandoned her, she lamented once again, “Circumstances force me to turn to you directly about work on my symphony.” After Kholodilin’s confirmation of her contract, she had assumed she would be able to concentrate entirely on it, supported by the advance, and had not sought other work. However, the advance had not come, which “left me in an extremely difficult condition. I cannot work and provide for my creative endeavors.” She reminded Lebedev she had quickly composed, orchestrated, and submitted her overture, proof she was a diligent and responsible worker for the cause of Soviet music. In closing, Chicherina bemoaned her cruel fate, musing, “Creatively, I developed late, and it seems I’m continuing to improve myself. But without moral and material support I cannot continue work. I ask you about this because what I need now is maximal consolidation of my work time, not dissipation of my strength.”⁹² This impassioned avowal of her martyrdom again did not suffice to motivate early dispersal of her fee, but nevertheless, Chicherina clearly touched a chord. Lebedev sent her note down the line to Kholodilin, who took the unusual step of sending her a second missive assuring her the contract was affirmed and the advance would be sent by August 8. In the end, it was not actually dispatched until the 27th, but for GUMU that was remarkably close to on time, for which Chicherina’s guilt-inducing letters deserve credit.⁹³

⁹² RGALI, f.962, op.5, d.1123, l.11; RGALI, f.962, op.5, d.1124, ll.154-155.

⁹³ RGALI, f.962, op.5, d.1123, l.8; RGALI, f.962, op.5, d.1124, l.154.

After this point, Chicherina's relationship with GUMU took a surprising turn. Over the course of October and November, she exchanged a series of letters with Gotgel'f, updating her on her progress. No longer playing the overburdened soul, Chicherina now excitedly chatted to her pen pal about the finer points of the symphony's development, expert advice she had received, and changes in her creative plan, sketching out melodic lines to illustrate her ideas and even asking for return of the piano score for the first movement, as she had completely rethought it.⁹⁴ In this way, Chicherina gradually shifted from supplicant to sister in crime, a fellow striver for the advancement of Soviet music, solidifying her partnership with Gotgel'f. As much as one can imagine Gotgel'f rolling her eyes at the receipt of each new letter – in her final missive, Chicherina promised not to write any more until she finished the symphony – she likely also became accustomed to receiving them and developed a fondness for their author's enthusiasm. Thus, first mobilizing a wounded, guilt-inducing tone in an effort to win GUMU's full support for her endeavor, then transitioning to eagerness and high spirits, Chicherina maintained a strong emotional appeal that was highly effective in keeping Gotgel'f, Kholodilin, and even Lebedev interested in her work and keen to help her complete it successfully.

Though such methods were effective, in rare cases, a composer decided she was unwilling to play this game and simply went over GUMU's head, a risky but potent move. It proved its worth to Boris Troianovskii, who became frustrated with GUMU in spring 1949 after a plan for Muzgiz to publish some of his balalaika compositions on GUMU's recommendation fell through. Troianovskii protested to GUMU, but receiving no answer, decided not to persist, perhaps because, as his colleagues' experiences demonstrate, the agency was likely to simply reply it was up to Muzgiz what it published. Instead, he took his complaint all the way up to

⁹⁴ RGALI, f.962, op.5, d.1124, ll.66, 7, 5, 1.

Kliment Voroshilov at the Council of Ministers, a well-known patron of musicians and artists. Voroshilov took swift action, ordering KDI to report which of Troianovskii's compositions were slated for publication in the coming year and the state of work on this project. A startled Lebedev quickly replied Muzgiz would publish "a number [*riad*]" of them, but the list was still being finalized, in consultation with a "major specialist in the area of balalaika literature." For good measure he sent a copy of his letter to GUMU, instructing Kholodilin to keep tabs on the affair.⁹⁵

Lebedev's reply to Voroshilov was suspiciously vague, and GUMU's next move revealed it was not at all certain of Muzgiz's plan. Having been charged with following up, Kholodilin wrote the head editor of Muzgiz's Leningrad branch to inquire which of Troianovskii's works had been published the previous fiscal year and which were scheduled for the coming one. At the same time, he wrote a surprisingly solicitous note to Troianovskii himself, assuring him GUMU intended to publish, again, "a number [*riad*]" of his compositions in 1949-1950. In a truly exceptional turning of the tables, he asked Troianovskii himself to inform GUMU "which specific works you consider necessary to publish, which of them first, and send GUMU these works in a single copy each."⁹⁶ This suddenly princely treatment was surely gratifying for the composer, accustomed like his colleagues to having to strategize his way around GUMU's disorganization. Unfortunately, Muzgiz's editor, apparently unaware of Voroshilov's involvement, was less sanguine about the whole business. He replied to Kholodilin that nothing of Troianovskii's had been published, nor would it be, though this was certainly not Muzgiz's fault. One piece had been slated for 1949, but "the material was of insignificant artistic value and

⁹⁵ RGALI, f.962, op.5, d.1124, ll.121-122. This file does not contain Troianovskii's letters to GUMU and Voroshilov or Voroshilov's letter to KDI. I have extrapolated the details from Lebedev's reply to Voroshilov and several notations made on it by various actors. On Voroshilov's patronage to artists, see Feliks Chuev. *Sto sorok besed s Molotovym: Iz dnevnika F. Chueva*. Moscow: Terra, 1991.

⁹⁶ RGALI, f.962, op.5, d.1124, ll.120a, 120.

required revision, in addition to clarification of the extent to which Troianovskii was coauthor.” Muzgiz had informed the composer, but he had submitted nothing further, so neither this piece nor any other had been included in the plan for 1950. This put Kholodilin in a difficult spot, to say the least, as Troianovskii and more importantly Voroshilov, had been assured the publication would take place. He lamely passed on the information from Muzgiz to the composer, in hopes the latter would either finally submit his revisions or withdraw his complaint.⁹⁷

Here the trail of Troianovskii’s story runs cold. But whether or not he managed to come to terms with Muzgiz and shepherd his works through to publication, he certainly proved the effectiveness of going over GUMU’s head in a procedural dispute. Without Voroshilov’s intervention, there is little chance Troianovskii would suddenly have begun to receive such solicitous treatment from Kholodilin, nor would he likely have been able to enlist GUMU’s support in his conflict with Muzgiz. Indeed, by taking his complaint to a superior authority and making it clear he had friends in high places, he improbably catapulted himself onto the A-list, toward whose members GUMU’s censors behaved generally far more courteously. Had the breakdown with Muzgiz been the publisher’s fault rather than his own, no doubt Troianovskii would have seen a substantial list of his compositions published within the year. But whether or not this was the outcome, his case clearly demonstrates the value to composers of obtaining the backing of higher authorities when receiving support from GUMU’s censors seemed unlikely.

Conclusion

As KDI’s representative in the world of music, GUMU was placed in charge of a vast array of administrative and censoring duties, far more than it could reasonably be expected to keep track of. From working with its sister agency Glavrepertkom, to supervising its subsidiary agencies, like the music divisions of the republican UDI’s, the Composers’ Union, and the Soviet

⁹⁷ RGALI, f.962, op.5, d.1124, ll.119, 118.

Union's many philharmonics and quasi-independent performance ensembles, to managing its interactions with other branches of the labyrinthine Soviet state apparatus, like Muzgiz and VRK, GUMU was substantially overburdened even within its own particular area of endeavor, let alone in its additional responsibilities for reporting up to the Central Committee and Council of Ministers, liaising laterally with its correlative Party agency Agitprop, and handling occasional requests from agencies further afield like VOKS. This situation was certainly not helped by the lack of procedural clarity in its operations and the various overlaps in competencies between GUMU and the other agencies with which it interacted, particularly the Composer's Union and VRK. The similarity of their interests ensured GUMU and these two organizations would frequently invade each other's space. And while the relatively clear hierarchical relationship between GUMU and the Union, on one hand, enabled them to work together smoothly most of the time, the bureaucratic separation and lack of established procedural norms governing interactions between GUMU and VRK, on the other, ensured frequent conflict between them. In short, GUMU simply had too many balls in the air at any given time. That it dropped one or more on a regular basis should hardly come as a surprise.

But it was not GUMU itself that suffered the consequences of its procedural disorganization on a day-to-day basis. That lot fell to Soviet composers, for whom all roads led through GUMU, if they hoped to build successful careers and make a living from their music. Whether dealing with formulating contracts and disbursing payments, canceling contracts or extending submission deadlines, or obtaining recommendations for performance and publication, composers could never quite anticipate what new foul-up their next interaction with GUMU would bring. They only knew to expect there would be one, a safe assumption based on their own and their colleagues' experiences. Because GUMU was so unreliable, or so reliably

haphazard, in its interactions with them, composers learned to be proactive, to develop a range of strategies for managing their affairs with GUMU, creating patchwork partnerships with its censors and enlisting their support in shepherding their pieces through to purchase, performance, and perhaps even publication. Some fostered a healthy distrust of the agency and politely but insistently followed up on its every move. Others employed trickery, stalling for time until they had squared away their end of the business, while keeping GUMU on the hook for their new works. Still others adopted a professional tone and mobilized the language of rights, legality, and fairness, impelling GUMU's censors to follow their own rules and procedures, insofar as they existed, whether with icy calm or righteous indignation. Yet another group relied on inflections of guilt and martyrdom, creating a sense of obligation in GUMU's censors to help those who had worked tirelessly (and thanklessly!) for Soviet music. And when all else failed, a few even dared go over GUMU's head, turning to higher authorities to compel GUMU's censors to take action.

In one sense, this can be seen as a moment of triumph and agency for Soviet composers in their often complex and frustrating interactions with state and Party censors. By assertively intervening in GUMU's disorganized operations, composers took charge of their fate, building bridges with GUMU's censors, advocating for what they wanted, and quite often achieving their desired results. By hook or by crook, they succeeded in shepherding their pieces onto the stage and into the repertoire and moved their careers one more step forward. But in another sense, the fact Soviet composers were so good at this task and had such a well-developed range of techniques for carrying it out is in itself a significant problem. Composers' skill at building extra-procedural relationships with GUMU's censors is a clear indication that such backdoor maneuvers had become the norm in their interactions with the agency. Because GUMU operated so haphazardly, composers learned to intervene proactively to induce it to do its job properly

and, when possible, act in their favor. But this very proactivity also enabled GUMU to continue to function poorly, as censors, in turn, learned they could let their duties slide until composers began to apply pressure. As this symbiotic cycle spun itself out, there ceased to be any “normal” interaction between composers and GUMU. There was no standard procedure; there was only manipulation and a game to play. That composers played it well is a credit to their resourcefulness, but it does not obviate the problem of their having to play it in the first place.

Ultimately, though composers were often able to navigate GUMU’s internal chaos successfully, being forced to do so did less to promote their agency than to erode it. The fact they had to operate extra-procedurally to get their pieces approved, performed, and published meant they had to abandon the behavior of citizens in a fully functional modern bureaucratic state. Indeed, rather than embodying the empowered citizenship Soviet authority had promised them, Soviet composers in their interactions with GUMU were reduced to permanent supplicants, ever dependent on the inconstant decisions of the censors who read their letters. As Sheila Fitzpatrick explains, citizens treat their interlocutors as equals and freely criticize procedural failings, while supplicants adopt a deferential tone and frame their requests in terms of favors to be granted.⁹⁸ As Soviet composers knew well, in their interactions with GUMU criticism was counter-productive, serving only to harm their cause, while deference could be the key to success. Even those who wrote in terms of rights, legality, and fairness maintained a carefully deferential tone, not demanding procedures be followed but merely implying their assumption they would be, in hopes of spurring censors to partner with them and meet that expectation. Such tactics often worked brilliantly, but they also left open the possibility a censor might decline a composer’s request, leaving her no recourse because she was, after all, only asking a favor. No matter how

⁹⁸ Sheila Fitzpatrick, “Supplicants and Citizens: Public Letter-Writing in Soviet Russia in the 1930s,” *Slavic Review* 55:1 (Spring 1996), 78-105.

skillfully composers maneuvered in their relationships with GUMU's censors, in doing so they never quite became true partners, always remaining in some sense supplicants, subject to the changeable impulses of their would-be patrons. While this might achieve the desired results, it also robbed them of the opportunity to become full musical citizens of the Soviet state.

PART II

Chapter 4:
(Over)producing the Work: The Case of *Ot vsego serdtsa*

Introduction

In October 1949, when Ukrainian composer Evgenii Zhukovskii brought his newly written opera *Ot vsego serdtsa* (*With All My Heart*) to Moscow to audition it before the Composers' Union's Opera Section, receive its thorough evaluation, and hopefully secure its recommendation for the opera to be produced and performed at one of the country's Union-level theaters, he was overwhelmed by his colleagues' positive response. "I'm very grateful for the critical notes given here," he averred. "I never expected my humble work to be so valued in Moscow."¹ In fact, Zhukovskii appeared to have hit the magic number: he was the right composer, he had written the right opera, and he had brought it to Moscow at exactly the right time. The central leadership of the Soviet musical community was uniquely primed to embrace *Ot vsego serdtsa* and promote its rise, and this was exactly what they did. Yet, subsequent events would reveal that Zhukovskii's sense of gratitude and good fortune was premature. As this chapter will demonstrate, the Opera Section's immediate praise for *Ot vsego serdtsa*, though heartfelt, was merely a prelude to a far more complex story.

An ambitious, young, rising star from the provinces, Zhukovskii was just the type of composer Union leaders and their colleagues at the Bolshoi Theater and the Committee on Arts Affairs (KDI) were looking to promote. Born in 1913 and having completed his conservatory studies only on the eve of WWII, Zhukovskii was too young to have taken a side during the musical disputes of the 1920s and the Cultural Revolution.² Indeed, with the exception of his

¹ RGALI, f.2077 (Soiuz sovetskikh kompozitorov), op.1, d.359, ll.15-16.

² The following biographical information is taken from: Virko Baley, "Zhukovsky, Herman Leont'yovich," in *Grove Music Online*: <http://www.oxfordmusiconline.com.proxy.uchicago.edu/subscriber/article/grove/music/30943> and L.S. Kaufman, "Zhukovskii, G.L." in *Muzykal'naia entsiklopediia*. Moscow: Sovetskaia

one-act opera *Marina*, written in his student days, he had begun his professional career only in the postwar period. Furthermore, the few works he had composed by the time of his journey to Moscow, including his first full-length opera, *Chest' (Honor)*, produced by the Kiev Opera and Ballet Theater in 1947, had reached audiences almost exclusively in Ukraine. There was thus little chance he had registered on the Central Committee's radar, which made him a less likely candidate than his more centrally-located colleagues to be the target of a future musical scandal.

In addition, though few in number, Zhukovskii's handful of compositions were quite promising. The highest-rated among them, his 1949 cantata *Slav'sia, otchizna moia! (Hail to You, My Fatherland!)*, which glorified Ukrainian partisans fighting to free Soviet territory from German occupation during the war, had made it onto the program of the Third Plenum of the Composers' Union's governing board, which was to take place shortly after *Ot vsego serdtsa's* first audition at the Opera Section. Indeed, within a few months, it would even be awarded a Stalin Prize, second class. In a feature article following up on this honor in *Sovetskaia muzyka*, musicologist Vladimir Protopopov praised *Slav'sia, otchizna moia!* as being "imbued with stirring lyricism and warmth of feeling, closely connected with the cantata's deeply patriotic idea and its creation of the image of the *narod* as... a living participant in events." Remarking on its highly singable melodies and excellent settings of Ukrainian folksongs, which, when added to its clear ideological merits, handily rounded out the work's Socialist Realist credentials, Protopopov pronounced the cantata "one of the best works in this genre in Soviet music in recent years."³ On

entsiklopediia/Sovetskii kompozitor, 1973-1982:

http://dic.academic.ru/dic.nsf/enc_music/2950/%D0%96%D1%83%D0%BA%D0%BE%D0%B2%D1%81%D0%BA%D0%B8%D0%B9 (Both sources accessed July 25, 2015), as well as A. Filippenko "Radostnaia udacha (Opera E. Zhukovskogo *Ot vsego serdtsa*)", *Sovetskaia muzyka* 17: 12 (Dec 1949), 66-68.

³ Vl. Protopopov, "Patrioticheskaia cantata ("Slav'sia otchizna moia!" E. Zhukovskogo)," *Sovetskaia muzyka* 18: 4 (Apr 1950), 19.

the strength of this good beginning and the promising initial impression made by *Ot vsego serdtsa*, the Opera Section recommended the opera, in Zhukovskii's first draft, for performance at the plenum, as well. Reporting on the event for *Pravda*, newly-installed Composers' Union head Tikhon Khrennikov mentioned it by name as a "talented work" rated highly by all in attendance.⁴ Thus, as a composer with great potential and a budding reputation, but who was still an outsider to the Moscow scene, Zhukovskii was extremely attractive to the central Soviet musical community.

What's more, even on first listening, it was clear to the Opera Section's members that *Ot vsego serdtsa* was just the sort of thing they were looking for. In its thematic and musical content, it satisfied each of the key criteria of musical Socialist Realism. Its storyline presented clear *sovremennost'* in telling the tale of ordinary Soviet people engaged in postwar reconstruction, an experience fresh in every citizen's memory. It also displayed evident *partiinnost'* and *ideinnost'* in valorizing its characters' dedication to rebuilding and even improving their *kolkhoz*, led by Party activists and a healthy Soviet ideological worldview. And last but not least, by making substantial use of Ukrainian folksongs, just as *Slav'sia otchizna moia!* had done, the opera demonstrated a strong component of *narodnost'*. As an added benefit, *Ot vsego serdtsa* was based on a successful Socialist Realist novel of the same title, whose author, Elizar Mal'tsev, supported the project to such an extent that he attended the Opera Section's initial audition of the work at Zhukovskii's side. And to top things off, the opera's music was highly engaging and singable, managing to stay in safely tonal territory without slipping into oversimplification or stale archaism. In other words, it had the sound of a moderately sophisticated piece of music theater, the musical equivalent of the classic middlebrow Socialist Realist novel.

⁴ Tikhon Khrennikov, "Puti razvitiia sovetskoi muzyki," *Pravda* (6 Jan 1950), 3.

With such qualities at the ready, *Ot vsego serdtsa* seemed to be everything the Soviet musical community could hope for in its next big undertaking.

Finally, and perhaps most importantly, *Ot vsego serdtsa* came along exactly when the musical community needed it most, in the wake of the Central Committee's final *zhdanovshchina* resolution, which on February 10, 1948 had condemned the Bolshoi's first new, postwar operatic production, Vano Muradeli's *Velikaia druzhba*.⁵ This resolution brought a particular complex of problems to the fore. In no genre had the Soviet musical community tried harder to achieve official approval than in opera, as evidenced by the massive exertions associated with the Soviet Opera Project of the 1930s.⁶ Yet, the desired result remained frustratingly elusive, and worse, both of the major Stalin-era musical scandals in which the Party was involved had operas at their center. Though Leonid Maksimenkov has convincingly argued that the author of the unsigned *Pravda* editorial denouncing Shostakovich's *Lady Macbeth* in 1936 was likely KDI head Platon Kerzhentsev, rather than Stalin, as previously assumed, Kerzhentsev apparently believed he was acting in accordance with Stalin's wishes, after the latter stormed out of the opera mid-performance.⁷ And in the case of *Velikaia druzhba*, the Central Committee had authored and promulgated the relevant denunciation itself. Evidently, despite the musical community's sustained efforts, opera was the genre in which it had managed to please the Party the least. Even more frustratingly, as Chapter 1 detailed, the Soviet musical community

⁵ "Postanovlenie Politbiuro TsK VKP(b) 'Ob opere *Velikaia druzhba* V. Muradeli' ot 10 fevralia 1948g.," in Andrei Artizov and Oleg Naumov, eds. *Vlast' i khudozhestvennaia intelligentsiia: Dokumenty TsK RKP(b)-VChK-OGPU-NKVD o kul'turnoi politike, 1917-1953gg* (Moscow: Demokratiia, 1999), 630-634.

⁶ On the Soviet Opera Project, see Introduction, as well as Marina Frolova-Walker, "The Soviet Opera Project: Ivan Dzerzhinsky vs. *Ivan Susanin*," *Cambridge Opera Journal* 18:2 (July 2006), 181-216 and Philip Ross Bullock, "Staging Stalinism: The Search for Soviet Opera in the 1930s," *Cambridge Opera Journal* 18:1 (Jan 2006), 83-108.

⁷ Leonid Maksimenkov. *Sumbur vmesto muzyki: Stalinskaia kul'turnaia revoliutsiia, 1936-1938gg.* (Moscow: Iuridicheskaiia kniga, 1997), 88-112.

had actively tried to prevent a *zhdanovshchina* resolution on music by convening the All-Union Meeting on Opera and Ballet Questions in December 1946, an attempt that had also clearly failed. Still, with two major scandals on their scorecard and no major successes to balance them, giving up on the genre was not an option. The only way forward was to find a new, promising Soviet opera on a contemporary theme and try again. With the Composers' Union and Bolshoi at their wits' end, *Ot vsego serdtsa* appeared on the scene just in time.

After determining at the close of the 1946 All-Union Meeting that they as a professional group had reached a deeper understanding of Socialist Realism, the members of the Soviet musical community had abandoned the laborious methods of the Soviet Opera Project in their approach to new works. Instead, they resolved to move forward much more quickly, at least with operas they all agreed had great Socialist Realist potential. *Velikaia druzhba* had been the first fruit of this new approach.⁸ In the wake of its denunciation, the musical community might have been expected to retreat from their newfound boldness. But, to the contrary, they rallied around it. As the profile and handling of *Ot vsego serdtsa* reveal, the lesson they took from the 1948 scandal was not that their conclusions after the 1946 All-Union Meeting were mistaken, but, more simply, that with *Velikaia druzhba* they had chosen the wrong opera to promote.

The Central Committee resolution denounced *Velikaia druzhba* for having an ideologically faulty plot, for failing to make use of authentic folksongs, and for poor artistic quality. *Ot vsego serdtsa*, on the other hand, had many of the same Socialist Realist qualities but was, the musical community assured itself, superior to its predecessor in all of these regards. Like *Velikaia druzhba*, *Ot vsego serdtsa* was an early-career work by a young, fresh-faced

⁸ Muradeli began writing the opera as early as 1940, and the Bolshoi almost certainly began work on its production prior to the 1946 All-Union Meeting. My argument here is that the theater increased the pace of its work in the wake of this meeting.

composer from the provinces. Likewise, it also addressed contemporary a theme – even more contemporary, being set in the early postwar period, rather than the Civil War. Further, it similarly conveyed Soviet ideology, though in a more accurate rendering. And finally, it also relied heavily on folk music, though using actual folksongs, rather than Muradeli’s folklike original melodies, which the resolution had made clear were an inadequate substitute for the real thing. Thus, in its Socialist Realist credentials, *Ot vsego serdtsa* hit all the same marks as *Velikaia druzhba* while doing it one better.

What’s more, the Soviet musical community handled *Ot vsego serdtsa*’s production in much the same way, confidently touting its suitability and promoting it rapidly through the production process. Clearly, for the Soviet musical community, there was no going back to the time-consuming processes of the prewar Soviet Opera Project. With *Ot vsego serdtsa*, an opera that fulfilled all the same criteria as its predecessor, and did so, they hoped, at a higher level, they resolved to hew to their new, faster approach. Indeed, the more quickly *Ot vsego serdtsa* reached the stage, the better. As the unimpeachable Socialist Realist opera the musical community believed it to be, it would serve simultaneously as a triumphant response to the Central Committee resolution and as proof positive of the correctness of the new, post-Soviet Opera Project approach to production.

Yet, this hoped-for triumph did not come to pass, nor did it have any real chance of doing so. The Soviet musical community needed desperately for *Ot vsego serdtsa* to achieve official approval, and thereby prove not only that they had learned the lessons of the *zhdanovshchina* and mended their substandard creative ways, but that, going forward, the Party could trust them to create the impeccable Socialist Realist operas it demanded. Unfortunately, as this chapter will demonstrate, as much as the musical community needed *Ot vsego serdtsa* to succeed, the Central

Committee needed it to fail, in order to preserve the level of control over Soviet composers and theater workers it had established through the mechanism of the *zhdanovshchina*. As I will argue in this chapter, *Ot vsego serdtsa* got caught in the traces of these competing political agendas, and its ultimate downfall had little to do with its actual thematic and musical content.

The Problem of Soviet Opera

Long before *Ot vsego serdtsa* appeared on the scene, opera had become a vexing problem for the Soviet musical community. In the first months after the Revolution, with funds stretched to the limit and starvation rampant in the streets of Moscow, Lenin had considered closing down the Bolshoi, as an unjustifiable drain on resources. Commissar of Enlightenment Anatolii Lunacharskii was able to convince him otherwise, but as the Civil War raged, world-renowned artists like Fedor Chaliapin often found themselves performing in unheated theaters and accepting sacks of flour as payment. The conditions of the major opera theaters improved during NEP, but through the 1920s, militant Proletarian musical activists railed against opera as an outdated, elitist genre, and during the Cultural Revolution, the RAPMisty harassed opera composers to such an extent that the production of new works slowed to a trickle.⁹

And yet, opera always had its Soviet advocates, as well. Most prominently, the influential composer and aesthetic theorist Boris Asaf'ev began as early as 1918 to defend opera in print as a “democratic” genre, pushing past the mature, lavish court-theater form it had taken on by the late 19th century to uncover its roots as a popular entertainment in Renaissance Italy.¹⁰ This argument proved lasting; in subsequent years, it was frequently taken up by those who wished to secure a place for opera in Soviet culture. *Sovetskaia muzyka* regularly featured articles on opera

⁹ Boris Schwarz. *Music and Musical Life in Soviet Russia, 1917-1981* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1983), 11-37; Amy Nelson. *Music for the Revolution: Musicians and Power in Early Soviet Russia* (University Park: Penn State University Press, 2004), passim.

¹⁰ Schwarz, 27.

as a realistic genre with genuine mass appeal and great Socialist Realist potential.¹¹ In fact, this conceptualization of opera survived throughout the ups and downs of the Stalin period. As late as 1951, composer and Union Secretary Mikhail Chulaki asserted during the post-premiere evaluation of *Ot vsego serdtsa*, “Opera is the most democratic, most all-people of the monumental musical genres, the most complex genre. What’s more, in opera the traits of our new method, the method of Socialist Realism, are brought out.”¹²

This assertion of opera’s value to the Soviet project was surely convenient, but it also rested on a substantive basis. Unlike more abstract musical genres, opera, as the original *Gesamtkunstwerk*, combined within itself a range of elements that made its message more accessible to audiences, even those lacking musical education. Within a single production, opera merged drama, in the form of its plot; poetry, in the form of its libretto; dance, in the form of the miming and interstitial ballets that remained a staple of Soviet compositions even after Western composers began to drop them; visual art, in the form of its sets and costumes; and, of course, melody and harmony, which enhanced the audience’s emotional experience by driving the storyline forward, commenting on its action, or warning of difficulties ahead. Taken together, these elements gave opera an exceptional ability to fulfill the dictates of Socialist Realism by clearly conveying Soviet ideology and supporting Party leadership of Soviet life, packaging such

¹¹ For example, see: I. Iordanskii, P. Kozlov, V. Taranushchenko, “K problem sovetskoi opery (Opernoe tvorchestva sovetskikh kompozitorov za 15 let),” *Sovetskaia muzyka* 1:1 (Jan 1933), 19-50; M. Pekelis, “O realizme Dargomyzhskogo,” *Sovetskaia muzyka* 2:4 (Mar 1934), 47-61; M. Glukh, Na puti k realizmu: *Groza V Shcherbacheva*,” *Sovetskaia muzyka* 11:3 (Nov 1935), 27-37; A. Shaverdian “Put’ sovetskogo opernogo teatra,” *Sovetskaia muzyka* 3:4 (Mar 1936), 61-69; I. Remizov, “V bor’be za realizm (Iz proshlogo russkoi opernoi stseny),” *Sovetskaia muzyka* 6:5 (Jun 1937), 55-74; Iv. Dzerzhinskii, “Mysli ob opere,” *Sovetskaia muzyka* 10/11:6 (Oct/Nov 1938), 21-22; G. Khubov, “Sovetskaia opera i ee kritiki,” *Sovetskaia muzyka* 1:7 (Jan 1939), 25-33; V. Tsukkerman, “Neskol’ko myslei o sovetskoi opere,” *Sovetskaia muzyka* 12:8 (Dec 1940), 66-78.

¹² RGALI, f.2077, op.1, d.563, l.2.

messages in accessible, catchy, folk-inflected melodies audience members could sing to themselves all the way home from the theater, and at the same time employing complex dramatic and harmonic elements that helped elevate audience members' aesthetic sensibilities. In other words, when done correctly, Socialist Realist opera represented the Soviet musical community's best opportunity to realize their pedagogical mission by using their art to teach the mass audience not only how to appreciate music like *New Soviet Men and Women*, but how to think and act like them as well. And indeed, European operatic history was ripe with examples of opera's political and pedagogical power. Daniel-François Auber's *La Muette de Portici* was thought to have sparked the Belgian revolt of 1830, and Giuseppe Verdi's operas played a major role in the Italian *Risorgimento* a generation later.¹³

In addition to all this, as Sheila Fitzpatrick has shown, the first generation of successful *New Soviet Men and Women*, the *vydvizhentsy* of the First Five-Year Plan period, embraced opera whole-heartedly once they had reached the top of the social and political hierarchy in the mid-1930s.¹⁴ As the newest members of the Soviet technical and managerial elite, these former workers plucked "from the bench" were eager to show they belonged among the intelligentsia and sought out cultural opportunities to show off their newly acquired appreciation for the arts. In opera, they found an ideal medium. Not only was it far more easily interpretable and engaging to their untrained ears than pure symphony or chamber music, but attending the opera itself was a sort of living spectacle, in which they found themselves surrounded by the beautiful people, sumptuous clothing, and glittering chandeliers of the social stratum to which they now belonged.

¹³ Robert Justin Goldstein, *Political Censorship of the arts and the Press in 19th Century Europe* (New York: St. Martins, 1989), 165-166; David A.J. Richards, *Tragic Manhood and Democracy: Verdi's Voice and the Power of Musical Art* (Brighton: Sussex Academic Press, 2004), 69-78.

¹⁴ Sheila Fitzpatrick. *Education and Social Mobility in the Soviet Union, 1921-1934* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1979), 249-254.

Considering the central role opera had taken by the mid-1930s in the political consciousness of the musical community, state and Party leaders, and the new intelligentsia that constituted the bulk of its audience, it is hardly surprising that this genre in particular was the focus of the first major Soviet musical scandal, the *Lady Macbeth* affair of 1936. Nor is it strange that this event triggered such a strong reaction, in the form of the Soviet Opera Project. The denunciations of *Lady Macbeth* on January 28, 1936 and of Shostakovich's concurrently running work in the adjacent genre of ballet, *Svetlyi ruchei* (*The Bright Stream*), in a second unsigned *Pravda* editorial on February 6 came as a major shock to the Soviet musical community.¹⁵ Four years after the end of the Cultural Revolution, with the new Composers' Union building strength and the theorization of musical Socialist Realism already under way, Soviet composers and musicologists were just beginning to feel confident about their place in Soviet culture and the value of their methods for redeveloping opera as a particularly Soviet art form. *Lady Macbeth* had been no small part of their growing self-assurance, playing to sold-out houses in Leningrad and Moscow for a full two years, and still going strong. Another promising factor was Stalin's frequent appearance at the Bolshoi, which the community took as a hopeful sign that the *vozhd'* appreciated their work and would protect it, should any difficulties arise. But Stalin's apparent passion for opera proved disadvantageous when he walked out early on *Lady Macbeth*. As much as the twin denunciations of it and *Svetlyi ruchei* may have had more to do with Shostakovich's outsized reputation than the closely-related genres of the works themselves, the Soviet musical community could not help but take notice that it was opera, the genre in which they held out the most hope for achieving musical Socialist Realism that had come under attack. Thrown into uncertainty, the musical community became exceedingly cautious, even as state and Party

¹⁵ "Sumbur vmesto muzyki: Ob opere *Ledi Makbet Mtsenskogo uezda*," *Pravda* (28 Jan 1936), 3 and "Balet'naia fal'sh'," *Pravda* (6 Feb 1936), 3.

censors adopted a far greater role in policing their operatic efforts. The result was the stagnation of the Soviet Opera Project.

Yet, because they still believed opera represented their best chance to create the ideology-conveying, audience-pleasing music the Party demanded of them, the centralized musical community based around the Bolshoi turned to the genre once again with renewed vigor after their postwar return to Moscow. And when, shortly thereafter, the Central Committee denounced Soviet creative artists' efforts in literature, dramatic theater, and film in the initial *zhdanovshchina* resolutions of 1946, it was because the musical community continued to pin their hopes specifically on opera, as much as because they recognized its narrative and synthetic similarities to the other sources of official ire, that they focused on this genre in particular in convening their preventive all-Union meeting.

In the meeting's wake, they determined to push ahead more boldly than ever in creating Socialist Realist opera. To this end, they settled on Vano Muradeli's *Velikaia druzhba* as the Bolshoi's first postwar production of a new Soviet opera. This choice was not made lightly. A musical tale of revolution, Civil War, and Soviet triumph in the Caucasus written by a promising young composer from the provinces, with its contemporary theme, strong ideological message, and accessible, memorable, folk-based musical language, *Velikaia druzhba*, much like *Ot vsego serdsta* after it, seemed an ideal Socialist Realist opera.

Kiril Tomoff has shown that the KDI leadership expressed some doubts about *Velikaia druzhba* as the opera neared completion, but these were apparently not strong enough for the agency to give the Bolshoi a red light.¹⁶ After a fast-paced – and enormously expensive –

¹⁶ Kiril Tomoff. *Creative Union: The Professional Organization of Soviet Composers, 1939-1953* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press), 130-131; Schwarz, 213-214. The date of Party leaders' attendance is apparently unknown, though it was likely around the time of the premiere. It is also

journey through the production process, *Velikaia družba* premiered at the Bolshoi on November 7, 1947, and several other theaters throughout the country shortly thereafter, in a performance commemorating the 30th anniversary of the October Revolution. In an echo of the *Lady Macbeth* affair, the opera was quite popular with audiences. However, as with its predecessor, although on a much reduced timeframe, Party leaders attended a performance and were greatly displeased, though in this case all remained seated through the final curtain.¹⁷ After this, a series of events followed quickly upon one another that had far reaching consequences for Soviet musical politics. On January 10, 1948, Zhdanov summoned leading lights from the musical community to the Central Committee's offices for a stern, three-day discussion of *Velikaia družba*'s failings; on January 26, the Central Committee fired Khrapchenko and replaced the entire Composers' Union leadership, in the process reorganizing its governing structure; and on February 10, the Central Committee finally released the final resolution of the *zhdanovshchina* in the arts.¹⁸

The resolution on *Velikaia družba* was published on the front page of *Pravda* above the fold the day after its adoption by the Central Committee.¹⁹ Scholars have proposed various theories about the reason for its denunciation. Boris Schwarz and Laurel Fay suggest Stalin was

unclear whether Stalin was personally present, though Dmitrii Shepilov, a high official in Agitprop, relates in his memoir that immediately after the premiere, he ran into Zhdanov at the theater, who told him Stalin was displeased with the opera on musical and historical grounds. See Dmitrii Shepilov. *The Kremlin's Scholar: A Memoir of Soviet Politics under Stalin and Khrushchev*, ed. Stephen V. Bittner (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2007), 97.

¹⁷ For details on this and surrounding events, see Tomoff, 122-151.

¹⁸ On the January 10 meeting, see: *Soveshchanie deiatelei sovetskoi muzyki v TsK VKP(b)*. Moscow: Pravda, 1948 (published transcript of the proceedings) and Tomoff, 123-124; on the firings, see: ““Postanovlenie Politbiuro TsK VKP(b) o smene rukovodstva Komiteta po delam iskusstv pri SM SSSR i Orgkomiteta Soiuzu sovetskikh kompozitorov SSSR’ ot 26 ianvaria 1948g” in Artizov and Naumov, 628-629; On the February 10 resolution, see: ““Postanovlenie Politbiuro TsK VKP(b) Ob opere *Velikaia družba* V. Muradeli’ ot 10 fevralia 1948 g.” in Artizov and Naumov, 630-634.

¹⁹ “Ob opere *Velikaia družba* V. Muradeli, Postanovlenie TsK VKP(b) ot 10 fevralia 1948g.” *Pravda* (11 Feb 1948), 1.

angered by its glorification of Bolshevik leader Sergo Ordzhonikidze, with whom, unbeknownst to the general public, Stalin had feuded, perhaps even driving the latter to suicide. In his memoirs, leading Agitprop official Dmitrii Shepilov recalls Zhdanov telling him that Stalin objected to both the opera's musical style, which he found "cacophonous," and its "distortion of historical truth," complaints that line up directly with the accusations in the Central Committee resolution. Most recently, Tomoff has concluded the denunciation had far more to do with the Bolshoi's profligate spending on the production, and the state's determination to reassert its budgetary authority, than with artistic or ideological issues.²⁰ Whatever its primary motivation, came as a major shock to the musical community, which had expected to be celebrating a major triumph, rather than scrambling fearfully to respond to the Central Committee's wrath.

The resolution "On the Opera *Velikaia druzhba*" denounced the opera as an example of the "formalist, anti-people direction... foreign to the Soviet people and its artistic tastes," which, it claimed, was rampant in Soviet music and must be eradicated. It further singled out six composers for particular condemnation as perpetrators of this fallacy: Shostakovich, Sergei Prokof'ev, Aram Khachaturian, Vissarion Shebalin, Gavriil Popov, and Nikolai Miasokvskii, all venerable members of the older generation.²¹ In language similar to the three previous resolutions, it accused Soviet composers as a professional group of inaccurate portrayal of Soviet life and low artistic quality, which it framed in explicitly ideological terms by upholding realism as the ultimate positive quality in Soviet art, as opposed to the ultimate negative, the already

²⁰ Schwarz, 214; Laurel Fay, "Velikaya druzhba ('The Great Friendship')" in *Grove Music Online*: <http://www.oxfordmusiconline.com.proxy.uchicago.edu/subscriber/article/grove/music/O006500> (Accessed July 25, 2015). Schwarz cites Khrushchev's "Secret Speech" as the source for this information. Shepilov, *The Kremlin's Scholar*, 97; Tomoff, *Creative Union*, 122-151.

²¹ "Postanovlenie Politbiuro TsK VKP(b) Ob opere *Velikaia druzhba* V. Muradeli' ot 10 fevralia 1948 g." in Artizov and Naumov, 631.

politically-charged term “formalism.” Pushing further on the issue of ideology, the resolution sternly reminded composers of their duty to educate Soviet citizens newly introduced to high culture through their music. “Soviet composers have an audience not one composer in the past ever knew,” it admonished. “It would be unforgiveable not to use all [music’s] richest possibilities and set its creative forces on the correct realist path.”²²

Indeed, realism now emerged more strongly than ever as a key factor in the Central Committee’s vision for Soviet music, which it laid out in broad terms near the resolution’s end. Musical realism, the resolution proclaimed, must be based on

an acknowledgement of the immense progressive role of the classical legacy... and its furthest development, linking in music substantial content with artistic perfection of musical form, correctness and realism in music, a deep organic connection with the folk and its musical and singing creativity, high professional mastery and at the same time simplicity and accessibility.²³

It was this very “connection with the folk,” it seemed, that *Velikaia druzhba* so fatally lacked. Muradeli, like his “formalist” colleagues, had spurned the use of authentic folk music, essential to truly Soviet composition, despite his opera’s setting in a national-minority milieu. Such compositions, the resolution complained in another echo of its 1946 counterparts, “strongly give off the spirit of the contemporary modernist bourgeois music of Europe and America.”²⁴ The resolution’s emphasis on realism, artistic quality, ideological purity, or *ideinost’*, and the use of folksong, a key aspect of *narodnost’*, made clear the direction Soviet music must take, though it failed to specify the path by which Soviet composers might arrive at this destination. It closed with a final warning, reminding composers of their social duty as Soviet artists, for those who had not yet grasped the seriousness of its accusations: “The Soviet people await from composers

²² Ibid, 634.

²³ Ibid, 633.

²⁴ Ibid, 631.

high quality, ideologically sound works... The Central Committee calls on Soviet composers... to create full value, high quality works worthy of the Soviet people.”²⁵

In the end, the Bolshoi was let off relatively easily in the resolution on music; condemnation of *Velikaia druzhba* took up a mere fifth of its text, and the theater itself was mentioned only in the first sentence. Nevertheless, there was plenty of cause for worry. While in principle the resolution criticized the state of Soviet music as a whole, its primary thrust was unmistakably directed at opera, as was made clear, for example, by the assertion that “composers have lost the art of writing for the people, the evidence of which is the fact that in recent years not a single Soviet opera has been made that stands on the level of the Russian opera classics.”²⁶ The Bolshoi’s production staff knew it was only a matter of time until repercussions reached them, as well. Sure enough, the following May the Central Committee fired the Bolshoi’s general director, Bondarenko, and its head conductor, Nikolai Golovanov, overhauling the theater’s leadership as it had done earlier to the KDI and the Composers’ Union.²⁷ In the wake of these events, the recipient of the dubious honor of becoming the Bolshoi’s new director, Aleksandr Solodovnikov, resolved to make absolutely sure that the theater’s next undertaking was a completely unimpeachable Socialist Realist opera.

A Star is Born!

Of course, Solodovnikov and his staff were well aware they could not avoid staging a new Soviet opera forever. When, in October 1949, more than twenty months after the resolution on *Velikaia druzhba*, the Composers’ Union’s Opera Section recommended the theater take on *Ot vsego serdtsa*, on the strength of its very favorable first impression, Solodovnikov agreed it

²⁵ Ibid, 634.

²⁶ Ibid, 632.

²⁷ “Postanovlenie Politbiuro TsK VKP(b) o merakh po uluchsheniiu deiatel’nosti Bol’shogo teatra ot 17 maia 1948g.” in Artizov and Naumov, 635.

was time to take a chance again. Zhukovskii's opera, with libretto by A. Bagmet, was brand new and had yet to be staged. And it had excellent credentials: it was set on a *kolkhoz*, in the present day, and dealt with highly relevant issues of reintegrating newly returned soldiers into civilian life, rebuilding after the destruction of war, and collectivizing agriculture in Ukrainian lands recently acquired by the Soviet Union. Furthermore, it was based on Mal'tsev's broadly popular novel, which had won a Stalin Prize, second class, that same year. With a work of such potential in his hands, Solodovnikov resolved that this time the Bolshoi would do things right. The theater embarked on a 14-month production process, which, though speedy by Bolshoi standards, came to include several re-writes, on which the composer, librettist and the theater's production staff worked together closely, as well as numerous meetings with music and theater professionals, arts control officials, and ordinary audience members, to verify the opera was on the path to success and safeguard it against the accusations of formalism that had done in its predecessor.

Ot vsego serdtsa tells the story of Rodion Vasil'tsov, a Ukrainian collective farmer recently returned from heroic fighting in WWII, and his wife, Grunia, who has become a famed *kolkhoz* brigade leader in his absence. The opera opens with a prologue set in the Altai region, where the *kolkhozniki* have been temporarily evacuated. Grunia leads her brigade in a valiant effort to save their crops from a snowstorm and ensure their delivery to the front, which establishes her credentials as an extraordinary worker, good Soviet citizen, and solid member of the collective. Grunia believes Rodion has been killed at the front, but in Act I, with the war over and the *kolkhozniki* returned to Ukraine, where the rest of the opera takes place, he unexpectedly arrives on her doorstep. Their tearful reunion is filled with patriotic sentiments and resolutions to work even harder on the *kolkhoz* now that peace has come. Soon, however, it becomes clear that battlefield heroism has gone to Rodion's head; he labors for his own glory, not that of the

collective. When his vanity begins to interfere with productivity, the *kolkhoz*'s governing board votes to remove him from his leadership role, and Rodion, in anger, breaks with Grunia and his comrades and leaves the farm. He finds work nearby, however, on the construction of a hydroelectric dam. Through labor, Rodion is re-educated in the collectivist values of a good Soviet citizen. Having completed the dam and his personal reconstruction, Rodion returns to the *kolkhoz* in hopes of reconciliation. In the meantime, Grunia has been visited by Natasha Soloveiko, one of Rodion's Red Army comrades, who convinces her that even in the thick of battle, he never forgot Grunia and the *kolkhoz*. Fortified by this information and Rodion's heartfelt tale of reformation, Grunia and the *kolkhozniki* agree to take him back, and the opera ends in triumphant collective song and dance.

Zhukovskii's decision to move the story from the Altai region to Ukraine is significant. Formerly a province of the Russian Empire, Ukraine was divided after WWI, and its western lands, including Zhukovskii's hometown of Radyvyliv, were integrated into the new Polish state. Given that Zhukovskii attended conservatory in Kiev, graduating in piano in 1937 and composition in 1941, which would have been quite difficult for a Polish citizen;²⁸ that he was fluent in Russian; and that the Soviet press items relating to his debut on the all-Union scene, first with his award-winning cantata *Slav'sia, otchizna moia!* in 1949, and shortly after with *Ot vsego serdtsa*, include no tales of a daring eastward escape, Zhukovskii's family was most likely already in Soviet Ukraine by the time the Polish-Soviet border was finalized. Nevertheless, as a native of a region that had spent 20 years under hostile foreign rule, Zhukovskii retained a potentially damaging "alienness." His situation was not helped by the fact that he had remained

²⁸ "Zhukovsky, Herman Leont'yovych" *Grove Music Online*
http://www.oxfordmusiconline.com.proxy.uchicago.edu/subscriber/article/grove/music/30943?q=Zhukovsk*&search=quick&pos=1&_start=1#firsthit. Accessed 27 Oct 2012.

in occupied Kiev during the war, which had generated rumors of collaboration with the enemy.²⁹ Zhukovskii was clearly eager to see his opera staged at the Bolshoi before it had been performed in Ukraine and he was willing to have it translated into Russian to further that goal. These factors, along with his Russification of his own name (upon moving to the all-Union scene, he dropped his given name, German, and instead began calling himself Evgenii) attest to his concern that he be known as a *Soviet* composer, not just a Ukrainian one.

So why move the action to Ukraine at all? Why not envision his characters, as Mal'tsev had, as Altai peasants, rather than temporary evacuees soon to return to their native Ukraine? This decision seems to have been based on two factors, one practical and the other political. On the practical side, Zhukovskii lived and worked in Kiev, and while his recent success at the all-Union level had clearly fueled his ambition to compose for an audience beyond the national sphere, such a career was as yet far from assured. Setting his opera in Ukraine, with a Ukrainian-language libretto, secured him a large audience at home whether or not his work found its place in Moscow. And on the political side, setting *Ot vsego serdtsa* in Ukraine was a shrewd move in positioning it as a solid Socialist Realist opera and a response to the 1948 resolution on music. One of the resolution's major complaints about *Velikaia druzhba* had been that Muradeli "did not use the wealth of folk melodies, songs, and dance motifs in which the peoples of the USSR and of the Northern Caucasus, where the action is set, are so rich."³⁰ Rather than study Siberian folksong, Zhukovskii took advantage of his status as a member of an ethnicity already recognized in Soviet circles as intensely musical. Setting *Ot vsego serdtsa* on a *kolkhoz* in

²⁹ Marina Frolova-Walker, "Stalin's Music Laureates: Myths and Realities," 14. Unpublished conference paper, delivered at "Music and Power: Historical Problems and Perspectives in Russia, Eastern Europe, and Eurasia," Miami University of Ohio, March 2013. Cited with the author's permission.

³⁰ "Postanovlenie Politbiuro TsK VKP(b) ob opera 'Velikaia druzhba' V. Muradeli, ot 10 fevralia 1948g." in Artizov and Naumov, 630.

Ukraine – specifically identified as being “near the Dnepr,” safely inside the interwar Soviet border – allowed him to make use of his thorough knowledge of Ukrainian folk music and position himself as both proud of his national heritage and at the forefront of Soviet composition, making approved use of his roots to further the healthy development of Soviet opera as a whole.

Ot vsego serdtsa first came onto the Moscow musical scene at the behest of Arkadii Filippenko, head of the Ukrainian Union of Composers, who encouraged the ambitious, young, as yet little-known Zhukovskii to bring it to the All-Union level Opera Section for evaluation and, along with Elizar Mal'tsev, author of the novel on which it was based, served as his cheering squad at this initial evaluating meeting. Filippenko, who had a knack for selling a work on exactly the right points, set the tone of the meeting from the outset. “Finally we have an opera on a Soviet theme that shows people’s education,” he enthused, touching on one of the key elements of the resolution on music.³¹ Mal'tsev eagerly concurred and, despite the preliminary nature of the meeting, already began pushing for a performance, predicting confidently, “I think it will receive recognition from our *narod*. We must make every effort so this opera is staged at the Bolshoi as soon as possible.”³²

In fact, Filippenko and Mal'tsev encountered little argument from the members of the Opera Section, whose initial response to the work was extremely positive. For the most part, the Section’s members, along with Nikolai Goriainov, newly appointed head of the KDI’s Main Administration for Musical Institutions (GUMU), praised the new opera in terms that reflected the criticism in the 1948 resolution, revealing that it was still fresh in everyone’s minds. Speaking in a panegyric tone, Goriainov touched immediately on the Central Committee’s demands for ideology, artistry, and realistic portrayal of Soviet life, calling the opera “very rich

³¹ RGALI, f.2077, op.1, d.359, l.7.

³² Ibid., l.11.

in ideological and artistic content... These [characters] are all living people, graced with human qualities. The score has a wealth of rich, good music.” Picking up Mal’tsev’s thread, he averred, “This work must reach the stage as quickly as possible... I want to be an active helper myself.”³³ Linking the opera’s sterling ideological qualities to its educative potential, musicologist Viktor Vinogradov, noted it “not only speaks of our days, but it opens the curtain on the future. It’s steeped in the atmosphere of a communist relationship to daily life, to labor, to society... Not everyone has such a worldview today. That’s the meaning of this opera, that it teaches this to all Soviet people.”³⁴ The Opera Section’s members heartily agreed. Several called *Ot vsego serdtsa* artistically “masterful,” and newly installed Composers’ Union head Tikhon Khrennikov praised its lifelike realism, dubbing it “a great achievement... [which] proves that Soviet composers can write a Soviet opera on Soviet material... It must inspire and further our creativity in opera.”³⁵ Many lauded Zhukovskii’s use of folk songs, another major demand of the 1948 resolution. Filippenko especially pushed this line, and the positive role he felt the opera played in integrating Ukrainian composers into the Soviet mainstream. He noted that staging *Ot vsego serdtsa* in Moscow would be “a service of the Ukrainian Composers’ Union and the whole compositional collective of our Union” and declared the collaboration between a Russian novelist and Ukrainian composer “especially touching.”³⁶ Summing up its many fine qualities, Filippenko declared that *Ot vsego serdtsa* “with its ideological content answers all the demands placed before us by the historic Party resolution on music. We can say with pride that here is born that operatic art we’ve waited for, our Soviet opera, in the style of Socialist Realism.”³⁷

³³ RGALI, f.2077, op.1, d.359, l.1.

³⁴ Ibid, l.5.

³⁵ Ibid, l.14.

³⁶ Ibid, l.9.

³⁷ Ibid, ll.7-8.

Indeed, the members of the Opera Section were so excited about Zhukovskii's opera that, returning to their resolve following the 1946 All-Union Meeting on Opera and Ballet Questions, they determined to rush it directly to the stage, without quibbling over details. "Finally, the opera we've long waited for has appeared," enthused one Serebriakov. "We don't have the right to hide this work while the final version isn't ready... It is our duty to demonstrate it as soon as possible."³⁸ He suggested performing excerpts at the upcoming third plenum of the Composers' Union's governing board. Khrennikov ardently agreed and pushed for its immediate translation into Russian, the necessity of which Zhukovskii did not contest. Adding his voice to those calling for the opera to be taken on by the Bolshoi, Khrennikov asserted that no other opera written on a contemporary theme could compare to *Ot vsego serdtsa*, which "sets before all composers new criteria for evaluation the quality of Soviet composers' work." Referring to the few points of criticism that had surfaced during the meeting, he cautioned, "The author must listen... but he must take only those notes that don't contradict his individual method. Perhaps what some have seen as faults to be changed cannot be altered without disturbing the original canvas."³⁹ After more than three years under the constant tensions of the *zhdanovshchina*, with the added stress of the *Velikaia druzhba* scandal, the members of the Opera Section believed they had finally found an ideal Soviet opera, one that was sure to satisfy the elusive requirements of the Central Committee, and they were determined to see it play its destined role in Soviet music history. Sure of their assessment of its Socialist Realist credentials, and despite only having heard it once, without reference scores and performed by the composer alone at the piano, they enthusiastically recommended it to the Bolshoi for performance. In addition, they set to work promoting *Ot vsego serdtsa* internally in closed professional meetings, and externally in the

³⁸ Ibid, ll.12-13.

³⁹ Ibid, l.14.

musical press, to ensure not only its success but its triumph (and theirs) over the operatic mistakes of the past.

The Bolshoi and Composers' Union held several joint meetings over the course of 1950 to verify *Ot vsego serdtsa*'s progress, with attitudes remaining consistently positive throughout. Finally, on December 30, 1950, the theater gave a closed, full dress rehearsal for members of the Composers' Union and KDI, after which the participants held one last pre-premiere discussion. Once again, Goriainov was quick to praise the opera and push for a speedy premiere. Noting that the Bolshoi had made immense progress since the previous evaluation two weeks prior, he declared, "The quality we saw today is evidence that this production must be quickly finished and released."⁴⁰ Allowing ten days for corrections, he established a premiere date of January 16. While Goriainov did mention a few areas in which he felt the opera required further improvement, his suggestion to open in just two weeks' time reveals how eager he was to see *Ot vsego serdtsa* claim the seat of honor in the Soviet operatic pantheon.

Consistent with Goriainov's ambitions for the opera and the language of previous meetings, speakers once again praised *Ot vsego serdtsa* for its high artistic quality and realistic portrayal of Soviet life. Tikhomirov, director of the All-Union House of Folk Art, who had just visited the concurrent production in Saratov dubbed it "very earthy, very true... In Saratov a mass *kolkhoz* audience attended and it received general approval and interest. I think a mass audience will come in Moscow too, with the same level of interest."⁴¹ Moreover, several participants praised the opera's copious use of folksongs. Pavel Lebedev, the new head of the KDI appointed in the wake of the 1948 scandal, singled out the opera's specifically Ukrainian quality. Calling it the "first Soviet folk opera," he compared it favorably to Dmitrii Kabalevskii's

⁴⁰ RGALI, f.648 (Gosudarstvennyi Akademicheskii Bol'shoi Teatr), op.5, d.165, ll.2-3.

⁴¹ Ibid., ll.4-5.

Sem'ia Tarasa, which had just premiered in Leningrad in its second version. “Kabalevskii’s work has the perfection of a master, but it lacks melody, national color, real Ukrainian music,” he asserted, whereas “Zhukovskii’s music has arias based on real folk material.”⁴² Once again, the meeting’s participants had the 1948 resolution in mind and the production process had apparently only strengthened their conviction that *Ot vsego serdtsa* would serve as a strong response to the demands it placed on Soviet music.

Given that the Bolshoi had now spent over a year becoming intimately acquainted with *Ot vsego serdtsa*, and that the premiere was imminent, the speakers at this meeting were more discerning in their criticism than they had been initially. Several noted aspects of the music, libretto, and staging they found lacking. However, as a group they agreed that the opera was so important that such concerns must not be allowed to delay its opening. As KDI official Ivan Anisimov expressed this general sentiment, “there’s no need to correct these faults in this opera. It has taken on its final character. We must study them in future work... [but] This production must be released. It conforms to the Central Committee’s resolution and is a serious step forward in the development of Soviet opera.”⁴³

Indeed, the consensus on this point was so strong that in his response, the formerly humble Zhukovskii now lashed out confidently at those who had dared suggest further revisions. “In the Union members’ criticism I discern a sort of tendentiousness,” he began. Then, using the 1948 resolution’s language as a weapon against his detractors, he asserted, “The Union still harbors some remaining formalists, and they don’t like the folk character and democratic language of my opera.”⁴⁴ A. Kovalenkov, his Russian-language librettist, seconded his

⁴² Ibid., 1.6.

⁴³ Ibid., ll.5-6.

⁴⁴ Ibid., 1.7.

counterattack, sharply noting the lack of “*partiinnost*” in Khrennikov’s comments in particular, though they had not been especially harsh. This was enough to put Khrennikov in full retreat, despite his leadership position, and cause Bolshoi director Solodovnikov distance himself from Khrennikov in his summation. “The Bolshoi believed in Zhukovskii’s work from the first listening,” he stated pointedly. “And today we have confirmation that we did not work in vain... Our stern demands on ourselves allowed us to achieved today’s recognition of the production.”⁴⁵ Thus, despite tacit acknowledgement that *Ot vsego serdtsa* was not in fact perfect, participants supported Goriainov’s decision to go ahead with the premiere. The opera was strong enough in the areas that mattered most: realism, artistry, *ideinost*’, and *narodnost*’, as laid out in the 1948 resolution, and the musical community was determined to give its answer to that document as quickly as possible, without letting secondary flaws hinder the decisiveness of their response.

It was not only in private discussions that the members of the Composers’ Union praised *Ot vsego serdtsa* in such heady terms. They also touted it as an answer to the 1948 resolution in the press. Arkadii Filippenko started off this public discourse almost as soon as the Bolshoi had agreed to take on the opera, with a laudatory article in the December 1949 issue of *Sovetskaia muzyka* entitled “A Joyous Success.” More an advertisement than a considered evaluation, the article began by noting, “For many years, Soviet composers have been searching for the way to represent our wonderful modernity in opera, that most democratic and beloved of the grand musical genres.”⁴⁶ Fortunately, Zhukovskii had accomplished that task. Filippenko praised his realistic depiction of simple Soviet people and their life on the *kolkhoz*, his flawless expression of Soviet ideology, and his artistic mastery – all areas of central concern in the 1948 resolution. Using the article to introduce Zhukovskii to a broader Soviet audience, Filippenko also touted his

⁴⁵ Ibid., 1.8.

⁴⁶ A. Filippenko, “Radostnaia udacha” *Sovetskaia muzyka* 17:12 (Dec 1949), 66.

creative use of Ukrainian folksong, while carefully positioning him as not just a Ukrainian, but an all-Union promising young composer. He noted the works that had already made Zhukovskii's name in Ukraine and praised his decision to undertake an opera on a postwar *kolkhoz* theme. Filippenko mentioned the composer had made cuts and additions to the novel's material to better suit it to operatic form, including moving the action to Ukraine, but did not undertake to explain Zhukovskii's reasons for this decision, perhaps thinking it obvious a Ukrainian composer would do so.

While this article did not posit *Ot vsego serdtsa* specifically as a response to the 1948 resolution, it strongly implied that message with such statements as, "Correctly developing the classical tradition and positive experience of Soviet opera composers, Zhukovskii interprets opera in all its rich realistic possibilities, without nihilist pseudo-innovation or unnecessary primitivism. This is opera in the fullest sense."⁴⁷ On the heels of this sparkling review, Tikhon Khrennikov also made special mention of the opera in his January 1950 report in *Pravda* on the Third Plenum of the Composer's Union's governing board, at which excerpts had been performed, on the Opera Section's recommendation. "Musical society highly values... [*Ot vsego serdtsa*'s] melodicity and bright folk coloration," he wrote glowingly. "Heartfelt lyricism is characteristic of this talented work, which extols the joy of creative labor in the postwar *kolkhoz* countryside."⁴⁸

Promotion of *Ot vsego serdtsa* in the arts press increased markedly as the premiere approached. In an article on the portrayal of Soviet heroes in new Soviet operas in the December 1950 issue of *Sovetskaia muzyka*, musicologist Tamara Livanova commended Zhukovskii's innovative work in this area, and her colleague T. Tsytovich offered similar praise in a piece on

⁴⁷ Ibid., 68.

⁴⁸ Tikhon Khrennikov, "Puti razvitiia sovetskoi muzyki," *Pravda* (6 Jan 1950), 3.

musical portrayals of Soviet labor the following month.⁴⁹ It seemed the opera satisfied all constituencies in terms of realism and ideology, both major concerns of the 1948 resolution on music. Finally, in the January 1, 1951 issue of the daily arts newspaper *Sovetskoe iskusstvo*, in a piece titled “An Artist’s Joy,” Zhukovskii himself wrote of Soviet composers’ duty to create music about contemporary Soviet heroes. “One can hardly conceive of a more noble and honorable task,” he enthused, “than the creation of works portraying the life of the *narod* and its constructive labor, which with each day brings closer the cherished dream of humanity: communism.”⁵⁰ Further on, he waxed poetic about his visits to *kolkhozy* in the Poltava region (again, safely in the Eastern portion of Ukraine, which had remained part of the Soviet Union between the wars), which had enabled him to fulfill this very task in writing *Ot vsego serdtsa*. After interacting with the *kolkhozniki*, Zhukovskii mused, “I understood a lot, I rethought a lot. It became clear to me what music the *narod* expects from us... I recall... how insistently they demanded living truth in all aspects: music, dramaturgy, plot... I am eternally grateful for their help.” Such lofty sentiments and boots-on-the-ground experience could only heighten the already avid anticipation of this heavily hyped opera. Whether his claims were calculated or not, Zhukovskii proved to be his own best promoter on the eve of *Ot vsego serdtsa*’s opening.

Final Touches

While Zhukovskii apparently felt he had come to understand what the average listener expected, the Bolshoi remained concerned about this point. During the process of creating and revising the production of *Ot vsego serdtsa*, the theater put substantial effort into discover what “the *narod*” wanted from Soviet opera in general, and from *Ot vsego serdtsa* in particular.

⁴⁹ T. Livanova, “Neoplachennyi dolg (Ob obraze sovetskogo geroia v opere,” *Sovetskaia muzyka* 18:12 (Dec 1950), 13-17; T. Tsytovich, “Tema sotsialisticheskogo truda v Sovetskoi muzyke,” *Sovetskaia muzyka* 19:1 (Jan 1951), 19-28.

⁵⁰ Evgenii Zhukovskii, “Schast’e khudozhnika,” *Sovetskoe iskusstvo* (1 Jan 1951), 3.

Meeting this nebulous demand would go a long way toward answering the charge of elitism leveled at the musical community in the Central Committee's 1948 resolution and hewing to its stern reminder that Soviet artists were expected to produce works that both reflected the life of ordinary Soviet citizens and appealed to them. As Khrennikov phrased it in his *Pravda* report on the Third Plenum, with its resolution on music, the Party had charged composers to "create deeply ideological music, imbued with the greatness and heroism of the Stalinist epoch, truthfully representing the thoughts and feelings of Soviet people, the builders of communism, music capable of delivering happiness to millions."⁵¹ Periodically, the Bolshoi performed selections from *Ot vsego serdtsa* for limited audiences, as Zhukovskii had done for the Poltavian *kolkhozniki* in the early stages of his compositional process, and kept track of their reactions, as well as those of the audiences of its sister productions in Saratov and Novosibirsk. However, despite their show of concern, the theater and the Composers' Union ultimately ignored and even contradicted this *vox populi* in the closed-door meetings of music and theater professionals that gave the production its final form.

At the end of the production process, as a final step in verification of audience response before opening *Ot vsego serdtsa* to the broader public, on January 13, 1951 the Bolshoi gave a run-through performance for a non-specialist audience, which was asked to stay afterward to assess what it had seen. The meeting's participants included three factory workers, four collective farmers, an agronomist from the Moscow regional government, and two students and a professor from the Timiriazev Academy, a leading agrarian institute. The Bolshoi invited this group to participate in the discussion in their capacity as leading "lay" people, representative of the audience the theater was presumably trying to reach: high quality Soviet citizens who were

⁵¹ Tikhon Khrennikov, "Puti razvitiia sovetskoi muzyki," *Pravda* (6 Jan 1950), 3.

open to appreciating opera but had no formal musical education. As the discussion unfolded, however, it became clear the participants themselves, many of whom were decorated Stakhanovites, thought they had been invited in their capacity as experts in Soviet labor, agriculture, and local government. Thus, even before the meeting began, a significant disconnect between the music and theater professional and lay participants had already been established.

The format of the meeting was itself somewhat unusual. Solodovnikov invited the lay participants to give their harshest criticism, because “we are counting on your advice to help the Bolshoi... in its search for the direction given us by the Party Resolution,”⁵² then yielded the floor entirely to the invited discussants. Each speaker, after being formally introduced, gave a brief report of his or her impressions of the production, which led the meeting to proceed more as a series of declarations than an active conversation. The only professional interventions after Solodovnikov’s introduction were a contribution by composer Semen Zaslavskii, a short speech by stage director Boris Pokrovskii after all lay participants had spoken, and Solodovnikov’s closing remarks. Unlike the many other meetings devoted to *Ot vsego serdtsa*, neither the composer, the librettists, nor the novelist attended.

On the whole, the agrarian and factory workers enjoyed the production. Several shared *sovkhoznitsa* Zudilova’s sentiment that “We *sovkhov* workers are grateful for this wonderful opera that reflects our current life.”⁵³ However, as labor experts, they immediately noticed several inaccuracies in that reflection. The largest issue, which drew comments from nearly every participant at the meeting, was the Bolshoi’s portrayal of the daily work of the *kolkhoz*. Participants noted the incorrect layout of farm buildings and fields and the misuse of agricultural

⁵² RGALI, f.2077, op.1, d.562, l.3.

⁵³ Ibid., l.20.

vocabulary. The scene that committed the worst offense in this regard was the Bolshoi's staging of the harvest. For example, Timiriazev Academy Professor Maisurian complained,

Your mowers stand in a row. They can't stand that way. They must stand in ranks. Of course, I understand with the conditions onstage one often can't give a full picture, but all the same... You must take into account real life... There's [also] a huge number of 'idlers' in this scene... Of course the choir must participate here, but they must be busy, to avoid this impression that people stand around and don't do anything.⁵⁴

Textile worker Abramov, who had some agricultural experience, agreed, adding, "The mowers aren't just in the wrong position, they stand incorrectly all together. When a mower mows, he leans his body forward and bears down on the blade... This position [onstage] doesn't exist for mowers. They can't stand this way. They look like they're on parade, not working."⁵⁵ Even the smelter Subbotin chimed in, noting that as an urban factory worker, "I don't know how [mowing] works, but if the farm workers say it's wrong, you need to fix it."⁵⁶

Mowing was not the end of the Bolshoi's woes in terms of realistic portrayal of *kolkhoz* life. Other participants noticed that the staging of the meeting of the *kolkhoz*'s governing body, at which Rodion was dismissed from his position as a brigade leader, had little in common with how such meetings proceeded in reality. Os'kin, a Timiriazev Academy student, noted critically, "First of all, the meeting must take place in an apartment, not the yard. Second, it needs to proceed more seriously. If a brigadier is removed from work, they need to put it to a vote... A *kolkhoznik* coming to watch this show will immediately notice the governing meeting is done wrong."⁵⁷ Indeed, there was a *kolkhoz* chairman in attendance, and he heartily agreed, remarking,

I must criticize you and say that you probably have rarely been to a *kolkhoz*. If you had been more often, you wouldn't show the meeting like this. You must show that the governing board is a force that decides everything in the *kolkhoz*. At such a meeting

⁵⁴ Ibid., 1.9.

⁵⁵ Ibid., 1.12.

⁵⁶ Ibid., 1.23.

⁵⁷ Ibid., 1.18.

there must be an *aktiv*; you have three people... Then there should be [another] eleven members, for a total of 20 to 25 people... And you hardly show the role of the *kolkhoz* chair... You need to fix that, too.⁵⁸

Apparently, despite Zhukovskii's on-site experience on the Poltavan *kolkhozy*, he and the Bolshoi's production staff knew far less about "real" Soviet life than they thought, a difficult revelation in light of the demands of the Central Committee resolution, especially so close to the opera's scheduled premiere.

The third major area of dissatisfaction among the lay audience, also touching on a sore spot from the Central Committee resolution on music, was the production's *narodnost*'. This issue was exacerbated by Zhukovskii's transfer of the action from the novel's original Altai region to his native Ukraine. Discussion participants' primary complaint centered on the opera's dance scenes, which they did not dislike so much as they found them unfamiliar. "I see good dances in this show," began one *kolkhoznik* old enough to remember pre-revolutionary days. "But these dances are alien to us. The *narod* doesn't dance like that... Ukrainians dance so you can't sit still. And Russian dances, so interesting!... You feel proud the peoples can dance like that. But in these dances there's nothing *narodnyi*."⁵⁹ A regional agronomist agreed the dances were appealing but not quite right for an opera about traditional denizens of the countryside. "You need to add something from what we see in *kolkhozy*," he suggested. "You need to show real folk dances, without covering over things here... And then you must have an accordion, which lends a folk character. It's pointless for the composer to leave out the accordion, because no holiday passes in a *kolkhoz* without one."⁶⁰ This last comment reveals that while the central

⁵⁸ Ibid., ll.24-25.

⁵⁹ Ibid., l.5.

⁶⁰ Ibid., l.16.

issue remained the staging, even the music was not immune to criticism for its lack of true *narodnost*, despite Zhukovskii's effort to work with the *narod* of his expertise.

While the overall tone of the meeting with lay audience members was quite positive, what it proved most was that the Bolshoi had failed in its attempt to create an operatic production of and for the people, as demanded by the Central Committee resolution. The Bolshoi's leadership might have been expected to find this news disturbing, after their intense labors and on the eve of the much-anticipated premiere. However, in their closing speeches, Pokrovskii and Solodovnikov paid no more than lip service to the audience's criticism. "Comrades! Creating a contemporary Soviet opera is a very difficult task," Pokrovskii averred. "Naturally, we couldn't resolve it entirely in one production... We are grateful for the valuable instructions you gave here today."⁶¹ Solodovnikov seconded his thanks and added, "If the audience understands a new production, it means our goal has been reached... It's valuable to us today that, fundamentally, our new work reached you. You understood it correctly, and it was recognized in a sense as a step forward in the development of Soviet opera. That's the most valuable thing we heard from you today."⁶² In other words, rather than expressing concern, or even frustration, Pokrovskii and Solodovnikov remained quite placid. The theater had done its best, it was good enough, and the show would go on, regardless of the concerns of these average viewers, which they clearly did not find it necessary to take too seriously. With their final remarks, the Bolshoi's leadership revealed that they had taken what they wanted to hear from the meeting with the lay audience and were content to chalk the rest up to the "inevitable" errors made when venturing out in a new artistic direction.

⁶¹ Ibid., ll.26, 28.

⁶² Ibid., l.29.

Success At Last

Ot vsego serdtsa premiered as planned on January 16, 1951, to great acclaim.⁶³ Giddy with relief, the Bolshoi held one final, two-day meeting with the Composers' Union and KDI on January 18 and 20 to assess their collective accomplishment. In a now-familiar pattern, those present praised the opera's realism and *narodnost'*. In Kirill Molchanov's words, the opera's main virtue was that "it stands on an absolutely realistic basis... [and] it exhibits real, original *narodnost'*. I'm not an expert on Ukrainian folk songs or whether this opera uses much folk material, but in any case, each aria, each song, even each recitative speaks to how deeply the author penetrates to the heart of Ukrainian folk songs."⁶⁴ Molchanov's remarks serve as a fascinating example of the persistence of the musical community's transformative experience during the All-Union Meeting on Opera and Ballet Questions four years earlier. In keeping with the general consensus that they as a professional group had come to a deeper understanding of Socialist Realism even though they remained unable to fully articulate it, here Molchanov expressed his certainty that he could recognize the Ukrainian *narodnost'* of Zhukovskii's opera even without direct knowledge of Ukrainian folk music. It *felt* Ukrainian to him, and to many others, and thus, he concluded it must be so.

The opera also received high marks for its musical *sovremennost'*, in that Zhukovskii's folk-inflected choruses achieved a more modern feel, though still fully tonal. On this point, conductor Kirill Kondrashin compared *Ot vsego serdtsa* favorably to Prokofiev's recently failed *Povest' o nastoiashchem cheloveke* (*Story of a Real Man*), which by contrast, he claimed,

⁶³ The premiere was listed in the "Today in the Theaters" sections of *Pravda* and *Izvestiia* on January 16, and both papers ran short reports on the premiere the following day. "Segodnia v teatrakh" *Pravda* (16 Jan 1951), 4; "Segodnia v teatrakh" *Izvestiia* (16 Jan 1951), p.4; "Ot vsego serdtsa" *Pravda* (17 Jan 1951), 4; "Novaia sovetskaia opera v Bol'shom teatre *Ot vsego serdtsa*" *Izvestiia* (17 Jan 1951), 4.

⁶⁴ RGALI, f.2077, op.1, d.564, ll.24a-25.

exhibited a far less desirable “archaic folk character.” Further, speakers at the post-premiere discussion also had many kind words for Zhukovskii’s compositional mastery, and especially for his exemplary impartation of Soviet *ideinost’*. “The creation of productions that can serve the communist education of our people is our common affair,” averred composer Il’ia Vilenskii. “With its fresh, ideologically rich images of our day [this opera] fulfills this role... It is a very significant event in our lives.”⁶⁵

Perhaps unsurprisingly, now the opera had managed to survive the production process and achieve a successful premiere, the meeting’s participants all but tripped over one another in their eagerness to declare it a triumphant and substantive response to the 1948 resolution on music. Fully half of the meeting’s twenty-two speakers referenced this resolution, beginning with Composers’ Union secretary Mikhail Chulaki, who opened the discussion by reminding participants of Zhdanov’s declaration that each new opera was a matter of communal responsibility and that opera was “the genre in which Soviet composers must first answer the Central Committee’s resolution.”⁶⁶ In fact, there was no danger of discussants losing sight of this point, as their keenness to speak to it demonstrates. Vladimir Kukharskii referenced it directly in his opening report. After a lengthy discourse on the opera’s fine and flawed points, he asserted, “The most important thing is that Zhukovskii approaches the difficult task of creating an opera about Soviet people and their modern, postwar, peaceful life from the realist position ordered by our Party [in the 1948 resolution]... This new premiere will serve the growth of Soviet opera well.”⁶⁷ This garnered a round of applause, fitting such a definitively positive conclusion. Further, Lev Knipper commented on the communal aspect of the task of creating operas that

⁶⁵ Ibid., l.39.

⁶⁶ RGALI, f.2077, op.1, d.563, l.2.

⁶⁷ Ibid., ll.23-24.

satisfied the 1948 resolution, which, he admonished, was sometimes forgotten, particularly when a work failed. Comparing composers to mountain climbers working together to scale a massive peak, he noted, “Each participant must help the collective, united by a single idea. Only then each in turn will find it easier to follow the path partly conquered by his predecessors.”⁶⁸ Happily, it seemed the musical community had finally reached the apex in answering the 1948 resolution, accomplished by mutual effort, for which they ought to congratulate themselves.

Even those who did not directly reference the 1948 resolution spoke to its central concern that composers write operas worthy of the Soviet mass audience that so eagerly awaited them. For example, a representative of the Novosibirsk Opera Theater, which was staging a third production of *Ot vsego serdtsa*, concurrent with those at the Bolshoi and the Saratov Opera and Ballet Theater, assured the group it had been extremely popular with his local audience. As proof, he read two reviews he had brought with him, one from a group of students who wrote enthusiastically, “We liked this lively, realistic show, which correctly told of contemporary *kolkhoz* life and the people of the *kolkhoz* countryside” and the other from a group of teachers who suggested the opera deserved a Stalin Prize.⁶⁹ With such evidence at hand, the meeting’s participants felt all the more strongly that at last the Soviet musical community had understood Party directives and produced an opera that fulfilled them.

Of course, that did not mean they considered *Ot vsego serdtsa* to be entirely without flaws. Each speaker noted some areas in which the opera had fallen short, a point they felt able to explore more trenchantly than at the meeting on December 30, because the premiere was no longer in question. However, there was a limit to how far they were willing to let such criticism go, and a definite spin they required in order to make it acceptable. Famously irascible

⁶⁸ RGLAI, f.2077, op.1, d.564, l.16b.

⁶⁹ Ibid., ll.50-52.

musicologist Aleksei Ogolevets overstepped these bounds when he accused Zhukovskii of “falsity” and “dilettantism” in his reworking of Mal’tsev’s original text, saying “if you take a good realist novel and destroy all that’s best and most realistic in it, that’s hardly a full-value move on the path of realism... The main thing we demand of Socialist Realist opera is... typicality. If we lose that, we fall into naturalism, and naturalism is the extreme right flank of formalism.”⁷⁰ Zhukovskii was deeply offended by these remarks and their political connotations. Seeing in them the implicit accusation that his music was too “bourgeois” and Western, he understood Ogolevets to be taking a swipe at the more questionable aspects of his background. “Let me tell you a little bit about myself,” he seethed in response.

Before the war, Kiev Conservatory was devoured by formalist tendencies. In our classes we were oriented to the new music of the West. Only after the war were we freed from all this... I fully acknowledge my mistakes, and... I'll correct them. However, I'm against provocational speeches. You can't say that I uncomprehendingly, dilettantishly approached work on my opera... I was born in the countryside and before I made this opera, I spent a whole year on *kolkhozy*.⁷¹

Clearly, Zhukovskii had been struck to the quick and was determined to defeat any hints of a less than perfectly Soviet approach in his music. To achieve his goal of being considered a “good” national-republic composer – who had studied Ukrainian folksong, but only in service of creating music that fulfilled the all-Union Soviet aesthetic paradigm of Socialist Realism – and a leading light in Soviet opera, he felt he had to acknowledge and disavow any hints of prewar nonconformity with these ideals and call dirty play on Ogolevets for bringing them up in the first

⁷⁰ RGALI, f.2077, op.1, d.563, ll.37-39. The opposition between “realism” and “naturalism” in Soviet music criticism dated back to the early 1930s and was well established by the 1950s. “Naturalism” indicated a portrayal of reality in its most unvarnished state. It stood in stark contrast to the aspirational aesthetic of Socialist Realism, which sought to portray reality in its best possible aspect. Further, naturalism was understood as being overly technical, paying more attention to form than to musical beauty and story telling. It was this sense of the term that brought it into association with the cardinal sin of “formalism.” “Typicality,” on the other hand, was a watchword of Socialist Realist aesthetics. For more on this point, see Introduction.

⁷¹ Ibid., ll.46-47.

place. Librettist Kovalenkov supported Zhukovskii once again, reaffirming *Ot vsego serdtsa*'s Soviet credentials by declaring that it "proved Stalin's genius thesis that art must be national in form and socialist in content."⁷² With the fate of their opera in the balance (such accusations had certainly destroyed Soviet operas before) Zhukovskii and Kovalenkov hoped to erect an ideologically pure barrier through which Ogolevets' damaging words could not penetrate.

They need not have worried. In a clear rejection of the path down which Ogolevets had set foot, several speakers harshly reprovved him for his remarks, including Lev Knipper, who explicitly listed Zhukovskii in the multinational ranks of leading Soviet opera composers. In a final blow, Chulaki threw Ogolevets' use of the negative terminology of the 1948 resolution back in his face. Speaking near the end of the second day, Chulaki stated stonily, "Ogolevets does not express what other composers think. In the leading compositional milieu such things are already uncharacteristic, though they have a place among *backwards* elements. Our society does not in any way agree with Ogolevets' speech... All agree that Zhukovskii's work is bright, realistic... and has every chance of being loved by the people."⁷³ True, as many agreed, the opera had some defects, and as a group they had been perhaps hasty in promoting it through production without pausing for a closer look, but if, as Goriainov now admitted, it "can't be a full answer to the demands put before music theater by the Central Committee's historic resolution," the solution was constructive criticism, not harsh words like Ogolevets'. Rather, he continued, "This opera is a path to resolving the task of creating a full-value, deeply ideological

⁷² Ibid., 1.43. This formula originated in an article by Stalin nearly twenty years before. See I.V. Stalin. *Marksizm i natsional'nyi-kolonial'nyi vopros: Sbornik izbrannykh statei i rechei* (Moscow: Partiinoe izd-vo, 1934), 195. For more on its adoption by composers and musicologists and its effects on Soviet music, particularly for national minorities, see: Marina Frolova-Walker, "'National in Form, Socialist in Content': Musical Nation-Building in the Soviet Republics," *Journal of the American Musicological Society* 51:2 (Summer 1998), 331-371.

⁷³ RGALI, f.2077, op.1, d.564, ll.73-74.

Soviet opera. That's its main value, and to try to take that away is to block the development of Soviet opera."⁷⁴ With this remark, Goriainov revealed the group's ultimate conclusion about *Ot vsego serdtsa* after the months of all-out effort, both artistic and promotional, which had finally culminated in an auspicious premiere: the opera may not be perfect, but it was a significant step forward and the best the compositional community had produced so far. As such, it must certainly be judged a success as a Soviet opera and as a response to the 1948 resolution.

Confident though they appeared to be in their own assessment, the Bolshoi, Composers' Union, and KDI were still anxious to secure confirmation that *Ot vsego serdtsa*'s had passed muster with the authorities. The *Velikaia družba* debacle and its heavy consequences, only three years past, were still fresh in the consciousness of all concerned, and even the memory of the *Lady Macbeth* affair lingered in the shadows. It was with these events in mind that on January 18, two days after the premiere, Pavel Lebedev, the new head of the KDI, appointed after the 1948 resolution on music, and a staunch supporter of *Ot vsego serdtsa*, wrote to Stalin, presenting a summary of the plot and praising the music, the storyline, and the Bolshoi's production. "In view of the fact that the production at the Bolshoi Theater of a new opera on a Soviet theme is an important event," he wrote with careful wording, "the KDI thinks it necessary to request of you, Comrade Stalin, that the government see this opera."⁷⁵ He provided dates of upcoming performances, for the latter's convenience. However, despite this letter and second sent within days by Zhukovskii, Pokrovskii, and Kondrashin describing *Ot vsego serdtsa* specifically as an effort to "answer the Resolution on the opera *Velikaia družba*" and requesting Stalin attend a performance and "tell us your opinion, is the theater on the right path in its search

⁷⁴ RGALI, f.2077, op.1, d.563, ll.78-79.

⁷⁵ RGASPI, F.17 (Tsentral'nyi Komitet Velikoi Kommunisticheskoi Partii (bol'shevikov)), op.133 (Otdel Khudozhestvennoi Literatury i Iskusstva), d.325, ll.16-17.

for a solution on the contemporary *kolkhoz* theme in opera?”⁷⁶ there is no evidence Stalin made an appearance at the theater. It seemed the musical community would have to rely on their own mutual assurances that with *Ot vsego serdtsa* they had finally overcome the failures of the past and stepped forward into the bright future of full-fledged Socialist Realist Soviet opera.

The final audience the Bolshoi and its colleagues had to satisfy, of course, was also its largest – average listeners. Audience response proved a substantial topic of discussion at the post-premiere meeting on January 18 and 20. However, the self-satisfied tenor of the conversation on this point proved that while the Bolshoi had diligently tracked responses throughout the production process, culminating in the meeting with workers and *kolkhozniki* on January 13, the theater’s attention to its lay audience had never really been more than a perfunctory fulfillment of a duty. Surely, if the Bolshoi had placed a real stake on satisfying this audience, it would almost certainly have left itself time to revise the production after the January 13 meeting. Indeed, had its staff ever planned to take the meeting with its lay audience seriously, they would undoubtedly have scheduled it earlier in the process of revisions and rehearsals, rather than a mere three days prior to the proposed date of premiere. In the end, the lack of real concern on the theater’s part, suggested by the timing of the meeting with representatives of the lay audience, was confirmed by the manner in which most music and theater professionals ignored the results of that discussion when pronouncing their own congratulatory appraisals of audience response at the post-premiere meeting less than a week later.

The specialists’ assessment of popular response to *Ot vsego serdtsa* drew on the overall enthusiasm evident on January 13 while ignoring its critical element. In principle, all agreed with Antonio Spadavekkia’s assessment that Soviet opera’s primary goal was “to create a realistic,

⁷⁶ Ibid., 1.14.

good production that will satisfy the *narod*.⁷⁷ There was also general consensus that this objective had been achieved. In his report on the meeting's first day, Kukharskii stated in no uncertain terms, "The choral scenes are the best, most successful part of the opera, because they're *narodnye* in the images and feelings expressed in them and in the [musical] means by which these images are realized."⁷⁸ Furthermore, reported the KDI's Goriainov, audiences at the Bolshoi and at the similarly timed productions in Saratov and Novosibirsk, "listeners of the most different categories," had responded well, which "is evidence that this opera is very close to the soul of Soviet man." To back up this assertion, Goriainov quoted the remarks of a smelter at the "surprisingly helpful and valuable meeting" on January 13 – remarks only tangentially related to those made by the only smelter who had attended. Goriainov claimed the smelter had declared *Ot vsego serdtsa* "very necessary and useful, because it teaches us young people that one must work, so that things will be good for everyone, and so that we, as a result of our successes, don't become conceited," and that the choruses had touched his heart.⁷⁹ In fact, on January 13, the real smelter had said only that the music had made a "big impression," but that he felt unqualified to comment further. More generally, praised the opera for "showing educative work very well. It becomes clear that a man must not be proud, even if he is a war hero," and predicted it would "make a big impression on our young people."⁸⁰ Apparently, in the five days since the smelter had said his piece, Goriainov – who does not appear to have been present on January 13, though he most likely read a transcript of the meeting – had managed to retain the outline of his words, but shifted their focus just enough to serve his own rhetorical purposes, yet another sign of the inattention with which the lay audience's evaluations were received.

⁷⁷ RGALI, f.2077, op.1, d.564, l.6.

⁷⁸ RGALI, f.2077, op.1, d.563, l.6.

⁷⁹ Ibid., ll.79-81.

⁸⁰ RGALI, f.2077, op.1, d.562, l.23.

Finally, in summing up the post-premiere meeting of professionals, Mikhail Chulaki returned to the theme of Zhukovskii's field research, stating confidently that the *narod* must certainly love *Ot vsego serdtsa*, because "Zhukovskii visited *kolkhozy* and consulted with the *kolkhozniki*, making friends with many of them."⁸¹ Surely after such laudable fraternizing with the common folk, the composer could not have failed to entirely capture their spirit, no matter what the lay discussants had said to the contrary on January 13. This applied even to the *kolkhoz* chairman, who suggested Zhukovskii undertake just such a consultation, *after* the "whole year on the *kolkhozes*" of which the composer was so very proud. "You must go to a *kolkhoz*," the chairman advised, "and see how everything is done there. Then it'll be clearer to you."⁸² Thus, despite claiming to base their overall assessment on "ordinary" people's opinions of the opera, the professionals preferred to rely on their own assumptions of what the *narod* wanted and the extent to which that demand had been satisfied, rather than engage seriously with the actual opinions of their invited layperson guests.

When discussing the details of the production, few professionals felt the need to comment on the Bolshoi's portrayal of the *kolkhoz*'s governing board, which had been a major issue at the lay meeting. In his report, Kukharskii did note that that scene ought to be revised "to show Rodion's guilt, so that we can verify the need for Grunia's and the whole collective's speeches against him... To show the immense educational force of the collective, the force of criticism and self-criticism in action."⁸³ But this was a far cry from the *kolkhozniki*'s complaints about the governing meeting, and when Zhukovskii responded that he would rather leave it as it was, no one challenged his position. By contrast, many professionals expressed opinions about the

⁸¹ RGALI, f.2077, op.1, d.564, l.80.

⁸² RGALI, f.2077, op.1, d.562, l.25.

⁸³ RGALI, f.2077, op.1, d.563, ll.17-18.

production's *narodnost*', which, unlike the lay discussants, who had been brought in as representatives of the *narod*, they found unimpeachable. Kondrashin praised the opera's "accessibility... democratic musical language, *narodnost*'... great singability and openness, melodicity... *Narodnost*' is not yet contemporaneity... but in Zhukovskii's opera all the melodies, especially the choral ones, are marked by contemporaneity."⁸⁴ Musicologist Boris Tarakanov also praised the "*Narodnost*', mastery of choral writing, emotionality" of the choral scenes, although in terms of dramaturgy, "not one choral scene relates the action."⁸⁵ Despite some adherents to this complaint, on the whole the professionals managed to find much more *narodnost*' in Zhukovskii's music than had the *narod* themselves, even after the *narod* had informed them this quality was lacking.

Perhaps the clearest instance of the disconnect between these two audiences, and the latter's disregard for the opinions of the former, centered on the issue of the Bolshoi's depiction of *kolkhoz* labor. Nearly all of the lay discussants had taken it for granted the harvest ought to be depicted accurately and in detail, and had, in what they understood to be their capacity as labor experts, advised the Bolshoi on how to adjust its staging to conform to actual practice. The only participant in that meeting to contradict this idea was one regional agronomist, and even he conceded that while a realistic mowing scene would of course be desirable, "This is very hard... One must recognize that the mowing scene is done wrong, but how on earth could it be achieved so that it's done right?"⁸⁶

While the agronomist despaired of achieving such a portrayal due to its difficulty, however, the arts professionals opposed it more on creative principle. This thread of discussion

⁸⁴ Ibid., ll.49-50.

⁸⁵ Ibid., ll.66-66a.

⁸⁶ RGALI, f.2077, op.1, d.562, l.15.

began with theater studies student Pekelis, who asserted, “This opera is about *kolkhoz* labor, the labor of Soviet people, which forges [their] new worldview... But does the opera show us real labor? It seems this is missing.”⁸⁷ She was quickly and decisively corrected by senior colleagues. “How can you show labor on stage?” countered Kondrashin. “In opera one must create the atmosphere of labor, show people who labor somewhere in the wings, but to show that same labor process onstage would be a naturalist conception, not realistic, because due to its conventions, opera will always depict that falsely... What’s on stage isn’t real,”⁸⁸ he assured her condescendingly. Tarakanov agreed, asserting that while the staging ought to be active, “to show the *narod* in action it’s absolutely unnecessary to show the production process on stage... [Rather], one must show the interrelatedness of people... [and] give the choral scenes a dramatic function.” He directed Pekelis’ attention to Vladimir Deshevov’s 1929 opera *Led i stal’* (*Ice and Steel*) as an instance in which “the production process was shown. However, other than formalism and naturalism, the author got nowhere with this venture.”⁸⁹ Not only did the professionals believe it would be impossible to depict labor on stage, they found it foolish and simplistic at best – and in contravention of the Central Committee resolutions at worst – to try to do so. By switching from the concrete terminology of mowing and milking used by the *kolkhozniki* to more abstract terms like “labor process,” the professionals moved the discussion out of the realm of actuality and into the rarified atmosphere of performance theory, with which they were clearly more comfortable.

Continuing in this intangible, specialist vein, the discussion in the professional meeting for the most part abandoned practical issues relating to the portrayal of everyday Soviet life in

⁸⁷ RGALI, f.2077, op.1, d.563, 29-30.

⁸⁸ Ibid., l.52.

⁸⁹ Ibid., ll.66a-66b.

favor of a conceptual evaluation of the opera's dramaturgical and musical issues. Kukharskii, for example, pointed out Zhukovskii's "errors... revealed primarily at the level of the veracity, the authenticity of the musico-dramaturgical embodiment of the central dramatic conflict of the opera."⁹⁰ Iurii Korev, among others, agreed that this fundamental plot point "looks stretched out and isn't significant enough to serve as the basis for the development of the opera."⁹¹ Everyone, it seemed, had a theory about where the opera's dramaturgy fell short. Lev Knipper located the primary flaw in "the absence of the main characters, Rodion and Grunia, from the finale."⁹² Their romantic conflict had been resolved in the preceding scene, in order to build the grand finale around the *kolkhozniki* as a group, but many found this unbalanced and unsatisfying. Pekelis, on the other hand, was troubled that "Rodion's conflict arises on one hand from the struggle for a record harvest, but on the other hand from [his] participation in building the hydroelectric dam. From the audiences' point of view, this is really incomprehensible and confuses the conflict."⁹³ Finally, in an issue linking the dramaturgy to music, Spadavekkia expressed his disappointment that "the choral scenes are good, but they're static."⁹⁴

Indeed, while the lay discussants had found Zhukovskii's music pleasant, if lacking in true *narodnost'*, the professionals found the music much stronger than Bagmet's libretto, which had been translated into Russian by A. Kovalenkov. The composer received a great deal of praise for what Vladimir Zakharov called the "hearty, expressive, simple, *narodnyi*, and accessible music... Especially the choruses and a few ensembles and arias,"⁹⁵ which he predicted would catch on and circulate beyond the operatic stage. In his closing remarks, Kukharskii agreed about

⁹⁰ Ibid., 1.12.

⁹¹ Ibid., 1.25.

⁹² RGALI, f.2077, op.1, d.564, 1.18.

⁹³ RGALI, f.2077, op.1, d.563, ll.30-31.

⁹⁴ RGALI, f.2077, op.1, d.564, 1.7/8.

⁹⁵ Ibid., 1.59.

the choral music but less so about the rest, complaining that many characters' arias and recitatives were too similar to one another.⁹⁶ Liubov' Solovtsova was more direct, stating flatly, "The composer has a clear melodic talent but has yet to master recitative. In the recitatives, the musical language takes a neutral character... [though] these are often important dramatic moments."⁹⁷ In terms of Zhukovskii's orchestral writing, Lev Stepanov complained that in places Zhukovskii's sweeping orchestration overwhelmed the singers,⁹⁸ while Spadavekkia, moving once again to a more theoretical plane, noted with disappointment that Zhukovskii missed opportunities to "use the orchestra in its capability as a subtext to the content, and sometimes as the text of the content; that is, the orchestra must say what the singer or main character can't. The orchestra bears a meaningful function... In a word, the orchestra must speak."⁹⁹

While discussing craftsmanship on this level, the specialists' discussion also turned to the issue of the musical identification of the opera's primary characters. Following the line of Kukharskii's complaint about the similarity among their arias, Tarakanov praised Zhukovskii's musical depiction of Rodion, which "underlines the unbending firmness, but at the same time deep humanity of this image." But his Grunia, on the other hand was musically characterized by "weak and dull recitative phrases that won't stay long in our memories," and *raikom* secretary Novopashin's music made use of "banal lyrical phrases barely linked to his words."¹⁰⁰ Other speakers disagreed on whether Rodion or Grunia received the better musical characterization, but all supported Tarakanov's conclusion that "The arias... are all alike... and don't reveal the

⁹⁶ Ibid., l.84.

⁹⁷ Ibid., ll.54-55.

⁹⁸ Ibid., l.36.

⁹⁹ Ibid., ll.11-12.

¹⁰⁰ RGALI, f.2077, op.1, d.563, ll.65-66.

character traits of each hero.”¹⁰¹ In response, Zhukovskii attempted to refute this criticism by explaining, “I have, in my understanding, a well-constructed system of leitmotifs.”¹⁰² Here again Zhukovskii and his interlocutors took the discussion well beyond the realm of the lay audience, for whom the concept of leitmotifs was foreign and likely more abstract than their typical mode of listening. Certainly, these issues of musical dramaturgy, orchestral writing, and leitmotivic characterizations were significant, and it was important for the gathered professionals to sort them out through considered discussion. However, the participants’ clear preference for addressing such rarified issues, which time and again distracted them from their evaluation of the opera’s ability to satisfy its average listener, is yet more evidence of how little weight the lay audience’s opinion held for them, relatively, in their final assessment of the opera’s quality.

In general, it is entirely reasonable for professionals to discuss professional issues on a professional level, making full use of their expertise. It is certainly not my aim to argue the participants in this meeting ought for ideological reasons to have set aside their training to discuss the Bolshoi’s production of *Ot vsego serdtsa* as lay people. Yet it is just such ideological considerations that generated the cognitive dissonance at play in the professional meeting. Their goal, as they understood it, was to create an opera successful with the public; their success rested substantially on that audience’s reaction. Yet, describing his trepidation on the eve of the lay meeting, Kondrashin revealed the theater’s predetermined understanding of what that reaction would be. “We were afraid they would say it was all nonsense,” he claimed. “But the audience felt nothing false in what they saw... They applauded because we showed contemporary people, in whom [they] saw themselves.”¹⁰³ In fact, while the audience had indeed applauded, they also

¹⁰¹ Ibid., 1.68.

¹⁰² RGALI, f.2077, op.1, d.564, 1.62.

¹⁰³ Ibid., 1.53.

offered substantial criticism, which the Bolshoi ignored by proceeding directly to the scheduled premiere three days later. Furthermore, while claiming to be deeply concerned about the lay audience's response, the professionals, none of whom attended the lay meeting, ran roughshod over its substance. Noting the *kolkhozniki*'s approval of the opera's postwar *kolkhoz* setting, they proceeded directly on to their own claims about the source of the audience's enjoyment. They contradicted this "real" Soviet audience on the issue of *narodnost*', finding it where the lay discussants had not. And they failed to take seriously the *kolkhozniki*'s concerns about the depiction of farm work onstage, instead turning to an abstract discussion of spirit and form in portrayals of the "labor process." Finally, the professionals spent the bulk of their two-day meeting entirely ignoring issues of concern to the lay audience in favor of theoretical discussion of musical and dramaturgical issues. Thus, while the professionals discussing the Bolshoi's production of *Ot vsego serdtsa* claimed to be heavily invested in the lay audience's response and to draw on it in their conclusions; while they fully supported Solodovnikov's assertion that the opera's success "speaks to the union of the Bolshoi with its audience;"¹⁰⁴ in reality they viewed this lay response as a mere platform on which to stage the rarified professional discussion with which, despite being "democratic" Soviet artists, they were far more comfortable.

Public Recognition

The public hyping of *Ot vsego serdtsa* in the arts press continued with full force in the wake of the opera's successful premiere, now with an unmistakably self-congratulatory tone. The premiere itself received only short notices in *Pravda* and *Izvestiia*, but the March issue of *Sovetskaia muzyka* again featured a major article on *Ot vsego serdtsa*, by Vladimir Kukharskii, who had given the opening report at the post-premiere meeting at the Bolshoi on January 18. Kukharskii began by calling the Bolshoi and Saratov premieres "important and significant events

¹⁰⁴ RGALI, f.2077, op.1, d.562, l.29.

in our musical life,”¹⁰⁵ then spent a full three pages praising the opera’s realistic, ideologically exemplary portrayal of *kolkhoz* life and contemporary Soviet heroes. Kukharskii reserved special acclaim for the opera’s “wealth of large folk-choral scenes, which affirm the assured, optimistic tone and general atmosphere of joyous ‘life as action, as creation’ characteristic of our *kolkhoz* countryside,”¹⁰⁶ which he claimed were clearly descended from the mass-choral traditions of that commendable classic, Rimsky-Korsakov. After this homage, at a point far enough into a lengthy article that only very interested readers were likely to still be on board, Kukharskii turned to serious criticism, noting, as he had in his report, deficiencies in the libretto, musical dramaturgy, and musical characterizations of the opera’s heroes. However, after a few notes on the Bolshoi’s staging, Kukharskii faithfully returned to the unified line on *Ot vsego serdtsa* that had emerged at the meeting on January 18 and 20, writing, “Zhukovskii’s creative experience, with all its achievement and flaws, is deeply instructive for the further development of our operatic art. This talented composer must continue working on operas... He will doubtless achieve new, significant creative successes.”¹⁰⁷ In other words, *Ot vsego serdtsa* might not be a complete answer to the 1948 resolution, but it succeeded where it mattered most, in the primary areas outlined in the resolution, and as such, it served as definitive proof that Soviet composers had succeeded in finding the correct path forward to Socialist Realist opera.

On the strength of this positive publicity and the opera’s genuine popularity with audiences, in mid-March 1951, *Ot vsego serdtsa* was awarded a Stalin Prize, third class. One

¹⁰⁵ V. Kukharskii, “Opera ‘Ot vsego serdtsa,’” *Sovetskaia muzyka* 19:3 (Mar 1951), 25.

¹⁰⁶ *Ibid.*, 26. The quotation is from Gorky’s definition of Socialist Realism at the First All-Union Congress of Soviet Writers in 1934, which had become famous in the seventeen years since its iteration. See “Doklad A.M. Gor’kogo o sovetskoi literature,” in *Pervyi vsesoiuznyi s’ezd sovetskikh pisatelei 1934: Stenograficheskii otchet*, ed. I.K. Luppol et al. (Moscow: Sovetskii pisatel’, 1990), 17.

¹⁰⁷ Kukharskii, “Opera ‘Ot vsego serdtsa,’” 34.

more laudatory article appeared after this event, published on March 31 in *Sovetskoe iskusstvo*. In even headier terms than Kukharskii, Konstantin Sakva, a former KDI official now serving as a senior editor at Muzgiz, hailed the appearance of this “brave and innovative” opera, punning on its name to describe its heartfelt, realistic portrayal of modern Soviet *kolkhozniki* and their worldview and making sure to mention its Stalin Prize in the third paragraph. Sakva once again made much of Zhukovskii’s artistic and ideological skill, particularly in the choral scenes. He even commended the composer’s clever use of Ukrainian folk intonation, rather than always directly quoting existing folksongs – something even many professional listeners had not noticed – which he claimed, was the key to avoiding archaism. Like Kukharskii, though less harshly, Sakva dutifully noted the opera’s flawed musical dramaturgy and the similarity of its heroes’ musical themes, but quickly moved on.

Finally, Sakva praised the Bolshoi’s production, though it had not excelled in every area. Despite its missteps, he concluded, the Bolshoi had still succeeded “in creating a bright, celebratory production, truthfully conveying the atmosphere of joyous creative labor so characteristic of the Soviet *kolkhoz* countryside.” Indeed, Sakva expressed the same sentiment about the opera itself, echoing what had by now become the standard take on *Ot vsego serdtsa*: “However serious its faults, the opera represents a great and substantial step forward... on the path to the high-quality, ideologically meaningful operatic works worthy of the Soviet people that Soviet composers were called on to create in the Central Committee resolution ‘On the Opera *Velikaia druzhba*’.”¹⁰⁸ In the wake of that shocking resolution, after a whirlwind fourteen months of work and discussion, three months of successful performances and yet more discussion, crowned by official approval in the form of a Stalin Prize, it seemed the Soviet

¹⁰⁸ All quotations in this paragraph in K. Sakva, “‘Ot vsego serdtsa’: Novoe v opernom zhanre” *Sovetskoe iskusstvo* (31 Mar 1951), 2.

musical community had finally established *Ot vsego serdtsa*'s lasting value to their collective enterprise: it demonstrated unequivocally that they had understood and taken to heart the 1948 resolution and conquered the major hurdles in finally achieving an ideal Socialist Realist opera.

Crash and Burn

Unfortunately, the Soviet musical community was not to rest long on its laurels. On April 19, 1951, less than three weeks after Sakva's laudatory article, disaster struck again. An unsigned editorial in *Pravda*, reminiscent of the ones that had denounced Shostakovich's opera *Lady Macbeth* and ballet *Svetlyi Ruchei* and all but destroyed his career in 1936, suddenly and decisively struck down the notion that Zhukovskii's opera had anything to offer Soviet opera. Titled "An Unsuccessful Opera," (perhaps inverting Filippenko's "Joyous Success") the editorial began by severely reminding composers, as had the 1948 resolution, that the Soviet people eagerly awaited a high quality opera realistically depicting their life. It then stated in no uncertain terms that *Ot vsego serdtsa* was not such an opera. Addressing the 1948 resolution's concerns for realism, artistry, and ideology, it fulminated, "The production shows *kolkhoz* life in a false light, depicting Soviet people lacking living human traits, their spiritual world impoverished, who can't in any way serve as an embodiment of the best qualities of Soviet *kolkhozniki*. The production is of the lowest artistic level. It does not give audience the joy of real art."¹⁰⁹ In sections labeled "Contrary to Living Truth," "Weak, Colorless Music," and "Major Faults in Staging," the editorial left no hope that any part of the opera was salvageable. *Ot vsego serdtsa*, which had only weeks before been touted as a major triumph for Soviet music, had now been declared a failure in every way.

¹⁰⁹ "Neudachnaia opera: O postanovke opery 'Ot vsego serdtsa' v Bol'shom teatre," *Pravda* (19 Apr 1951), 2.

The editorial attacked the opera's libretto primarily on ideological grounds, comparing it unfavorably to the novel on which it was based. According to the anonymous author, the libretto "reflects neither the richness and power of the modern *kolkhoz*, nor the theme of happy, joyous labor in which new people grow and form their leading communist morality."¹¹⁰ Despite the musical community's many private and public assurances that the opera's true hero was "the people," the editorial found that this social message had unforgivably been given a backseat to Rodion and Grunia's personal drama. And even that was done badly: the author noted several unmotivated plot points and despaired of the librettists' decision to set modern labor vocabulary to opera, though Kovalenkov had defended this move the previous December on the grounds that "what sounds prosaic today will sound poetic tomorrow."¹¹¹

If the librettist were lax ideologically, however, Zhukovskii himself – whom the article stubbornly referred to by his original, somewhat suspicious name, German, rather than his adopted, Russified name, Evgenii – was artistically incompetent. His use of folk music, which had been universally praised in production meetings and the press, was now labeled severely wanting. Complaining Zhukovskii had carelessly transferred the action from the Altai region to Ukraine while retaining the characters' Russian names, the editorial griped, "only a few musical episodes.... bear the stamp of Ukrainian folk songs, [while] the folk dances, like the musical language of the heroes, lack national specificity."¹¹² In other words, in his effort to make the opera Ukrainian but not *too* Ukrainian, Zhukovskii, along with the librettists and choreographer, had left it not Ukrainian enough. Further on, the author brought Zhukovskii's musical characterization of his heroes and his musical dramaturgy to the fore. Members of the musical

¹¹⁰ Ibid.

¹¹¹ RGALI, f.648, op.5, d.165, l.7.

¹¹² "Neudachnaia opera," 2.

community had noticed these aspects' flaws, but found them forgivable, given the opera's many other fine qualities. The editorialist disagreed. These sins, along with Zhukovskii's "passion for dreamy elegy," which, he hinted, was formalism-adjacent at the very least, not to mention his overly heavy orchestration, revealed the opera's music as "weak professionally, which further underlines the ideological falsity of the libretto, depersonalizes and impoverishes the images of Soviet people, and betrays the lack of living truth in this production."¹¹³

Given the severity of these faults, the editorialist also had sharp criticism for the Bolshoi, which had wantonly brought such a musical disaster upon itself and furtherer compounded the misery with its ugly, unrealistic staging and claustrophobic sets. He noted pointedly that the theater had previously spared no expense in creating dazzling palaces for classic operas, yet was now somehow unable to convey the natural beauty and openness of the Ukrainian steppe, vivified by modern, joyous *kolkhoz* labor. Such issues, he continued, "speak to an unserious, irresponsible relationship of the leadership of the Bolshoi and its director, Solodovnikov, to creating a new Soviet opera repertoire," the Bolshoi's special responsibility as the country's foremost opera theater.¹¹⁴ And the trouble did not stop at the Bolshoi's door. The editorial made clear that the Composers' Union and KDI were also at fault in the opera's failure for erroneously acclaiming it rather than criticizing it in the early stages of production. Nor were the critics spared; the editorial singled out both Kukharskii and Sakva for their "disorienting" articles, which had falsely praised this clearly substandard work. In essence, the editorial hinted strongly that the entire musical community had colluded in promoting and producing an undeserving, poor-quality, harmful opera, and in so doing had depriving the Soviet people of the operatic experience they so richly desired and deserved.

¹¹³ Ibid.

¹¹⁴ Ibid, 3.

The *Pravda* editorial had a devastating effect on the Soviet musical community. As with the Central Committee's 1948 resolution "On the Opera *Velikaia družba*," the consequences were immediate and severe. Perhaps because the denunciation had not been carried out by the Central Committee directly, this time the state apparatus, rather than the Party, took the lead. Five days after the editorial's publication, on April 24, the Council of Ministers passed Resolution no. 1337, firing KDI Chair Lebedev, GUMU Chair Goriainov, and Bolshoi Director Solodovnikov, the last of whom was particularly criticized as "having in his possession serious critical notes from the theater's artists concerning Zhukovskii's opera *Ot vsego serdtsa*, but relating to them disdainfully and, using his administrative power, staging an opera containing serious mistakes and flaws." Lebedev was replaced by his deputy, Nikolai Besspalov, while Ivan Anisimov, a KDI official, was appointed to replace Solodovnikov at the Bolshoi.¹¹⁵ Just over two weeks later, the Central Committee passed a resolution revoking Zhukovskii's Stalin Prize for *Ot vsego serdtsa*, and requiring that an explanation of this decision be published in the press, presumably to ensure its message was not lost on any members of the musical community or the public.¹¹⁶ The resulting notice, appearing on the bottom corner of page two in the next day's *Pravda*, was brief, saying only that in response to "the just criticism of this opera on the part of Soviet society" the Stalin Prize Committee had asked the Central Committee to rescind Zhukovskii's prize.¹¹⁷ Only the Composers' Union escaped without a major shakeup. Still, the May 11 *Pravda* item had pointedly noted that Zhukovskii was nominated for the Stalin Prize by

¹¹⁵ RGALI, f.648, op.5, d.182, ll.4-5.

¹¹⁶ "Postanovlenie Politbiuro TsK VKP(b) ob otmene prisuzhdeniia Stalinskoi premii 3 stepeni kompozitoru G.L. Zhukovskomu za operu *Ot vsego serdtsa*," ot 10 maia 1951g." in Artizov and Naumov, 669. This incident also had far-reaching implications for the Stalin Prize Committee itself. See Tomoff, *Creative Union*, 246-267.

¹¹⁷ "V Komitete po Stalinskim Premiiam v oblasti literatury i iskusstva" *Pravda* (11 May 1951), 2.

the KDI and the Union, with the clear implication that this was a serious lapse in judgment on their part. Together with the firings at the KDI and Bolshoi, this notice left no doubt that while the Union may have avoided direct consequences, its members as a professional group were now on Soviet officials' watch list more than ever.

In many ways, *Pravda's* editorial denouncing *Ot vsego serdtsa* was quite different from the resolution on *Velikaia druzhba*. It focused on a single work, and it made no attempt to condemn the compositional community as a whole for its inadequacies. Even the dreaded term "formalism" was only hinted at, rather than leveled as an explicit accusation. Published on page two, below the fold, it was not a positional statement in the same way its predecessor had been. And yet, the similarities between these two documents were far too clear for the Soviet musical community to ignore. Despite its narrower focus, the *Pravda* editorial criticized *Ot vsego serdtsa* very much in the terms of the resolution on music: failure to convey Soviet ideology, low artistic quality, insufficient use of folk music, and most damningly, false, unrealistic portrayal of contemporary Soviet life and heroes. Furthermore, as in the 1948 resolution, blame was evenly distributed throughout the Soviet musical community: the Bolshoi was at fault for choosing such a poor excuse for an opera in the first place, music critics were at fault for praising it despite its obvious flaws, and the Composers' Union and KDI were at fault for sending it merrily on its way to the mass audience instead of demanding it be rewritten to meet the highest standards. In the final accounting, though its immediate consequences were less dire than those of the resolution "On the Opera *Velikaia druzhba*," the unsigned *Pravda* editorial concerning *Ot vsego serdtsa* essentially functioned as a second Central Committee resolution on music. Once again, despite all its artistic effort, its major publicity drive, and its self-confidence, the Soviet musical community had utterly failed. Again the fear of 1948 returned, and the search for the next great

contemporary Soviet opera, the one that would *really* satisfy the Central Committee and prove once and for all that music and theater professionals had finally discovered a new creative path and triumphed, began anew. Next time, they assured themselves, we will surely get it right.

Conclusion

Ot vsego serdtsa's downfall was deeply shocking to the Soviet musical community. And yet, it was all but predestined to occur. In the wake of the relative freedom of the war years, once the state resolved to seriously reassert its authority over cultural production by directing more scrutiny toward it, it was inevitable this drive would eventually land at music's door. The initial *zhdanovshchina* resolutions condemning literature, dramatic theater, and film in the late summer of 1946 even gave the musical community advance warning and hinted at the type of criticism they could expect to face. Yet, this foreknowledge, and their efforts to make use of it by convening the 1946 All-Union Meeting on Opera and Ballet Questions, did them comparatively little good. The 1948 resolution "On the Opera *Velikaia druzhba*" came down just as surely as if they had made no effort at all to prevent it.

Why, despite its concerted efforts, was the Soviet musical community unable to avoid the *zhdanovshchina* resolution on music, and why was it so persistently unable to create an ideal Soviet opera? The 1948 resolution itself provides the answer. The resolution lays out in broad strokes the Socialist Realist qualities Soviet opera was required to possess: *sovremennost'*, in its portrayal of modern Soviet life, accompanied by high quality, moderately innovative musical language that still paid respect to the Russian classics; *partiinnost'*, in its depiction specifically of Party-affiliated heroes at the forefront of that modern life; *ideinnost'*, in its conveyance of proper Soviet ideological values; and *narodnost'*, in its incorporation of folk music attractive to the mass audience. Such pronouncements seem clear enough in themselves, but as implementable rules, they were maddeningly vague. Indeed, even the resolution's criticism of *Velikaia druzhba*

itself was surprisingly non-specific. But as Richard Taruskin has explained, this was exactly the point. “There was good reason, from the administrative point of view, for imprecision,” Taruskin writes in his landmark study of Soviet music. “Specific directives can be complied with. Compliance can be a defense. There can be no defense against the laconic, inscrutable charge of formalism.”¹¹⁸ Ultimately, this was the source of the 1948 resolution’s power: it brought Soviet composers to their knees without giving them a way to get back up.

And yet, of course, they had to try. Given the harshness of the 1948 resolution and its blanket denunciation of the Soviet musical community, composers had no choice but to endeavor to answer it, specifically in the all-important genre that had apparently triggered it, contemporary Soviet opera. Appearing on the scene less than two years after the 1948 resolution, enough time for the paralysis to wear off but not so long that the shock had passed entirely, *Ot vsego serdtsa* seemed a perfect choice to the new leaders of the Composers’ Union, the Bolshoi, and the KDI. Filled with good, artistically solid, folk-based musical writing, realistic portrayal of postwar *kolkhoz* life, and sterling ideological lessons, *Ot vsego serdtsa* appeared to have all the necessary requirements for an ideal Socialist Realist opera, which would save the Soviet musical community, and Zhukovskii himself, from the clouds of suspicion hanging over their heads.

And yet, *Ot vsego serdtsa* was ultimately as big a fiasco as its predecessor. Marina Frolova-Walker has argued that during the Stalinist period, the state’s conflicting demands for timely realism and timeless monumentality made the creation of an ideal new Socialist Realist opera effectively impossible, and the case of *Ot vsego serdtsa* seems to bear this conclusion

¹¹⁸ Richard Taruskin. *Defining Russia Musically* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1997), 490.

out.¹¹⁹ However, given the tense political situation surrounding this opera's production, with the *zhdanovshchina* in full swing, the musical community's new approach to opera on the line, and the *Velikaia druzhba* affair still fresh in memory, I argue that the primary reason for *Ot vsego serdtsa*'s failure was not that the opera was unable to fulfill the state's impossibly vague and contradictory Socialist Realist demands, but that at this particular juncture, the state itself was unwilling to acknowledge any opera as having done so. Indeed, the state could not possibly acknowledge *Ot vsego serdtsa* as a positive example of Socialist Realist opera, because to do so would undermine the authority it had established by means of the 1948 resolution. To be sure, the resolution on *Velikaia druzhba* had not just shocked composers; it had put them on notice. It had placed them in a condition of acute anxiety, quickening their desire to please the authorities, placing that goal seemingly within reach, but without providing adequate directions for achieving it. The 1948 resolution was thus highly effective in achieving its broader purpose, the reassertion of the state's control over the musical community. And the state had no intention of relinquishing its hold simply because Zhukovskii's opera had found its way to the Bolshoi.

As *Ot vsego serdtsa*'s adventure on the Moscow stage reveals, in spite of Zhukovskii's and the entire musical community's best efforts, the opera ultimately fell victim to a chain reaction with only one possible outcome. Because cultural avenues had opened up and Western influences filtered in while the state's attention was directed elsewhere during the war years, it was inevitable the late Stalinist state would bring renewed scrutiny to bear on the arts, including music, in the early postwar period, which it did through the mechanism of the *zhdanovshchina*. Because the 1948 resolution on *Velikaia druzhba* hit the Soviet musical community with such force, it was inevitable that its members would frame their conceptualization the Bolshoi's next

¹¹⁹ Marina Frolova-Walker, "The Soviet Opera Project: Ivan Dzerzhinsky vs. *Ivan Susanin*," *Cambridge Opera Journal* 18:2 (July 2006), 181-216.

production in the terms of that document and the new work's potential as an answer to it. And because Soviet composers insisted so vehemently that *Ot vsego serdtsa* was in fact a substantial answer to the 1948 resolution, the state had no choice but to either confirm or deny their position. To confirm it would be to undo the authoritative effects of the 1948 resolution, thus necessitating another such document in the near future – which would have started the cycle over again. That left the state with only one option: to deny the musical community's claim, which it did loudly and clearly in the pages of *Pravda*.

Ultimately, while *Ot vsego serdtsa*'s appearance on the Moscow scene in 1949 had seemed auspicious, and while its qualities appeared to fulfill the demands of Socialist Realism as laid out in the 1948 resolution, a string of events had already been set in motion long before Zhukovskii's arrival in Moscow that predetermined his opera's fate. In the end, it hardly mattered whether the music, libretto, and staging were realistic or folk-based. It mattered equally little whether they exhibited artistic mastery or conveyed a proper ideological message. As a result of its timing and the complex musical politics of the *zhdanovshchina*, *Ot vsego serdtsa* was doomed to failure before its journey even began.

Chapter 5: **Censors into Authors: Collaborative Authorship in Iurii Shaporin's *Dekabristy***

Introduction

One Saturday in 1925 after an afternoon among creative friends, up-and-coming Soviet composer Iurii Shaporin began work on his first opera, *Polina Gebl'*, at the urging of historian Pavel Shchegolev and writer Aleksei Tolstoi. In Shaporin's recollection, it was Shchegolev, a specialist in the Decembrist movement, who first suggested a collaboration between the three friends: an opera about the Decembrists, in tribute to their 100th anniversary. Shchegolev proposed as central characters Ivan Annenkov and his wife, the French emigrée shopgirl Polina, who ultimately followed him into Siberian exile. Tolstoi and Shchegolev quickly produced a libretto, and Shaporin gamely composed music for two scenes, given a concert performance at the former Mariinskii Theater on December 28.¹ Little did Shaporin realize, this casually conceived project would become the most frustrating and famous work of his career.

Ultimately, the opera took twenty-eight years to produce. When the completed work finally premiered on June 23, 1953 at the Bolshoi Theater, it had little in common with Shaporin's original conception. Now titled *Dekabristy (The Decembrists)*, it had been transformed by endless revisions from a lyrical love story set against notable events into a grand historical epic, freighted with political messages about Russian society under autocracy and

¹ This anecdote is recounted in S. Levit. *Iurii Aleksandrovich Shaporin: Ocherk zhizni i tvorchestva* (Moscow: Nauka, 1964), 118-119. The identity of the scenes performed is given in E.A. Grosheva. *Iurii Aleksandrovich Shaporin: Literaturnoe nasledie* (Moscow: Sovetskii kompozitor, 1989), 51. For the rest of the program that evening, see Grosheva, 307. All dates in this chapter pertaining to the Decembrist Revolution are given in the old style (according to the Julian calendar, in use during Russia's imperial period), while all pertaining to twentieth-century events are given in the new style (according to the Gregorian calendar, adopted by the Soviet government immediately following the Bolshevik Revolution.) In the early nineteenth century, the two calendars were separated by twelve days; thus, the date of the revolution, December 14, 1825 in the old style, corresponds to December 26, 1825 in the new style. The former Mariinskii may have scheduled its anniversary concert on the 28th because the 26th, a Saturday, was already booked.

serfdom, the Decembrists themselves, and the meaning of their revolution. A number of factors delayed production, including Shaporin's slow compositional pace and conflicts with Tolstoi over the ever-evolving libretto. More significantly, because the opera was so long in the making, effectively growing up alongside Soviet power, Shaporin was compelled to repeatedly modify its content in response to shifts in cultural policy.

WWII disrupted Shaporin's career.² By the time he returned to his opera and *Dekabristy* finally began the process of revision and rehearsal at the Bolshoi in the early 1950s, a substantial new policy factor had come into play: the *zhdanovshchina*. With its genre-based resolutions on the arts in the early postwar years, the Central Committee put creative workers, arts institutions, and censors on notice that a new standard was required, and serious consequences awaited those who created or sanctioned works found in transgression.³ This new imposition of authority was particularly troubling for composers of Soviet opera, singled out in the 1948 resolution "On the Opera *Velikaia družba*" as the genre in which Soviet music had failed most spectacularly, and for the Bolshoi, which had seen its first two new postwar productions, *Velikaia družba* (*The*

² Shaporin set *Dekabristy* aside during the war. Evacuated to Nal'chik in August 1941, then to Tbilisi three months later, he turned instead to writing new works: an oratorio, *Skazanie o bitve za russkuiu zemliu* (*The Story of the Battle for the Russian Land*, the second of his three epic-historical patriotic oratorios, which premiered in April 1944 after the composer's return to Moscow and was awarded a State Prize the following year), a cycle of romances on Russian poets, film and theater music, and a set of songs for a troupe of the Red Army Song and Dance Ensemble, with whom he toured from Tbilisi to Frunze. Shaporin did not return to work on *The Decembrists* until 1945, at which point he began major revisions and new work for what would become the first completed score, submitted to the Bolshoi in March 1950. See Levit, 254-302; Grosheva, 28-49. For the date of Shaporin's submission of the complete piano score, see RGALI, f.648 (Gosudarstvennyi Akademicheskii Bol'shoi Teatr), op.5, d.822, l.7.

³ Postanovlenie Orgbiuro TsK VKP(b) o zhurnalakh 'Zvezda' i 'Leningrad,' ot 14 avgusta 1946g., "Postanovlenie Orgbiuro TsK VKP(b) o repertuare dramaticheskikh teatrov i merakh po ego uluchsheniiu ot 26 avgusta 1946g.," and "Postanovlenie Orgbiuro TsK VKP(b) o kinofil'me 'Bol'shaia zhizn'" ot 4 sentiabria 1946g." in Andrei Artizov and Oleg Naumov, eds. *Vlast' i khudozhestvennaia intelligentsiia. Dokumenty TsK RKP(b)-VKP(b), VChK-OGPU-NKVD o kul'turnoi politike. 1917-1953 gg.* (Moscow: Demokratiia, 1999), 587-591, 591-596, 598-602.

Great Friendship) in 1947 and *Ot vsego serdtsa (With All My Heart)* in 1951, officially denounced.⁴ Noting the steep drop-off in commissions in this period, Marina Frolova-Walker marks the *zhdanovshchina* as the end of the Soviet opera project, designating *Dekabristy* a mere “left-over.”⁵ But for the Bolshoi it was, at least potentially, the project’s culmination. *Dekabristy* was the theater’s third attempt at a new Soviet opera, and its leadership was desperate to perfect every detail to finally ensure success.

Amidst the tensions of the *zhdanovshchina*, Shaporin’s subject proved problematic. A historical opera would seem easier to stage in such a climate. The Soviet state continued to glorify Russia’s past, and it ostensibly avoided the difficulties facing works on contemporary themes, which struggled to fulfill the dictates of Socialist Realism by portraying Soviet life not as it was but with the level of advancement the Party believed it to possess, while preserving a dose of realism. As Evgeny Dobrenko explains, “Socialist Realism’s basic function was... to produce reality by aestheticizing it,” to depict, for example, a planned highway as though it already had been built and teach audiences to see it as real, to create a “‘fictitious world’... in which people live and even drive on nonexistent highways.”⁶ Yet, Socialist Realism was also a lens through which to view the past, requiring historical figures be represented in a particular, idealized light. Indeed, a further goal of the Soviet opera project was to impose a “unity of source text and subsequent adaption,” to ensure Soviet citizens imbibed the same message, whether reading a textbook or attending a performance.⁷ Never was this more important than for

⁴ Postanovlenie Politbiuro TsK VKP(b) ‘Ob opere *Velikaia družba* V. Muradeli’ 10 fevralia 1948g.” in Artizov and Naumov, 630-634; “Neudachnaia opera,” *Pravda* (19 Apr 1951), 2-3.

⁵ Frolova-Walker, “The Soviet Opera Project,” 213.

⁶ Evgeny Dobrenko. *Political Economy of Socialist Realism* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2007), 4, 30. Dobrenko takes the example of the nonexistent highway from Soviet philosopher Merab Mamardashvili.

⁷ Bullock, “Staging Stalinism,” 97.

the Decembrist Revolution, the “first Russian revolution,” in Soviet parlance, a touchstone of Bolshevik ideology and self-image, a pivotal moment of defiance from which Lenin had drawn inspiration. Soviet authorities were thus deeply concerned with its operatic depiction and focused extraordinary scrutiny on Shaporin’s work from its earliest days. If there was to be an opera about the Decembrists, it would have to conform to Soviet ideological standards to the letter.

Thus, in choosing this particular historical subject, Shaporin jumped from the frying pan into the fire. As Herrala has established, Soviet officials never clearly defined musical Socialist Realism, preferring to signal preference through negative examples: the opera scandals of the 1930s and 1940s.⁸ Determined to avoid another scandal and cognizant of the ideological stakes, the Bolshoi mobilized an unprecedented range of consultants to make Shaporin’s opera everything it needed to be. During the production process, *Dekabristy* became a site of intense negotiation between artists and authorities of official memory and aesthetic portrayal of Russia’s revolutionary past with historical accuracy, artistic brilliance, and ideological purity. These negotiations centered on a handful of key issues: the opera’s central pair, whose prominence required they be exemplary heroes; the Decembrists’ relationship to the masses, whom they sought to liberate, yet whose revolutionary potential they fatally overlooked; the inclusion of Pavel Pestel’, a leader of paramount importance, but active in the south; and the portrayal of events on Senate Square, the Decembrists’ ultimate moment of triumph and failure. In seeking to meet the state’s heightened demands and avoid further censure, all involved in *Dekabristy* production concentrated on its historicity, assuming complete accuracy was vital to its success. In this sense, *Dekabristy* forms an essential case study, not because Shaporin was a genius or his

⁸ Meri Herrala. *The Struggle for Control of Soviet Music from 1932-1948: Socialist Realism vs. Western Formalism*. Lewiston: Edwin Mellen, 2012.

opera a masterpiece – in fact, it exhibits the pleasant blandness characteristic of Socialist Realist music – but because it succeeded where so many others did not.

To overcome such substantial difficulties and prove *Dekabristy* not only an unimpeachable historical opera but the first truly successful new Soviet opera, the Bolshoi called upon an unprecedented range of consultants to help make it everything the musical community desperately needed to be. Over the years of its production, these music and theater professionals, writers, historians, critics, and censors, through their constant interactions with Shaporin, Tolstoi, and Vsevolod Rozhdestvenskii, the librettist who stepped in after Tolstoi's death, fundamentally shaped and reshaped *Dekabristy*, until it achieved its final form. In the process, they became much more than mere consultants. They became, in essence, co-authors of *Dekabristy*, and in so doing, helped to define the nature of authorship in the Soviet collaborative creative process.

Beginnings

In the canonical Soviet understanding, the Decembrists played a critical role in Russian history as originators of a revolutionary impetus, reincarnated with each new, more radical generation, that culminated in the Bolshevik Revolution. As Lenin explained, “The Decembrists awakened Herzen. Herzen began the work of revolutionary agitation. This work was taken up, broadened, strengthened by the revolutionary *raznochintsy*... But this was not yet the storm itself. The storm is the movement of the masses.”⁹ Despite the fact the Decembrist Revolution

⁹ V.I. Lenin, “Pamiati Gerzena” in *Polnoe sobranie sochinenii, t.21* (Moscow: Gosizdat politicheskoi literatury, 1961), 261. The essay was written in 1912, and its title refers to Aleksandr Herzen, a leader of the radical Westernizers of the 1840s and early agrarian socialist. The *raznochintsy*, educated non-nobles who fell between the cracks in Russia's estate system, took up the banner from Herzen's generation in the 1860s and pushed further toward radical populism, socialism, and anarchism through the end of the century. They, in turn, inspired Lenin's generation of underground revolutionaries, who worked to direct the masses toward proletarian revolution. See Philip Pomper. *The Russian Revolutionary Intelligentsia*. Wheeling: Harlan Davidson, 1993. On the specifics of Soviet interpretation of the Decembrist Revolution,

failed, and was a strictly elite affair, the Decembrists being too blinded by class prejudice to include commoners in their movement, in the Soviet interpretation the anti-autocratic ideals of these noble (in both senses) revolutionaries inspired the masses who witnessed the events on Senate Square and led directly to the broader popular revolution of 1917. It was therefore crucial that Shaporin's opera accord perfectly with their status as Soviet revolutionary heroes.

In its initial version, *Polina Gebl'*, with its foregrounded romance and scant attention to Decembrism, fell short of this standard. The opera consisted of nine scenes, though Shaporin did not complete all of them before WWII.¹⁰ Tolstoi and Shchegolev's libretto opens in Paris, where the Russian army, after conquering Napoleon, rests and imbibes egalitarian values. Annenkov meets Polina, the daughter of a French revolutionary, and smitten by her beauty and political credentials, proposes marriage. Polina refuses, thinking it unlikely a nobleman would keep his word to a shopgirl, but reveals she has taken a job in Moscow. In his initial manuscript, Shaporin skipped this scene, beginning instead at Annenkov's mother's estate outside Moscow. Her cruel treatment of her serfs and their choral lamentations encapsulate early nineteenth-century autocratic society, while Annenkov's disputes with his mother over the morality of serfdom and outrage at her rejection of Polina underscore the new ideals of Russia's young elites. When Annenkov receives orders to return to his regiment, he is only too glad to obey. On the way, he stops at a Fair, a colorful mass scene in which four overlapping choruses – peasant girls on a

see Ludmilla A. Trigos. *The Decembrist Myth in Russian Culture*. NY: Palgrave Macmillan, 2009, especially 53-139.

¹⁰ This summary draws from Aleksei Tolstoi and Pavel Shchegolev, "Polina Gebl' (Dekabristy): Dramaticheskaiia poema," *Novaia Rossiia* (1 Jan 1926), 35-57 [Tolstoi and Shchegolev's original libretto] and RGALI, f.2642 (Iurii Shaporin), op.1, d.1 (*Dekabristy*, Deistvie Pervoe, klavir, rukopis', 1930-e) and d.2 (*Dekabristy*, Deistvie Vtoroe i Chetvertoe, klavir, avtograf, 1930-e) [Shaporin's first draft of the score]. There does not appear to be an extant manuscript of Act 3 from this period, though Act 4 in this draft roughly corresponds to the contents of Act 3 in later versions.

carousel, gypsy women, and two groups of peasant men – sing invented folksongs allegorizing the *narod*'s desire for freedom. Annenkov plays cards, displaying his idealism again when his opponent places two serfs as a bet. He vows to win and grant them, and by extension Russia, freedom. Annenkov's political character is further revealed through an encounter with Iakubovich, a fellow member of the conspiratorial Northern Society, with whom he discusses revolution.¹¹ Finally, Annenkov is reunited with Polina, and they pledge their love.

The next scene opens in Moscow, at Annenkov and Polina's home. Despite their bliss, Annenkov broods on Russia's political situation. He is soon interrupted by Kakhovskii and Bestuzhev, Northern Society co-conspirators, who inform him Tsar Aleksandr has died, Konstantin has refused the throne, and Nikolai is now poised to become tsar. The time for revolution has come. Bestuzhev fires their souls with an inspirational aria, "Comrade, Believe," set to Pushkin's poem "To Chaadaev," and the three swear the Decembrists' oath: "Death or freedom!"¹² Kakhovskii and Bestuzhev hurry to St. Petersburg and Annenkov soon follows, with Polina's blessing. From this point, Shaporin's manuscript devolves into sketches, but Tolstoi and Shchegolev portray further conspiracy at Kondratii Ryleev's St. Petersburg home. The conspirators resolve to seize the moment for revolution, murder the tsar, and establish a republic.

¹¹ The Northern Society was one of two branches of the Union of Welfare (initially called the Union of Salvation), a secret society dedicated to social and political reform founded by young, aristocratic officers in the Russian army after their return from the Napoleonic Wars. Based in St. Petersburg, the Northern Society was more moderate, advocating for constitutional monarchy, whereas the Southern Society, based in Kiev, advocated for the complete overthrow of the monarchy in favor of a democratic republic. The Union's members became known as "Decembrists" after their failed revolt on December 14, 1825 (old style). See Anatole G. Mazour, *The First Russian Revolution, 1825: The Decembrist Movement*. Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1967; Marc Raeff. *The Decembrist Movement*. Englewood Cliffs: Prentice Hall, 1966; Trigou, *The Decembrist Myth in Russian Culture*, xv-xx.

¹² RGALI, f.2642, op.1, d.2, ll.22-27ob. The manuscript becomes sketchy at this point, with multiple realizations of several passages. For Pushkin's poem, see Aleksandr Pushkin, "K Chaadaevu" in *Pushkin: Polnoe sobranie sochinenii, t.2: Stikhotvoreniia 1817-1825gg* (Moscow: Voskresen'e: 1994), 68.

Only Rostovtsev has second thoughts and announces his intention to confess. The others curse him but resolve to proceed. The opera reaches its apotheosis on Senate Square, where the Decembrists' brave refusal to swear loyalty to Nikolai turns to tragedy when Trubetskoi, their elected leader, fails to appear and the revolution is thrown into confusion. Nikolai sends the Metropolitan, then Governor-General Miloradovich to negotiate, and in the heat of the moment, Kakhovskii shoots the latter. This is the last straw; Nikolai orders his artillery to open fire, and the revolution is defeated. Afterward, Nikolai interrogates Annenkov, who refuses to implicate others. Nikolai assures him he will rot in prison.

Shaporin did not initially compose music for Senate Square or Annenkov's Interrogation. However, his fragments for the scene At Ryleev's are followed by sketches for a new scene,¹³ which would become the Masquerade-Ball, where Polina asks Nikolai's permission to follow Annenkov into exile. He assents, with a warning she may never return.¹⁴ Undaunted, Polina races triumphantly to the Peter and Paul Fortress, where the revolutionaries are imprisoned. In a substantial revision of the libretto, Shaporin depicts a kindly old prison guard, Sergeich, who admits Polina. Reunited, she and Annenkov sing a joyful duet, before Sergeich recounts the execution of the Decembrist leaders in a mournful ballad. Finally, the exiles set out for Siberia, accompanied by a peasant chorus, which assures them their deeds will not be forgotten.¹⁵

Initial Institutional Interventions

From the beginning, the theaters with which Shaporin held contracts asserted their right to influence the opera's form and ensure it became an ideal Socialist Realist opera. This was particularly so for Bolshoi Director E.K. Malinovskaia, who initially scheduled *Polina Gebl'* for

¹³ RGALI, f.2642, op.1, d.2, ll.50-54.

¹⁴ RGALI, f.2642, op.1, d.11, ll.1-77; Iurii Shaporin. *Dekabristy: Opera v 4-kh aktakh, 10 kartinakh. Klavir* (Moscow: Muzfond SSSR, 1953), 373-436.

¹⁵ RGALI, f.2642, op.1, d.2, ll.78-89.

the 1931-32 season. Not having received the score by fall, she wrote Shaporin to inquire after his progress. He replied with overt charm and covert resistance, saying, “Formally, of course, you’re right, I didn’t turn the music in on time... But I assure you, creativity has its rights.” He reminded her that he was still working on his symphony (also commissioned by the Bolshoi), that he was short of staff paper, and that she herself had advised him to “work according to the contract’s timeline, but if you find that hurrying lowers the quality of the work, think first of all of quality.”¹⁶ Shaporin also sent a revised production plan, but by late November he had yet to submit any actual work. Frustrated, Malinovskaia wrote, “I’m staggered by your naïveté and, to put it delicately, the lightness of your relationship to your obligations.”¹⁷ Shaporin countered, “It would be immeasurably worse if I were to commit an unpleasantness to the cause we both serve, music, by creating an *immature* work... [That] is unworthy of a self-respecting artist.”¹⁸

Whether or not Malinovskaia took Shaporin’s words to heart, by this point she felt invested in *Polina* and preferred to cajole him rather than invoke the standard clause allowing her to terminate his contract for non-completion.¹⁹ Instead, she delayed the premiere of the opera, which Shaporin had now begun to call *Dekabristy*, until the next season.²⁰ When the score was still not forthcoming, Malinovskaia informed Shaporin the opera was off the schedule until she had something concrete, and closed with a financial threat, noting, “Keep in mind, being

¹⁶ RGALI, f.648, op.5, d.819, ll.2-3 (9 Oct 1931).

¹⁷ RALI, f.648, op.5, d.819, l.4 (189 Oct 1931); Grosheva, 371 n.82 (28 Nov 1931)

¹⁸ Levit, 310 (12 Dec 1931)

¹⁹ For example, see RGALI, f.2642, op.1, d. 543, l.22, a new contract between Shaporin and the Bolshoi dating from roughly 1940 (the document is undated; I have ascertained its date by surrounding documents in the file). Point four states, “In case of non-submission of scenes by the deadlines established in Point 1, the theater has the right to abrogate the contract. In this case, Shaporin is obligated to return to the theater all funds received up to that time.”

²⁰ Levit claims Shaporin began to call the opera *Dekabristy* in the early 1930s. However, a 1951 report written jointly by the Bolshoi’s History Sector and the Directorate of the Academy of Sciences’ Institute of History noted that a 1940 draft of the opera was still called *Polina Gebl’*, its name changing only after the war. See Levit, 320; RGALI, f.648, op.5, d.820, l.23 .

subject to the Central Executive Committee, the Bolshoi is a controlled entity, and our paying you a substantial monthly sum over an extended period without receipt of the commissioned opera may attract unpleasant consequences.”²¹ This letter had the intended effect. Shaporin quickly replied, explaining he had had a family emergency. He begged her to include *Dekabristy* in the 1933-34 repertoire. She acquiesced, but Shaporin missed his deadlines again. After a few more such interactions, and a futile attempt to get the Composers’ Union involved,²² Malinovskaia gave up on including *Dekabristy* in the repertoire for a specific season and resigned herself to an ever-extending series of contracts with functionally soft deadlines. Malinovskaia also involved herself in reviewing the opera’s content, as was her right, written into the Bolshoi’s standard contract.²³ For instance, in March 1932, Tolstoi wrote Shaporin that she “*categorically* rejects [the prologue in] Paris.”²⁴ The composer duly removed the scene, opening instead at The Estate.

Continuing this trend of personal intervention, in March 1936 the Bolshoi’s new director, V.I. Mutnykh, conductor Aleksandr Melik-Pashaev, and Boris Asaf’ev, as consultant, to check on Shaporin’s progress and review his future plans. Shaporin reported to Tolstoi with mild impatience that the three had “once again subjected the scenario and plan to discussion” and recommended a variety of alterations.²⁵ Around the same time, the Kirov sent its own committee, conductor Evgenii Mravinskii and poet Vsevolod Rozhdestvenskii. Interestingly,

²¹ RGALI, f.648, op.5, d.819, l.5 (20 Dec 1932).

²² See correspondence between the Bolshoi, Composers’ Union and Shaporin, RGALI, f.648, op.1, d.819, ll.8 (10 Sept 1933), 10 (26 Sept 1933), 12 (20 Oct 1933).

²³ See RGALI, f.2642, op.1, d.543, l.17, ll.23-26.

²⁴ Grosheva, 178.

²⁵ Levit, 315-318 (9 Apr 1936)

Rozhdestvenskii remembers being included as the librettist.²⁶ But while he had begun working with Shaporin some months before, he did so solely as a consultant, replacing Tolstoi only after the latter's death in 1945. Exhibiting subtle resistance, Shaporin masterfully avoided his guests' topic of interest. As Rozhdestvenskii recalled, "At morning tea... Mravinskii tried in vain to bring the conversation around to business. Iurii immediately took control and with joyful animation poured forth witty observations and entertaining stories having nothing to do with music."²⁷ Only when Shaporin felt ready did he show them the developing score for *Dekabristy*.

Not content to rely on such informal discussions, the theaters also undertook more formal analyses. As early as November 1934, the Bolshoi asked the production group it had assembled to submit a report on the libretto. This report found its ideological content weak and characters underdeveloped. It recommended a laundry list of alterations to existing scenes and proposed an outline for the still unwritten Act Three.²⁸ Again the Kirov followed suit, organizing an audition on October 25, 1936. It was well received, but this theater, too, requested alterations. In a letter to Tolstoi, the Directorate instructed him to "bring the opera's subject closer to historical truth, to events that now exist only as background."²⁹ Bound by their contracts, composer and librettist could only return to the drawing board and do their best to please.

²⁶ Grosheva, 306 ("The Kirov Theater decided to send... its then conductor E.A. Mravinskii and me, the librettist.") Rozhdestvenskii says only that this meeting took place one spring "long before the war." I date it to 1936 because Shaporin moved to Klin at the end of 1934, and A.V. Zhivago, another Klin resident, recorded Rozhdestvenskii's first visit to work with Shaporin on the libretto in his diary on 26 August 1935. See Levit, 313.

²⁷ Grosheva, 306.

²⁸ RGALI, f.648, op.5, d.820, l.1.

²⁹ Levit, 318 (20 Nov 1936). Kirov Director N. Grinfel'd and Artistic Director A. Pazovskii first informed Tolstoi, who was out of the country, of the audition and need for alterations to the libretto in a letter on 2 November 1936. See RGALI, f.2642, op.1, d.546, l.1. The second letter elaborated on the specific alterations the theater had in mind.

Similarly detailed assessments were drawn up by the theaters' production staffs at least twice more before World War II, often in contradiction with one another. For instance, one mid-1930s assessment, which went so far as to suggest literary source material, advocated reinstating the Paris Prologue but dropping *The Fair* because "the color of everyday life is overused and merely holds up the course of events, adding nothing new." In this conceptualization, Polina was to not only support Annenkov's revolutionary intentions, but "decisively and energetically call him to fulfill his duty" when fellow officers tried to dissuade him.³⁰ By contrast, a Bolshoi analysis just a few years later recommended starting the opera with *The Fair*, where Annenkov, now recently returned from Paris, would happen upon a meeting of the Northern Society, learn of their secret revolutionary plans, and join them.³¹ Here, Annenkov would also meet Polina, asks her to marry him, *then* take her to his mother's estate to ask her blessing, which would not be forthcoming. The document further recommended that rather than urging Annenkov on to revolution, Polina ought to try to dissuade him, and when she failed, "faint from despair."³² Such a cacophony of suggestions did little to ameliorate Shaporin's already-stubborn avoidance of what he considered outside interference in his and Tolstoi's creative work.

Searching for the Perfect Central Pair

Though the opera evolved to focus on the Decembrists as a vital historical revolutionary group, it originated as a tale of love between Annenkov and Polina, which always remained at its core. If this was to be so, the Bolshoi soon realized, if *Dekabristy*'s central pair were to be so inescapably prominent, they must be unimpeachable heroes, adhering to Soviet-inflected Decembrism in every way. Sadly, Annenkov and Polina were not ideal. Shaporin later claimed

³⁰ RGALI, f.2642, op.1, d.583, ll.2-3. This review is unsigned and undated. I have attributed it to either the Bolshoi or the Kirov because its author(s) makes frequent reference to issues of staging. I have dated it between 1935-1938 based on the scenes discussed.

³¹ RGALI, f.648, op.5, d.820, l.1a. This document is marked with a rough date: "1938-1941"

³² Ibid, l.2

even in the first days, “I started to doubt the expediency of building an opera on... Annenkov, as he didn’t play a decisive role in the movement.”³³ But in fact, this choice was not so strange. True, Annenkov was not a major player on Senate Square, but Polina’s story, the motivation for their selection, is certainly compelling. A commoner and foreign citizen, not yet officially married to Annenkov at the time of the revolution, she had less reason and faced more difficulty than the other celebrated Decembrists’ wives in following her spouse into exile. Yet, she did. Furthermore, beyond appearing in Decembrist writings, Polina left a record of her tumultuous life in her own memoir.³⁴ Nevertheless, as the opera’s emphasis shifted from the love story to the larger history of Decembrism, Annenkov’s minor role became increasingly problematic. So did Polina’s foreignness, as the Soviet Union retreated from internationalism in the late 1920s. Given the importance accorded the Decembrists’ wives as symbols of a high, particularly Russian morality, exemplified by Nikolai Nekrasov’s 1872 poem “Russian Women,”³⁵ in an epic-heroic opera about the Decembrists, could these wives really be represented by a foreigner?

This issue first arose in 1937, when the KDI, attempting to move things forward, appointed a committee of composers, musicologists, and historians to analyze the opera’s

³³ Quoted in Levit, 118.

³⁴ P.E. Annenkova. *Vospominaniia Poliny Annenkovoi*. ed. Sergei Gessen and An. Predtechenskii. Moscow: Mospoligraf, 1929. In their introduction, the editors note that Annenkova’s memoirs, dictated in 1861 in French to her daughter, who translated them into Russian in her transcription, were first published in the periodical *Russkaia starina* in 1888, then reprinted as a separate volume in 1915 (P.E. Annenkova. *Zapiski zheny dekabrista P.E. Annenkovoi (Pauline Gueble)*. St. Petersburg: Prometei, 1915). The 1929 edition restores passages excised from the 1915 edition and includes additional materials, including a brief memoir by Polina’s daughter, Ol’ga Ivanovna Ivanova.

³⁵ Nikolai Nekrasov, “Russkie zhenshchiny” in *Polnoe sobranie stikhotvorenii v trekh tomakh*, t.2 (Leningrad: Sovetskii pisatel’, 1967), 309-372. Written mainly in the first-person voices of Princesses Ekaterina Trubetskaia and Mariia Volkonskaia, who voluntarily followed their Decembrist husbands into Siberian exile, Nekrasov’s famous poem illustrates their unwavering determination to follow the difficult but morally just path of self-sacrifice and enshrines them as shining exemplars of the nobility and virtue of Russian women.

progress. Their report decried “distortion of historical facts and Decembrist characteristics,” and placed blame the on Annenkov, noting, “One cannot show Annenkov’s revolutionary actions; he had none.”³⁶ In a feature article the following year, *Sovetskaia muzyka* agreed, asserting Annenkov was so romantic a character, “one hardly believes in [his] internal connection to Decembrism!”³⁷ Such criticism created a major conceptual problem for Shaporin, who, characteristically, delayed responding.

Yet this was far from the last he would hear about *Dekabristy*’s central characters. In mid-1950, the Bolshoi finally received the complete piano-vocal score and began rehearsals.³⁸ Following Tolstoi’s death in 1945, the libretto was now in the hands of famed poet Vsevolod Rozhdestvenskii, with whom Shaporin got along substantially better creatively.³⁹ To assuage its fear of censure for historical inaccuracy, the Bolshoi, following the KDI’s lead, began consulting with historians. In his review, Professor Petr Zaionchkovskii raised a red flag concerning “the third-rate Decembrist Annenkov and... the Frenchwoman, daughter of a royalist.”⁴⁰ A Bolshoi memo soon echoed this concern over “the second-rate, atypical Annenkov... [and] the self-sacrifice and patriotism typical of... Decembrist wives formulated only through a Frenchwoman.”⁴¹ True, Annenkov advanced in this assessment from third-rate to second, but this was still far from acceptable, and the revelation that Polina’s background was not actually

³⁶ Levit, 318-319.

³⁷ A. Lepin, “*Dekabristy*: Opera Iu. Shaporina,” *Sovetskaia muzyka* 6:7 (July 1938), 26.

³⁸ RGALI, f.2642, op.1, d.543, l.15. This contract, dated September 29, 1932, prolongs the original, the date of which is given as March 21, 1931; RGALI, f.648, op.5, d.822, l.7: Act dated March 28, 1950, certifies Shaporin has submitted and the Bolshoi has accepted the full piano-vocal score for *Dekabristy*.

³⁹ The Bolshoi formally contracted with Rozhdestvenskii for the libretto in 1947. See RGALI, f.648, op.5, d.819, l.34.

⁴⁰ RGALI, f.648, op.5, d.820, l.16. This letter is dated only 1950; context places it shortly after June of that year. This is the first mention of Polina’s father’s true political inclination in documents related to the opera.

⁴¹ RGALI, f.648, op.5, d.820, l.5

revolutionary only added to the issue of her foreignness.⁴² Clearly, both would have to go. The men and women of the Decembrist Revolution were simply too important historically to be personified by anyone but the most heroic – and Russian – representatives of their milieu.

The Bolshoi began dealing concretely with the Annenkov-and-Polina problem the following January, when it brought in a second author, Vsevolod Ivanov, to collaborate on further revisions.⁴³ In a meeting between Shaporin, Zaionchkovskii, KDI Assistant Director Ivan Anisimov, consultant Boris Pokrovskii, and Composers' Union head Tikhon Khrennikov, two options were considered: replacing Annenkov with a fictional character or fictionalizing him to become more heroic.⁴⁴ Finding the former more palatable, they agreed to exchange the real Annenkov for the newly-imagined Dmitrii Kamenkov. Polina, in turn, was transformed into an imaginary Russian woman, Elena Orlova, a solution presaged in *Sovetskaia muzyka*'s 1937 feature, which declared, "By type, Polina is a Russian girl... an image engraved in Russian literature and opera."⁴⁵

On April 19, 1951, the *Ot vsego serdtsa* scandal broke with the publication in *Pravda* of an unsigned editorial savaging composer, librettist, and the Bolshoi for Socialist Realist failure.⁴⁶ Five days later, the Council of Ministers passed Resolution no. 1337, firing KDI head Pavel Lebedev and Bolshoi Director Solodovnikov and ordering the Bolshoi's new director, Anisimov,

⁴² Polina's father's true political inclination is revealed in the first pages of her memoir, where she writes, "My father was an aristocrat and a royalist... he served in the king's dragoons... In 1802, my father, with the protection and solicitation of various people, was finally taken into the service of Napoleon I." Annenkova, 32-33. The Soviet edition of the memoir was not published until 1929, four years after Tolstoi and Shchegolev penned their libretto. It would seem they either did not have access to the 1915 edition at the time of writing and forgot this detail, or considered it permissible to reimagine Polina's backstory in a work of fiction.

⁴³ RGALI, f.648, op.5, d.819, l.63.

⁴⁴ RGALI, f.648, op.5, d.820, ll.18-19.

⁴⁵ Lepin, "Dekabristy, Opera Iu. Shaporina," 25.

⁴⁶ Neudachnaia opera," *Pravda* (19 Apr 1951), 2-3.

to “report to the Government on... *Dekabristy* and not include it in the repertoire without Government permission.”⁴⁷ In response, the Bolshoi decided to assess its work so far. In a hastily-scheduled meeting on April 20, a spooked Pokrovskii announced he still had doubts about the hero, even as Kamenkov. Though historian-consultants had deemed a composite character acceptable, “provided the era and its ideas are properly reflected,”⁴⁸ all present supported appointing a special commission to “certify the libretto’s historical correctness with the Central Committee.”⁴⁹ As soloist Dmitrii Mchedeli reminded his colleagues, Zhdanov himself had assured the theater, “the door of the Central Committee is always open to you.”⁵⁰ Such openness was mutually beneficial, providing the Central Committee with close control over the Bolshoi’s repertoire and the theater with a means of self-defense, should scandal strike again.

Rather than wait for this commission, which apparently was never convened, likely forgotten after the April 24 firings, the Bolshoi proceeded with its own assessment. On May 8, the theater gave a closed performance, inviting composers, musicologists, historians, literary scholars, and representatives of the Central Committee and KDI, followed by a thorough discussion. For this performance, Annenkov and Polina kept their original names, which all now agreed was a mistake. As musicologist Aleksei Ogolevets explained, “Realism demands a generalization of the most typical phenomena. Generalization of an atypical phenomenon is anti-realistic... If the opera keeps the name *Dekabristy*, we can’t... leave Annenkov and Polina as main characters, for they are atypical.”⁵¹ Ogolevets’ terminology was no accident; typicality was a watchword of Socialist Realist aesthetics, albeit curiously defined. As Dobrenko explains,

⁴⁷ RGALI, f.648, op.5, d.182, ll.4-5.

⁴⁸ RGALI, f.648, op.5, d.193, l.5.

⁴⁹ Ibid., l.3.

⁵⁰ Ibid., l.5.

⁵¹ RGALI, f.648, op.5, d.194, ll.60-61.

Soviet officials understood typicality as “by no means connected to being widespread in ‘life’... but rather that which ‘corresponds to the essence of a particular social force.’”⁵² In other words, while Annenkov and Polina’s unusualness was problematic, the real issue for them as Socialist Realist heroes was their inadequacy as exemplary representatives of Decembrism.

Others concurred, complaining of the historical Annenkov’s passivity and lamenting the absence of famous Decembrist wives Princesses Trubetskaia and Volkonskaia, the heroines of Nekrasov’s poem. To this complaint, at least, Shaporin had a ready answer: his opera concerned the Northern Society, whereas Volkonskii was active in the South, and adding the Trubetskoi, would overburden an already character-heavy work. As for Annenkov, the composer admitted, “Maybe long ago I should have repudiated him.” But he had been loath to do so after discovering a glowing description by “the great democrat and poet Shevchenko. I sometimes believe poets more than historians, forgive me that.”⁵³ Nevertheless, Shaporin agreed to leave Annenkov and Polina behind. He soon wrote the theater he had decided to replace Annenkov with “Dmitrii Shchepin-Rostovskii, who was active on Senate Square [and] for Polina substitute a Russian woman,”⁵⁴ easily done, he claimed, because Polina’s music was not characterized by French intonation.⁵⁵ Finally, the Annenkov-and-Polina problem appeared solved.

⁵² Dobrenko, 70. The quoted phrases are taken from Central Committee member Georgii Malenkov’s report to the Nineteenth Party Congress (5-14 October 1952), which sought to clarify the definition of “typicality,” which had been an issue since the early days of Socialist Realism in the mid-1930s.

⁵³ RGALI, f.648, op.5, d.194, ll.97-98. As a Ukrainian, Shaporin was particularly drawn to Taras Shevchenko, a Ukrainian national cultural hero.

⁵⁴ RGALI, f.2642, op.1, d.187, l.2.

⁵⁵ According to Shaporin’s own account, in an early draft of the opera Polina’s music had been characterized by French intonation, and she had even sung the French revolutionary song *La Carmagnole*. By 1951, these aspects of her musical characterization had been entirely written out. The draft of the score with French intonation is lost. See RGALI, f.648, op.5, d.194, l.99; Levit, 324 on manuscript’s loss.

In the end, even Shchepin was not ideal. As a Bolshoi staffer noted in a late-1951 report, “Shchepin can’t be considered a typical Decembrist. He sharply differentiated himself in the revolution, killing five men... Besides, onstage this finds no expression. Shchepin in the opera does not correspond to the historical Shchepin.”⁵⁶ This commentary expresses two ostensibly contradictory concerns, both crucial to Socialist Realism: first, that Shchepin, like Annenkov, was atypical, and second, that Shchepin’s *image* lacked historicity, failing to display the traits that made him distressingly unique. Seemingly, the theater would either have to highlight his individuality, which would be more historically accurate but make him a less desirable hero, or search yet again for a historical Decembrist who better fit the bill. Fortunately, in February 1952 historian Militsa Nechkina provided a way out in a review displaying her keen understanding of Socialist Realist aesthetics. “The libretto does diverge from real events,” she wrote.

[Shchepin] is characterized as a longstanding member of the secret organization... The real Shchepin was attracted to Decembrism on the eve... and acted more in the name of Konstantin’s “legality” than leading Decembrist ideas... But the opera’s goal isn’t immortalizing a *given* Decembrist; its task is... to give a typical hero, the image of a movement... Shchepin in the libretto must be understood as a general, collective Decembrist image, not the image specifically of Shchepin.⁵⁷

Thus, whereas Annenkov’s image had been plagued by faithful portrayal of his atypicality, it was of no concern Shchepin’s bore little resemblance to him, because Shchepin himself was not whom the opera sought to portray. Furthermore, it also mattered little that the historical Shchepin was atypical, because he served only as the root of a generalized, ideal Socialist Realist hero. And in contrast to Annenkov’s other problem, his French wife, Shchepin had no wife, making insertion of the fictitious Elena even easier. At last *Dekabristy* had an acceptable central pair, of whom it gave an aesthetically, if not historically, accurate rendering.

⁵⁶ RGALI, f.648, op.5, d.820, l.23ob.

⁵⁷ Ibid., ll.53-54, emphasis in the original.

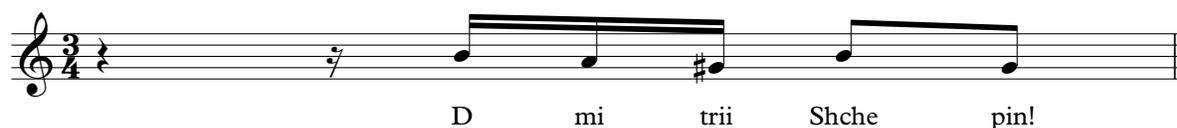
Despite Shaporin’s assurances, replacing the central pair required substantial recomposition. Shchepin was easier; Shaporin merely exchanged one name for the other, changing a few notes to accommodate its different rhythm [Fig. 1A-1B].

Figure 1A (Annenkov /Kamenkov as hero, 1951 score)



SOURCE: RGALI, f.2642, op.1, d.9, l.53ob.

Figure 1B (Shchepin as hero, 1953 score)



SOURCE: Iurii Shaporin Iurii Shaporin. *Dekabristy: Opera v 4-kh aktakh, 10 kartinakh. Klavir* (Moscow: Muzfond SSSR, 1953), 94.

Elena, however, was a genuinely new character, requiring a new history and motivation. In the final version, Shaporin reconstructed her as the daughter of Shchepin’s mother’s neighbor, an impoverished noblewoman, whom Shchepin encounters at the Estate arriving with her mother to plead for a loan.⁵⁸ As before, it becomes clear he has declared his love, but she has refused him. Whereas Polina brushed him off brusquely and departed, Elena remains with Shchepin while the older women exit. A classic damsel in distress, in a newly composed exchange Elena does not hide her love, but weeps, “Oh God! Why do you torment my heart again?”⁵⁹ [Fig. 2A-2B] Just then, Shchepin’s mother returns and, ascertaining the situation, sends both Orlovas packing. When Shchepin makes to follow, she returns to the original music with altered text, mocking him for considering marriage to a woman without means. The number ends with new music, over

⁵⁸ The following summary is taken from Shaporin. *Dekabristy*, 38-52.

⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, 42-46.

which Shchepin cries despairingly, “I’m suffocating here, my soul aches!” Thus, Shchepin maintains the moral high ground, while his relationship with Elena is left more uncertain than previously.

Figure 2A (The Estate, 1930s score: Annenkov and Polina)

The image displays a musical score for a vocal piece. It is divided into two systems. The first system features a vocal line for Annenkov and a piano accompaniment. The vocal line is in 3/4 time and begins with a rest followed by a quarter note. The lyrics are: "De spair takes hold of me when I see you with out a care at". The piano accompaniment consists of a right hand with chords and a left hand with a simple bass line. The second system also features a vocal line for Annenkov and a piano accompaniment. The vocal line starts with a measure rest, followed by a quarter note, and then a half note. The lyrics are: "all for me, so far from me What re mains for me?". The piano accompaniment continues with similar chordal textures. The score is written in a key with one sharp (F#) and a 3/4 time signature.

SOURCE: RGALI, f.2642, op.1, d.1, ll.33-33ob.

Figure 2A (continued)

8

Polina

Annenkov

Piano

To shoot my self or the de - eadly Cau ca sus.

11

Polina

Piano

have busi ness here. All ow me to pass to her dress ing room.

Detailed description: The image shows a musical score for three parts: Polina (soprano), Annenkov (tenor), and Piano. The score is divided into two systems. The first system starts at measure 8. Polina's part has a whole rest for the first two measures, followed by a quarter note G4 in the third measure. Annenkov's part features a triplet of eighth notes in the first measure, followed by a quarter note G4, a quarter note F#4, and a quarter note E4 in the second measure. The piano accompaniment consists of chords in the right hand and single notes in the left hand. The second system starts at measure 11. Polina's part has a triplet of eighth notes in the first measure, followed by a quarter rest, a quarter note G4, and a triplet of eighth notes in the second measure. Annenkov's part has a quarter note G4, a quarter note F#4, and a quarter note E4 in the first measure. The piano accompaniment continues with chords and single notes. The score concludes with a double bar line.

Figure 2B (The Estate, 1953 score: Shchepin and Elena)

Shchepin

You had for bade me to see you, E le na! I sub mit

Piano

4

Shchepin

ted to you. But in this un ex pect ed me et ing

Piano

7

Shchepin

it's not with in my power to con trol my beat

Piano

SOURCE: Iurii Shaporin. *Dekabristy: Opera v 4-kh aktakh, 10 kartinakh. Klavir* (Moscow: Muzfond SSSR, 1953), 42-43.

Figure 2B (continued)

9

Elena

Oh, dear God!

Shchepin

ing heart.

Piano

10

Elena

Why do you torment my heart a gain?

Piano

Shaporin also substantially altered Elena's appearance at the Fair. In the 1951 score, he removed the gambling scene, the original motivation for her encounter with Annenkov, transforming it into a chance meeting, with dialogue recycled from the now-excised Moscow scene. In newly-composed material, Annenkov exulted in Polina's confession of love, but despaired they must part so he could join the revolution. Polina supported him, though less vividly, and they concluded with the scrapped Moscow scene's duet. In the final, 1953 version, their meeting suffers from an even less believable motivation, played out in a new vignette wedged after the opening choral number. Rather than encounter Elena by chance, Shchepin now leaves the Decembrists' meeting in a Tavern to search for her, though he has no reason to believe

she would be at the Fair. Luckily, she is, and swoons upon seeing him, just as he returns indoors. In another new musical creation, Elena writes Shchepin a note, vividly depicted in sixteen measures of symphonic “scribbling,” which a gypsy delivers.⁶⁰ The lovers finally meet when Shchepin reemerges holding Elena’s note. Over a musical setting similar to 1951’s, Elena explains she ran away to join him. The scene proceeds as before, with one final alteration. At a post-run-through discussion on June 25, 1952, historian Boris Syroechkovskii advised making Elena more revolutionary, to better connect the love story to Decembrism.⁶¹ Glad to restore her political credentials, lost in the transition from Polina to Elena, Shaporin complied. In the final version, when Shchepin announces he must leave, Elena supports him with renewed firmness, declaring over a rewritten melody, “Your duty calls you. Go!... I am always with you!”⁶² The scene concludes with the Moscow duet.

As in *The Estate*, the shift from Polina to Elena is not only musical, but psychological. Though Polina had been softened from the 1930s’ disciplined businesswoman to 1951’s practical shopgirl, she remained a strong, self-directed character. As Elena, however, she lost much of her agency, appearing first as a mere appendage to her mother, then a star-crossed lover, helplessly compelled by passion to abandon her home for Shchepin. Herein lies a second, unspoken factor making Elena a more suitable heroine and linking her more closely to Nekrasov’s Decembrist wives. Yes, she is Russian; she is even noble. But more importantly, she poses no competition to Shchepin or the Decembrists as a compelling moral locus of the opera. Like Nekrasov’s Trubetskaia and Volkonskaia, the force of her will emerges only to overcome obstacles to

⁶⁰ Ibid., 188 m.6-190m.5. In using the term “gypsy,” I follow Shaporin’s designation of the role. Stesha and the “gypsy” chorus are stylized characters representing the popular Russian folklore type called “gypsies” and bear little if any resemblance to actual Roma culture.

⁶¹ RGALI, f.962 (Komitet po delam iskusstv), op.3, d.2414, l.25.

⁶² Shaporin, *Dekabristy*, 208.

supporting her husband. Irrational and emotion-bound, Elena emerges as the perfect non-threatening heroine for an opera about the Decembrists.

Fostering the People

Once the opera had heroes, it needed people: the Russian *narod*, specifically. According to the dictates of Socialist Realism, all Soviet operas, regardless of storyline, ought to be written for, and about, the Soviet people, or their worker and peasant antecedents.⁶³ Thus, while the *narod* was not the most prominent group in *Dekabristy*, its correct portrayal, from an ideological perspective, was crucial to the opera's success. For historical reasons, the *narod* could not drive the action; the Russian peasantry of 1825 was neither politicized nor organized, and furthermore, the Decembrist Revolution was a strictly elite affair. Nevertheless, it was essential that Shaporin depict the *narod* as bearing within itself the ability, if still latent, to undertake future revolutionary action. As the Bolshoi and its consultants knew from past failures, if *Dekabristy* was to gain official acceptance, Shaporin would have to tread a fine line in his operatic representation of the *narod*.

Concern over this issue generated attention throughout *Dekabristy*'s long production process. On one hand, the opera's many commentators were eager that it portray the societal ills of early 19th-century Russia, including the harsh serfdom of noble estates and punishing regime of 25-year conscription and forced military resettlement named for Count Aleksei Arakcheev, chief military advisor to Aleksandr I, both of which helped inspire the Decembrist Revolution. On the other hand, they were anxious not to depict the masses as too quiescent; rather, they urged Shaporin to highlight their revolutionary potential. Added to this was the issue of the Decembrists' relationship to the *narod*. Lenin had famously declared, "The circle of

⁶³ For more on the importance of populism, or *narodnost*, to Socialist Realism, see Chapter 1.

revolutionaries was narrow. They were terribly far from the *narod*.⁶⁴ The opera would have to balance this cardinal assertion of political distance with the equally vital Soviet understanding of the Decembrists as acting in the *narod*'s name, if separately from it.

In 1937, the KDI's expert commission raised this last issue, suggesting emphasizing this disconnect by depicting the outbreak of a popular revolt on Senate Square, which "paralyzed" the Decembrists.⁶⁵ Shaporin responded in his 1951 score by expanding the small role Tolstoi gave a group of workers, heckling tsarist officials, throwing logs, and vowing loyalty to Konstantin.⁶⁶ Shaporin's *narod*, now identified as construction workers building St. Isaac's Cathedral, is more vocally revolutionary, cheering the Decembrists' regiments and urging, "Brothers, stand firm! For the people's truth!" Now serving the traditional role of chorus, they comment on events, shouting at the Metropolitan, cheering Miloradovich's shooting, throwing building materials, and reacting with horror when Nikolai's artillery arrives.⁶⁷ This active, engaged crowd seemed a positive development, establishing sympathy between the Decembrists and *narod*, a pathway by which the latter drew revolutionary lessons from the former. But as Bolshoi Director Solodovnikov pointed out in October 1949, the scene's historical politics were not so simple. "The Decembrist Revolution was noble ... not mass," he wrote, echoing Lenin.

The circle of revolutionaries was terribly small and far from the *narod*... Now it looks like the *narod* is... already one with the Decembrists... This is untrue and hinders revelation of the Decembrists' tragedy... The *narod* learned from these events... but were passive and disunited.⁶⁸

⁶⁴ Lenin, "Pamiati Gerzena," 261.

⁶⁵ Levit, 319.

⁶⁶ Tolstoi and Shchegolev, 51-52.

⁶⁷ RGALI, f.2642, op.1, d.10, ll.75ob-77, 85ob-87, 92-101ob.

⁶⁸ RGALI, f.648, op.5, d.819, l.57. The alacrity with which Bolshoi staff and consultants repeated Lenin's formulation is a testament to its canonical place in Soviet historical education. Though the complete orchestrated score is dated 1951, Shaporin submitted it over the course of 1949 and 1950, first in piano-vocal, then orchestral score. Solodovnikov commented on the piano-vocal score of Senate Square before the entire work was submitted.

For Solodovnikov, to place these workers in too close relationship to the Decembrists was a double sin, putting the cart before the horse historically, and worse, transgressing the Soviet explanation for the Decembrists' failure: blinded by class prejudice, they viewed the *narod* only as objects of their revolution, not partners in it.

Yet, ideologically, it was also unacceptable to portray the *narod* as passive witnesses to history. As the opera evolved, the Bolshoi, while heeding Lenin, increasingly emphasized the Soviet view of the Decembrist Revolution as a bourgeois-democratic precursor to the popular Revolution of 1917. This entailed moving away from Solodovnikov's caution and accentuating the Decembrist-*narod* connection. In May 1950, consultant S.M. Oreshnikov alerted Solodovnikov to historian Nikolai Druzhinin's review. Highlighting Druzhinin's approval of the engaged crowd, Oreshnikov added, "witnesses establish Nikolai met with logs and shouts from the construction site."⁶⁹ With expert verification and historical documents on their side, surely they could proceed boldly in depicting a revolutionarily sympathetic *narod*. At the May 11, 1951 discussion, this idea generated greater resonance, with several speakers advocating a more active crowd. Historian Evgenii Tarle mused circumspectly, "The *narod* didn't support the revolution. This was no *pugachevshchina*... But here, too, they participated."⁷⁰ Less shy, musicologist Iosif Ryzhkin urged Shaporin to take his depiction further by adding "a popular mass... oppressed by autocracy but bearing great possibility for revolutionary explosion. The fundamental conflict is the *narod*'s with tsarism. The Decembrists' revolution, despite their isolation from the *narod*,

⁶⁹ RGALI, f.648, op.5, d.820, l.14, 13ob.

⁷⁰ RGALI, f.648, op.5, d.194, l.17. *Pugachevshchina* refers to the massive peasant revolt led by Emel'ian Pugachev from 1773 to 1775, during the reign of Catherine II, supported by Cossacks, peasants, and schismatics. Pugachev lived on in popular memory as a hero to the peasants and bogeyman to the nobility through the Imperial period, and was celebrated by the Soviet state. Paul Avrich, "Pugachev," *Russian Rebels, 1600-1800* (NY: Norton, 1972), 179-254.

was an expression of this.”⁷¹ Indeed, it seemed Shaporin could, and should, do more to showcase the *narod*’s political consciousness and responsiveness to Decembrism.

Still, there was danger in overemphasis, which could rob the *narod* of their independent revolutionary agency, a crucial factor in the progression from bourgeois to proletarian revolution. On this point, the Bolshoi and its consultants focused on two scenes prominently featuring the chorus: The Estate and The Fair. During the opera’s early years, when its story centered on Annenkov and Polina’s romance, Anna Ivanovna’s serfs attracted little notice, functioning primarily as the downtrodden objects of her caprice. As late as January 1950, in a review for the Bolshoi, Druzhinin gave their portrayal an expert’s stamp of approval, averring the opera “correctly depicts the historical background... in the images of the serf-owner Annenkova... and the serfgirls languishing in slavery.”⁷² However, in an internal memo a few months later, the theater’s production staff expressed reserve. They praised Shaporin’s rendering of suffering under serfdom, particularly in the serfgirls’ newly-added song “*Akh, talan,*” sung in The Estate and repeated at various points as a leitmotivic reminder of the *narod*’s continuing misery, and his use of folk intonations. But they also expressed concern over the absence of “the social roots of Decembrism,”⁷³ that is, Arakcheevism, and suggested Shaporin write a new prologue to demonstrate this aspect – despite noting only paragraphs earlier that the opera was far too long.

By the time of Shaporin’s January 1951 meeting with Khrennikov, Zaionchkovskii, Pokrovskii and Anisimov, this demand had become more pronounced, with the notes scolding, “Russia in the 1820s was a military-feudal monarchy. The corporal punishment regime... and the

⁷¹ Ibid., ll.27-28.

⁷² RGALI, f.648, op.5, d.820, l.14 (12 Jan 1950).

⁷³ Ibid., l.5.

burden of military service find no expression in the libretto.”⁷⁴ Loath to add substantial new material, Shaporin lamely suggested inserting “a soldier” in *The Estate* and including a vignette depicting the sale of serfs in *The Fair*. But the other four closed ranks, insisting on a new, full-fledged military prologue.⁷⁵ It seemed this extra scene would have to be composed, along with the many other alterations the composer was now required to implement.

Still, by late spring Shaporin had done little to amend *Dekabristy*. At the May 11 discussion, in the wake of the *Ot vsego serdtsa* scandal and with all the urgency it entailed, Shaporin again faced criticism for his depiction of the *narod*, now attacking not only the lack of military atmosphere, but also his portrait of serfdom, which had previously been approved. Speaking first, Bolshoi singer Kamenshikov declared, “We don’t have the right to present an opera on a historical, political theme without depicting the *narod*. But the *narod* is missing... The composer imagines them as slaves, groaning under serfdom, expressing their despair in sad songs – the view of the liberal intelligentsia, nothing like our Soviet view.”⁷⁶ He further criticized the lack of Arakcheevism, which he cited as the primary source of the Decembrists’ righteous anger, as they were army officers. Finally, he pronounced *The Estate* far too frivolous to depict the true horrors of serfdom. He suggested adding new scenes depicting serfs being sold, traded for dogs, or even lost at cards – the last of which had been included in the 1930s version but was excised from the 1951 version to accommodate the change in Annenkov’s character.

Others agreed Shaporin’s depiction of the *narod* was lacking, particularly in terms of its political consciousness. In searching for a solution, historian Zaionchkovskii again suggested an Arakcheevist prologue. Meanwhile, his colleague, Evgenii Tarle, first appeared to equivocate,

⁷⁴ RGALI, f.648, op.5, d.820, l.18.

⁷⁵ Ibid., l.19ob.

⁷⁶ RGALI, f.648, op.5, d.194, l.5.

musings, “You can’t show the *narod* not only suffering but fighting, especially when they didn’t fight.”⁷⁷ Yet, in the end, he concluded Shaporin must add not merely prologue, but an entire new first act providing a full exposition of the social conditions inspiring Decembrism. In response, Shaporin offered that when an orderly arrived to summon Annenkov at the close of The Estate, “I can speak to the 25 years of service not in a sociological sense but in images,”⁷⁸ through an exchange with Annenkov. But this half-hearted suggestion was manifestly insufficient. Shaporin would have to make substantial changes to the score.

If Shaporin was unenthusiastic about such revisions, his new co-author, Vsevolod Ivanov, was eager to begin. In an August letter to the Bolshoi, he announced the opera’s main theme must be “the heroic fight of the *narod* and leading progressive forces of Russian society... to liberate the masses from autocratic oppression.”⁷⁹ Among his ambitious proposed alterations, Ivanov recommended replacing The Estate with a scene in a military colony, which would

symbolize... Arakcheevism. Since the action develops among soldiers, we must show where Prussian, drill-sergeant, heartless militarism led: to reaction and anti-patriotism. Set against a military settlement, we can more easily show the soldiers’ fate and the growing consciousness of the progressive officers who became Decembrists.⁸⁰

This was more than Shaporin could stomach, and the change of venue was never realized.

Fortunately for the composer, after mid-1951, enthusiasm for an exhibition of Arakcheevism subsided. But while the focus shifted, concern over the portrayal of the *narod* in The Estate continued. Apparently, Shaporin still had yet to find the right balance.

Nearly a year later, after the full run-through on June 14, 1952, a new wrinkle emerged: discussants began to complain not so much about the portrayal of serfdom as the serf girls’

⁷⁷ Ibid., ll.16-17.

⁷⁸ Ibid., l.99.

⁷⁹ RGALI, f.2642, op.1, d.583, l.6.

⁸⁰ Ibid., ll.11-12.

behavior. As M.N. Zhukov put it, “They sit and sing and don’t do anything. It would be more plausible if they worked.”⁸¹ Stage director Nikolai Okhlopkov objected, asserting heatedly, “You say... I must give them work, so it’s clear they’re serfgirls. I disagree. That’s vulgarization... They aren’t gathered for work. They’re sing about their unhappiness.”⁸² Positioning his approach as truly Socialist Realist by opposing it to naturalist vulgarization was an interesting tactic, but it failed to stem the criticism.⁸³ At the broader discussion three days later, historian Nechkina raised similar concerns. While praising the opera’s musical and political qualities, she opined, “At The Estate there are too many serfgirls. The furnishings are too rich... and the serfgirls are too vigorous.”⁸⁴ In other words, ensconced in implausibly luxurious surroundings, the serfgirls sang their woe with a full-throatedness incommensurate with true laboring oppression.

It would seem this line of inquiry provided Shaporin with a reprieve, as staging was not his responsibility, but at the meeting’s close, Anisimov cleverly returned the ball to his court, reminding participants, “Don’t forget, today we still didn’t perform the prologue Shaporin is preparing.”⁸⁵ His bid to remind the Bolshoi’s consultants that stagecraft would always be secondary to content was apparently successful. At the next meeting, a week later, discussants focused more squarely on the opera’s ideological message. For example, Druzhinin noted the problem was not that Shchepina’s estate was lavish, but that its brilliance overpowered the message that such lavishness among the nobility, while the *narod* suffered in abject poverty, was an injustice and incitement to Decembrism. Musicologist Tatiana Livanova took this thought further, noting, “The first scene remains unsatisfying, not because of its fabulous decoration...

⁸¹ RGALI, f.648, op.5, d.236, l.7 (14 June 1952).

⁸² Ibid., ll.18-19.

⁸³ For more on realism vs. naturalism and the issue of depicting labor onstage, see Chapter 4.

⁸⁴ RGALI, f.648, op.5, d.236, ll.33-34.

⁸⁵ Ibid., ll.52, 55.

But the demonstration that the revolutionary impulse is growing, that Shchepin is becoming a Decembrist... is not shown in the necessary measure.”⁸⁶ She urged Shaporin to link the scene’s vignettes more closely in a coherent dramaturgical line, suggesting Tchaikovsky as a model.

For their part, historians Zaionchkovskii and Syroechkovskii addressed ideology by returning to the question of the serfs’ agency, still unresolved since Kamenshikov’s comments a year earlier. Leaning on his professional expertise in addressing “points that raise doubts among historians,” Zaionchkovskii cautioned, “In the first scene, the serfs are completely submissive. Don’t forget, this was a period of serf revolts. Here you should have some protest.”⁸⁷

Interestingly, this suggestion contradicted Tarle’s warning a year earlier against portraying rebellious actions that had not actually occurred. By June 1952, discussion of *Dekabristy* had evolved to the point where fictionalization in service of ideological purity had become possible.

In the end, Shaporin successfully held out against the prologue. Anisimov’s allusion in June 1952 is specific enough that Shaporin likely drafted one, but it was apparently never completed and did not become part of the final score. Instead, for the 1953 version of *Dekabristy*, he composed a 72-measure orchestral introduction, a far cry from the proposed full-scale exposition of Arakcheevism, or even Ivanov’s suggestion to revise the original prologue in Paris. The Introduction leaves it to the director’s discretion what, if any action to stage; it contains no directions other than a style indication of *marziale* in measure 5, after a short fanfare. And while its tone is indeed martial, it dips into 3/4 meter for the middle third of its length and concluding in a slower, heroic-elegiac ballad mode.⁸⁸ Thus, in the Introduction, Shaporin answer his critics in his own way. The goal of the prologue so insistently pushed by the Bolshoi, KDI,

⁸⁶ RGALI, f.962, op.3, d.2414, l.33.

⁸⁷ Ibid., l.18.

⁸⁸ Shaporin, *Dekabristy*, 5-9.

and consultants was to create a view of the social elements contributing to Decembrism: militarization, feudalism, and the young officers' political awakening after the Napoleonic wars. Shaporin's Introduction fulfills these goals, if purely musically. Though brief, its motifs of militarism, drama, nobility, heroic sacrifice and hope for the future are unmistakable.

Shaporin further made major alterations to *The Estate*. He had already substantially restructuring the scene for the 1951 version, adding the serfgirls' mournful song "*Akh, talan*"; excising a long, pointless song-and-dance interlude; and transplanting the Postman's Song, "*Oi, vy versty,*" to the end of *The Tavern*, where Bestuzhev now sang it.⁸⁹ For the 1953 version, between further altering his portrayal of the serfgirls and making the revisions necessary to transform Polina into Elena, he almost completely rewrote what remained of his original conception. Neatly answering the demands that he portray serfdom less frivolously, Shaporin constructed a vignette on the ashes of a scene of the serfgirls dressing Anna Ivanovna (now Ol'ga Mironovna), in which she sells some serfs, inserting the new text over the old when possible and making alterations as necessary.⁹⁰ The Bolshoi was pleased with this invention and touted it specially in a report to the KDI in late 1951.⁹¹ Shaporin also revised another vignette, in which Anna Ivanovna originally sentenced two serfgirls to bread and water for eating onions. In the final version, he threaded the needle of displaying serf labor without resorting to naturalism while again highlighting the horrors of feudal power by having the girls sentenced, far more seriously, to whipping when a cap they had sewn did not meet their mistress' standards.⁹²

⁸⁹ RGALI, f.2642, op.1, d.1, ll.1-43; RGALI, f.2642, op.1, d.9, ll.1-43, passim.

⁹⁰ RGALI, f.2642, op.1, d.9, ll.1lob-12ob.

⁹¹ RGALI, f.648, op.5, d.820, l.26; l.30 for the specifics of the new vignette.

⁹² RGALI, f.2642, op.1, d.9, ll.15ob-17ob; Shaporin, *Dekabristy*, 23-25. The 1951 score bears the marks of later alteration. For clarification of the original formulation, see also RGALI, f.2642, op.1, d.1, ll.9-10ob.

Surprisingly, there is little change to the serfgirls themselves in the 1953 version. If anything, their role is reduced; they sing fewer songs and express no resistance to Ol'ga Mironovna or their lot in life. Rather than fundamentally alter their affect and risk charges of historical inaccuracy, Shaporin followed Livanova's suggestion from June 25 to demonstrate the changing political awareness of the younger nobility through Shchepin's reaction to events at The Estate. Whereas the 1951 version preserved a scenario in which the hero sulked and, when prodded, launched into a lengthy speech about his experiences in France, the 1953 version tightened this material and subtly shifted its aim. Here, Shchepin enters already exclaiming, "All this slavery, this arbitrary rule in my fatherland... How unbearably hard to discover anew the shame of my native country!" When Ol'ga Mironovna, as before, accuses him of becoming a Voltairean and assures him the tsar himself cares about the *narod*, rather than lecture her about the difference between Aleksandr I's early days and the present, as before, he shouts, "Oh, Mama! He cares about chains... A persecutor of liberty rules us. Tyrant, whose name has become hateful!"⁹³ The exchange is shorter but more effective, with Shchepin transformed from moody, self-righteous son of privilege to a passionate, world-wise patriot at the height of his powers, concerned not for the fate of the entire *narod* and the honor of Russia. Finally, Shaporin had succeeded in bringing the opera's length more under control and, crucially, in satisfying his many consultants concerning the portrayal of the *narod* under serfdom.

Unfortunately, triumph though it was, bringing The Estate into conformity with expectations still left major problems in the portrayal of the *narod* in The Fair, the opera's greatest mass scene. Contestation of The Fair began even earlier in the long compositional process and focused on two interconnected areas: the Fair's nature and its success in showcasing

⁹³ RGALI, f.2642, op.1, d.9, ll.18ob-23; Shaporin, *Dekabristy*, 27-30.

the *narod*'s revolutionary potential. As the collective vision for *Dekabristy* broadened in scope and ambition, the Bolshoi encouraged Shaporin to expand it, recommending in the late 1930s that he add elements “depicting the *narod*'s dream of liberation.”⁹⁴

In the 1951 version, the peasantry received a more lavish exposition than before: with Annenkov's card game excised and his conversation with Iakubovich transformed into a Decembrist conclave in a nearby Tavern, now a separate scene, the revised Fair directed the audience's full attention to the peasant choruses, now comprising more than half its length.⁹⁵ The Bolshoi applauded Shaporin for illustrating “the mighty, explosive force of Razin and Pugachev, sympathizing with the Decembrists and actively expressing their relationship to autocracy.”⁹⁶ After the denunciation of *Ot vsego serdtsa* for inadequate portrayal of the *narod*, however, Shaporin's Fair seemed insufficient. At the post-scandal May 11 meeting, speakers called for a stronger revolutionary tone. As soloist Kamenshikov complained, “This *narod* was active. They recently defeated Napoleon and carried the banner of freedom across Europe. They had revolutionary traditions and experience... One can't make [them] so mute, groaning, not expressing outrage.”⁹⁷ The theater took this commentary seriously, including “insufficient display of the *narod*'s force”⁹⁸ among flaws in need of correction.

Despite the substantial revisions, the choral aspect of the Fair had not become appreciably more political, which it now became apparent it would have to do. Having

⁹⁴ RGALI, f.648, op.5, d.820, l.1a.

⁹⁵ For comparison, see RGALI, f.2642, op.1, d.1, ll.44-112ob (1930s score) and RGALI, f.2642, op.1, d.9, ll.44-108 (1951 score).

⁹⁶ RGALI, f.648, op.5, d.820, l.4. This memo dates from mid-1950, after Shaporin submitted the piano-vocal score for *The Fair* in November 1949 (See RGALI, f.648, op.5, d.822, l.3). Cossack leader Stepan (Sten'ka) Razin led another great peasant revolt, just over a hundred years before Pugachev's. See “Razin” in Avrich, 49-122. For the Bolshoi's late 1930s assessment of the Fair, see RGALI, f.648, op.5, d.820, ll.1a-3.

⁹⁷ RGALI, f.648, op.5, d.194, l.5.

⁹⁸ RGALI, f.648, op.5, d.819, l.70.

overhauled the scene once, Shaporin was loath to do so again. He lamely proposed to the Bolshoi that he could revise to “depict the *narod*’s reaction to the news of Aleksandr I’s death more sharply than it’s now done,” a vague suggestion at best.⁹⁹ But here again, Ivanov had ambitious plans. In his August letter, he enthused, “We must further underline the meaning of the *narod*... Peasants couldn’t take part in the revolution... but they thirsted for battle. It was this surety along with the *narod*’s behavior on Senate Square, and Nicholas I’s fear of a ‘mob revolt,’ which motivated him to bring the artillery into action, that decided the fate of the battle.”¹⁰⁰ To implement all this in *The Fair*, he asserted,

We must show the *narod* is happy... not just because it’s a holiday or the start of trade, but because they sense events are coming to a head... It’s vital to show the *narod* wished for change, not counting on the lords to give them freedom, but proposing to conquer it themselves. Maybe here Trubetskoi discovers the *narod*’s plans and... starts to waver.¹⁰¹

Ivanov was anxious to move beyond Shaporin’s charming genre songs into more explicitly political territory. Indeed, this was why the Bolshoi had recruited him; Shaporin alone was unlikely to reconstruct the Fair as Soviet aesthetic and historical politics required.

As usual, planning far preceded action. But by late 1951, the Bolshoi assured the KDI the Fair had been thoroughly revised to “underline the *narod*’s revolutionary mood” and include lines for Trubetskoi demonstrating, per Ivanov’s vision, his realization and fear of the *narod*’s revolutionary potential, foreshadowing his cowardly abandonment of his own revolution. The authors had also worked to “more fully reveal the Decembrists’ class limitations, being terribly far from the *narod* and not using its forces in the uprising.”¹⁰² The next performance, in June 1952, revealed the Fair’s markedly more political cast. Where the girls on the carousel had

⁹⁹ RGALI, f.2642, op.1, d.187, l.2.

¹⁰⁰ RGALI, f.2642, op.1, d.583, l.10.

¹⁰¹ *Ibid.*, l.12.

¹⁰² RGALI, f.648, op.5, d.820, l.26.

previously sung of romance, they now directly addressed their mounts, as if living creatures, urging, “Fly, little horse, so the wind can’t catch us!”, echoing the *narod*’s desire to fly free of the chains of serfdom.¹⁰³ Similarly, the second male chorus’ song, “*Prov pivo navaril*,” expressed the *narod*’s revolutionary mood through its tale of a peasant who held a feast, inviting everyone but the master, who starved. “And Prov ate, and Prov drank. He... wiped his beard, remembering the master. Ho, ho, ho!” crowed the chorus, delighting in the thought of the master made helpless by culinary serf rebellion.¹⁰⁴ To complete the picture, as the Decembrists exit the Tavern onto the fairgrounds, Trubetskoi asks, “What’s this celebration?” Iakubovich replies, “There’s a rumor among the masses that a new Pugachev has appeared.” Shocked, Trubetskoi answers only, “Blessed are those who believe,” a quotation from Griboedov’s contemporaneous play *Gore ot uma* (*Woe From Wit*).¹⁰⁵ His horror at the thought of peasant revolt illustrates the Decembrists’ unpreparedness to consider the *narod* as revolutionary partners.

These revisions proved canny. By June 1952, *Dekabristy* had become unmanageably lengthy. As a result, for the first time since the 1930s some questioned whether the Fair, with its boisterous overlapping choruses, enjoyable but not especially plot-driven, should remain. During the June 14 discussion, one commentator noted that at its length, the opera would run even than *Boris Godunov*, which in its hybridized Soviet version ran to nearly twice the length Mussorgsky had envisioned.¹⁰⁶ Soloist Mariia Maksakova bluntly asserted, “I don’t understand what The Fair

¹⁰³ RGALI f.2642, op.1, d.1, ll.47-55ob, 63-63ob, 83ob-91; RGALI, f.2642, op.1, d.9, ll.81-89, 94-95 and Shaporin *Dekabristy*, 139-144.

¹⁰⁴ RGALI, f.2642, op.1, d.9, ll.83-90; Shaporin, *Dekabristy*, 146-154.

¹⁰⁵ RGALI, f.2642, op.1, d.9, l.89-91; Shaporin, *Dekabristy*, 155-157. For Trubetskoi’s quotation, see Aleksandr Sergeevich Griboedov. *Gore ot uma* (Moscow: Russkaia Redaktsiia, 2004), 16. My thanks to Irene Belsky for identifying this line.

¹⁰⁶ For ideological reasons related to its censoring by the Directorate of Imperial Theaters, Soviet performances of *Boris Godunov* included every scene Mussorgsky composed for the opera, including scenes pertaining to the distinct versions of 1869 (rejected by the Directorate) and

is for. Now, if we got rid of the fair in *Sorochinskaia iarmarka* (*The Fair at Sorochinsk*), there would be no opera. But here... why is it necessary?"¹⁰⁷ Others agreed, and even Kondrashin chose his words carefully, praising the music's "many wonderful moments," but suggesting significantly reducing the Fair's length and complexity, explaining, "You have four choruses interwoven, and we can't hear anything where they overlap... [It] produces the impression of chaos."¹⁰⁸ He further noted Trubetskoi's wedged-in line sounded like a patch, and the Night Watchman's song came across as a pro-autocracy call for peace, which hardly served the opera's ideological goals.¹⁰⁹ Soloist Dmitrii Mchedeli, on the other hand, suggested excising the gypsy chorus from the Tavern and cut most of the Fair's first choral number.¹¹⁰ He framed these excisions as a way to save the Fair, but his remedy amounted to cutting it by half and removing nearly all its *narodnyi* material, hardly a viable solution for an opera already taking criticism for insufficient depiction of the *narod*.

Fortunately for Shaporin, director Okhlopkov would have none of such drastic solutions, and thanks to the Fair's newly sharpened political content, he successfully made the case for its preservation. "No other composer has written such a brilliant fair," Okhlopkov declared. He admitted the choruses were impossible to sort out but refused to see this as a fault, claiming the heady impression of intertwining musical lines rendered such distinctions unnecessary. Further,

1872 (accepted by the Directorate) and separate sketches found in Mussorgsky's papers. These materials were compiled by Pavel Lamm in 1928 and revised for performance by Dmitrii Shostakovich, among others. See Caryl Emerson. *Boris Godunov: Transpositions of a Russian Theme* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1986), 170-175; Caryl Emerson and Robert William Oldani. *Modest Musorgsky and Boris Godunov: Myths, Realities, Reconsiderations* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994), 35-90; Edward R. Reilly. *The Music of Mussorgsky: A Guide to the Editions* (New York: Musical Newsletter, 1980), 5-18.

¹⁰⁷ RGALI, f.648, op.5, d.236, l.3.

¹⁰⁸ *Ibid.*, ll.8, 10.

¹⁰⁹ *Ibid.*, ll.8, 10

¹¹⁰ *Ibid.*, l.13

he argued, “The Fair is necessary politically.” Returning to Kamenshikov’s sentiments from May 1951, he continued,

The *narod* was beaten, but then came the Patriotic War [of 1812], when they showed their patriotism, heroism, and adopted a revolutionary mood. The Decembrists came from the *narod* and feared them. Without this scene, we can’t get across the political and ideological meaning. The Fair is necessary to show the *narod*’s force, that even in the worst times it was heroic, had... a great revolutionary spirit.¹¹¹

Trubetskoi’s new line was essential, because it pointed directly to the spirit of Pugachev.

Okhlopkov would consider streamlining the Fair, but not its elimination. With these impassioned remonstrances, he won the day. Anisimov, speaking with authority as Director of the Bolshoi, supported the Fair, demanding only that it be shortened.

By June 17, this message had made its way through the musical community. As one consultant enthused, “In The Fair... the *narod* presents its boldness, its desire to relax. Without doubt, The Fair must be preserved.”¹¹² Still, there was work to do. One soloist expressed displeasure with the gypsies and suggested, in contrast to Mchedeli, that their presence be reduced in the Fair, rather than The Tavern.¹¹³ Noting the continued discontent with these two scenes, another speaker suggested cutting The Tavern and Fair completely. But this was a step too far, quickly rejected by Vladimir Zakharov, who defended its “wonderful choruses,” which “show the people’s joy at the Fair. The Russian *narod* sings and dances so easily.”¹¹⁴ Still, even he agreed The Fair was too chaotic.

Ideology was also an issue in The Fair. As choreographer Lev Kramarevskii advised, “you must present The Fair so the audience understands what the Decembrists didn’t,”¹¹⁵ i.e.,

¹¹¹ Ibid., ll.15-20.

¹¹² RGALI, f.648, op.5, d.236, l.31.

¹¹³ Ibid., l.38.

¹¹⁴ Ibid., l.43.

¹¹⁵ Ibid., l.47.

that the *narod* was rife with revolutionary potential. On this point, Mchedeli strangely reversed his position of three days before, now advocating for maintaining The Fair's large choral first number, defending the scene as "the sharpest in the opera. This is the breath, the force, the *narod*. Shaporin has found a never before seen... wonderful resolution of a fair scene... This is the main subject of *Dekabristy*."¹¹⁶ By portraying the four choruses working together, Mchedeli believed, Shaporin highlighted their combined strength and their ability to use it. Anisimov again agreed, calling The Fair the opera's "juiciest part." At last, The Fair was safe, though Shaporin would have to revise to meet the consultants' demands for greater clarity and ideological force.

Though the KDI held its discussion only a week later, the ground had already shifted. With other concerns taking precedence, the Fair received little attention. Only Khrennikov lodged a serious complaint, announcing he was as displeased with the opera as he had been a year ago. "I can't agree... the *narod* in The Fair fully satisfies," he fumed. "We can't detect the necessary atmosphere [here]... And I'm far from demanding, as some have, that Shaporin achieve Mussorgsky's sound. He must depict it by his own means."¹¹⁷ The ongoing references to Mussorgsky no accident. His operatic portrayal of the *narod* was considered the finest in Russian music, and as the *narod* took an increasing role in *Dekabristy* in response to the Bolshoi's demands, the comparison was all but inevitable. In the June 25 meeting alone, Mussorgsky and *Boris* were mentioned three times.¹¹⁸ If anything, Khrennikov granted Shaporin more leeway, by *not* insisting he endeavor to compose The Fair as Mussorgsky would have done. Nevertheless, he, and others, were clearly still dissatisfied. A joyous *narod* was a fine thing, but insufficient.

¹¹⁶ Ibid., l.50.

¹¹⁷ RGALI, f.962, op.3, d.2414, l.81.

¹¹⁸ Ibid., ll.39, 41, 72.

Shaporin would have to continue working to display what the *narod* shared most with the Decembrists, though they failed to recognize it: revolutionary potential.

Khrennikov's concern was taken up again the following day at the KDI's smaller in-house meeting. Indeed, as Sysoev fulminated, "The Fair is completely unacceptable. I can hardly tell what's going on; it's some sort of bazaar... a *balagan*, bewildering in all its bustle."¹¹⁹ He demanded Shaporin shorten the scene and discard the gypsy chorus, to avoid its "operetta-ish" feel. But Sysoev's harsh assessment provoked a defense. One speaker noted lightly, "A fair is a fair. Its main purpose is trade... You can't turn a fair into a political manifestation. Maybe there's too much movement, but that can be cut down."¹²⁰ Another agreed, denying the scene contained anything approaching operetta. "The Fair plays its role," he claimed, identifying it as a particular operatic device. "Besides, it's very interesting musically... It's a big *narodnyi* assemblage, and it's very colorful." For him, The Fair's primary value was that it "brightly portrays the relation of the *narod* to power." He singled out the exchange between two peasants, newly added in response to the demand for a stronger reaction to news of Aleksandr I's death. The first peasant wonders aloud what the new tsar will be, like and the other responds, "Eh, clearly we won't wait forever for freedom."¹²¹ In the speaker's reading, this was a perfect encapsulation, in keeping with the Russian operatic tradition.¹²²

Another, more moderate consultant expressed approval that "in the music and libretto the feeling of the fight for freedom always pushes through," but agreed The Fair was still in need of revision.¹²³ Finally, KDI head Nikolai Bepalov weighed in, declaring the opera a success for its

¹¹⁹ RGALI, f.962, op.3, d.2415, l.2.

¹²⁰ Ibid., ll.6-7.

¹²¹ RGALI, f.2642, op.1, d.9, l.97ob.

¹²² RGALI, f.962, op.3, d.2415, ll.11-12.

¹²³ Ibid., l.13.

authors, but noting some directorial issues. He reminded his colleagues how crucial it was to get the *narodnye* scenes right, because “in *Ot vsego serdtsa* and *Velikaia druzhba*, depiction of the *narod* was criticized. All the classical operas [in Soviet productions] receive [this] criticism... even *Boris Godunov*... The Central Committee and government attach great importance to scenes correctly and brightly depicting images of the *narod* in our art.”¹²⁴ Thus, The Fair’s place in *Dekabristy* was assured, but a great deal still depended on its perfection. Given recent failures, this opera could not be allowed to premiere until its Fair was ideal in every way.

In their subsequent report to the Council of Ministers, Bespalov and Anisimov noted cautiously that, for all *Dekabristy*’s improvement since 1951, “the *narodnyi* scenes have not received sufficiently deep musical-dramatic exposition.”¹²⁵ Over the course of the next year Shaporin implemented a number of revisions to the Fair to better balance its elements [Fig. 3]. In the final version of the opening number, he bowed to demands for brevity, shortening each of the four choral “folk” songs., though he stood firm on their polyphonic bustle, even increasing its complexity by adding lyrics for the gypsy chorus where previously they had sung on “la.”¹²⁶ As before, The Fair opened with a slow, measured first male chorus singing of distant Taganrog, where “a tragedy occurred, a young Cossack was killed.”¹²⁷ However, Shaporin shrank this mock-pious ode referencing Aleksandr’s death by half, signaling the unpopularity of its monarchism.

¹²⁴ Ibid., ll.20-21.

¹²⁵ RGALI, f.962, op.2357, l.49.

¹²⁶ RGALI, f.2642, op.1, d.9, ll.90-94; Shaporin, *Dekabristy*, 156-168.

¹²⁷ RGALI, f.2642, op.1, d.9, ll.77-80; Shaporin, *Dekabristy*, 136-141.

Figure 3 (The Fair, overlapping choruses)

1st Male Ch. ("In Taganrog")

He'll be re mem ber'd

Piano

Detailed description: This system shows a vocal line and piano accompaniment. The vocal line is in 4/4 time, starting with a whole rest followed by notes for the lyrics 'He'll be re mem ber'd'. The piano accompaniment consists of a treble and bass clef with chords and a rhythmic pattern.



Carousel Girls ("Fly!")

4

Fly,

1st Male Ch. ("In Taganrog")

re mem ber'd in the king ly tav

Piano

Detailed description: This system shows overlapping vocal lines and piano accompaniment. The top vocal line is for 'Carousel Girls' and ends with 'Fly,'. The bottom vocal line is for '1st Male Ch.' and continues with 're mem ber'd in the king ly tav'. The piano accompaniment continues with a consistent rhythmic pattern. A measure rest '4' is shown above the first vocal line.

SOURCE: Iurii Shaporin. *Dekabristy: Opera v 4-kh aktakh, 10 kartinakh. Klavir* (Moscow: Muzfond SSSR, 1953), 168-173.

Figure 3 (continued)

7

Carousel Girls ("Fly!")
my _____ lit tle horse, lit tle__horse, so

2nd Male Ch. ("Prov")
Hey! Oh, beer is, Beer is good, it's so

1st Male Ch. ("In Taganrog")
ern!

Piano

11

Carousel Girls ("Fly!")
the wind can't catch us!

Gypsy Ch. ("My Long Road")
Oh, this long road, my_ fur ther jour ney. How

2nd Male Ch. ("Prov")
good. But wine

Piano

Figure 3 (continued)

14

Carousel Girls ("Fly!")

Gypsy Ch. ("My Long Road")

2nd Male Ch. ("Prov")

Piano

We have on ly a mo
the wind blows, filled with snow. How, as
is best of all!



17

Carousel Girls ("Fly!")

Gypsy Ch. ("My Long Road")

Piano

ment now to en joy some
in a dream, the lit tle bell un der the arch rings

Figure 3 (continued)

20

Carousal Girls ("Fly!")

hap pi ness here.

Gypsy Ch. ("My Long Road")

so mourn ful ly!

Piano

6

Further undercutting the first chorus' sentimentality, its initial iteration was interrupted by the carousel girls, who retained their more political 1952 lyrics urging their artificial horses to carry them to freedom. In this final version, however, they are soon overtaken by the second, male chorus crying, "Ho ho ho, my happy *Malan'ia!*", the traditional Slavic new year's eve celebration.¹²⁸ This line heralded the beginning of their song, "*Prov pivo navaril,*" which Shaporin had finally edited as promised, and which now appeared in a more prominent position, highlighting its allegorical tale of peasants gaining the upper hand over their master. In late 1951, the Bolshoi had reported to the KDI that "*Prov*" would be revised to strengthen its exposition of the peasants' revolutionary mood. In the end, this was an overstatement; the chorus was simply shortened, leaving its central narrative intact.¹²⁹

Despite shortening the number overall, here Shaporin added nine measures of orchestra to solve another problem: Trubetskoi's uncomfortably-placed exclamation about Pugachev. This addition provided time for the Decembrists and gypsy chorus to exit the Tavern onto the

¹²⁸ Shaporin, *Dekabristy*, 142-143.

¹²⁹ RGALI, f.2642, op.1, d.9, ll.83-90; Shaporin, *Dekabristy*, 146-154.

fairgrounds and notice the jolly atmosphere. Now, when Trubetskoi asked, “What’s all this celebrating?” his words had room to resonate, rather than squeezing in around the choral fireworks.¹³⁰ Finally, the gypsy chorus joins in. In the 1930s, they sang two songs. The first, in The Fair’s opening number, was a tale of lost love. Written from a male perspective, lines such as “My life is wasted, for to meet you again is not fated” echoed Annenkov’s emotions when he thought he had lost Polina forever.¹³¹ The gypsies’ second song, in the second choral number, retained this sense of longing but expanded to a third-person narrative of a gypsy’s love of the wide-open steppe, another symbolic reference to the peasants’ desire for freedom.¹³²

As noted above, in the 1951 version the gypsy chorus’ first appearance was transferred to The Tavern, where they served as cover for the Decembrists’ conspiracy. In this version, Shaporin dropped the lyrics from both songs, replacing them with melodies on “la.” The first song’s melody bore only passing resemblance to the 1930s version,¹³³ while the second was an entirely new creation, replacing its predecessor.¹³⁴ For the final, 1953 version, Shaporin retained the new, 1951 melodies but granted the gypsies words once again, in defiance of the calls for greater simplicity, perhaps figuring that if the half-measure of reducing them to wordless melody had not satisfied his critics, he might as well let them speak. In The Tavern, the gypsies resurrected their original lyrics, expanding them to fit the revised melody, while in The Fair, they now sang mournfully of the long road ahead, the snowy winds, and an absent loved one, subtly foreshadowing the Decembrists’ journey into exile at the opera’s close and the *narod*’s acknowledgement of their service. Interestingly, this shift served to distance the gypsy chorus

¹³⁰ RGALI, f.2642, op.1, d.9, ll.89-91; Shaporin, *Dekabristy*, 155-157.

¹³¹ RGALI, f.2642, op.1, d.1, l.60.

¹³² *Ibid.*, ll.93-97ob.

¹³³ RGALI, f.2642, op.1, d.1, ll.57-60; RGALI, f.2642, op.1, d.9, ll.49-53.

¹³⁴ RGALI, f.2642, op.1, d.1, ll.93-97ob; RGALI, f.2642, op.1, d.9, ll.90-96.

from the *narod*, to which the opera's consultants had never been fully convinced they belonged, and brought them more into Shchepin and Elena's love-centered orbit. Stesha, the head gypsy, makes a final appearance later in *The Fair*, in the number added for Elena's scribbled love letter, when, reprising the first gypsy song to herself in passing, Elena recruits her to deliver the note.¹³⁵

With this last round of revisions to *The Fair*, Shaporin attempted to answer the many concerns voiced by the Bolshoi and its consultants, while balancing them against his own creative vision in one of the few scenes that remained recognizable from his original 1930s draft. The result was shorter, tighter, and more ideologically driven, yet as complex and vibrant as ever. It did not meet with universal approval. Following the final pre-premiere run-through on June 6, historian Zaionchkovskii declared *The Fair* "false... [in] the *narod*'s reaction to the news of the tsar's death,"¹³⁶ while musicologist Grosheva still found the staging chaotic. However, as Grosheva noted, following Soviet theatrical practice, "corrections can be made in the process of its scenic life."¹³⁷ If Shaporin had not found a solution to *The Fair* that satisfied everyone, he had at least created a version that could finally allow *Dekabristy* to move forward to its premiere.

Though the issue of Arakcheevism had faded by mid-1951, it had not disappeared. After the May 11 discussion, attention increasingly turned to the possibility of adding a role for an individual, conscripted peasant-soldier, who could facilitate the exposition of the military-feudal atmosphere of late-19th century Russia consultants desired and provide a specific embodiment of the *narod*, in whose name the Decembrists undertook their revolution. To this end, Shaporin took a second look at an idea he first raised in his meeting with Khrennikov, Pokrovskii, Anisimov,

¹³⁵ Shaporin, *Dekabristy*, 82-93 (The Tavern), 156-174 (The Fair, No.12), 190-193 (The Fair, No.14).

¹³⁶ RGALI, f.648, op.5, d.821, l.6.

¹³⁷ RGALI, f.648, op.5, d.821, l.13.

and Zaionchkovskii in January, to add a soldier to The Estate.¹³⁸ Though the others rejected this idea out of hand, this new character, the Old Soldier Lukin, gained traction in the long run.

Lukin first appeared in the 1951 score on Senate Square. Seeking to illustrate the tragic results of Nikolai's order to shoot, Shaporin had him raise his wounded body on the emptied square and painfully intone, "Oh, brothers! Clearly, death is nigh... The enemy's bullet didn't touch me, but from my own [side] comes death! Oh, where are you, Russian truth?"¹³⁹ This cameo received little attention on May 11, amidst the calls for an Arakcheevist prologue. Only Syroechkovskii mentioned it, complaining, "The soldiers weren't like that... There shouldn't be such funereal notes... Maybe change the character of the song... He's dying, but he can speak heartily."¹⁴⁰ It seemed this small, sad moment would not suffice as an exposition of autocratic militarism and might even undermine the ideological message of the *narod's* revolutionary potential. At the meeting's close, Shaporin again suggested adding a soldier to The Estate, this time specifying his vision of an orderly bringing Annenkov a summons and conversing with him about the harsh terms of conscription.¹⁴¹

Though the response on May 11 was tepid, the Bolshoi soon warmed to Lukin and sought further opportunities to showcase him. In a midsummer memo, the theater noted that not only were "the historical circumstances producing the Decembrist movement" to be presented at The Estate, but Lukin would also now appear at the Fair, conversing with the peasants.¹⁴² True to form, Vsevolod Ivanov, had even grander plans, proposing featuring Lukin prominently in the transposed Arakcheevist first scene and the new Prologue in Paris, and positing that at The Fair

¹³⁸ RGALI, f.648, op.5, d.820, l.19ob.

¹³⁹ RGALI, f.2642, op.1, d.10, ll.104ob-105ob.

¹⁴⁰ RGALI, f.648, op.5, d.194, l.24.

¹⁴¹ *Ibid.*, l.99.

¹⁴² RGALI, f.648, op.5, d.820, l.17.

he would talk with the peasants specifically “about the old days, about PUGACHEV, that Pugachev’s time might return.”¹⁴³ Finally, Lukin would appear in a fourth, unspecified scene, before his final moment on Senate Square. For Ivanov, this new character was apparently an ideal, *narodnost*’-ensuring device.

Shaporin accepted adding Lukin to *The Estate*, as it accorded with his own plans, though he declined to insert him in *The Fair* or the never-completed *Prologue*.¹⁴⁴ Still, in its late-1951 petition to the KDI, the Bolshoi proudly touted Lukin’s new arioso, in which he lamented his conscription to a sympathetic Shchepin. “Either he’s worked to death by the ice or he finds a bullet in his chest,” Lukin grieved. “That’s the life of a soldier.”¹⁴⁵ Yet, the theater still worried Lukin’s appearance was not sufficient to demonstrate the “military milieu” inspiring Decembrism, and that his demeanor might be historically inaccurate.¹⁴⁶ Concerned about his frankness with Shchepin, Okhlopkov suggested adding some hesitation on Lukin’s part.¹⁴⁷ Shaporin duly made this alteration, but after the June run-through, the newly extended Lukin-Shchepin exchange still received unfavorable notice, this time from a Bolshoi soloist who found it “unsuccessful and drawn out.”¹⁴⁸ By contrast, two weeks later at the KDI discussion, Khrennikov demanded it be expanded, asserting, “last year, we spoke of strengthening the line of the *narod*’s oppression, but the theater made a mere formal reply, [adding Lukin] in Scene One, when you needed to write a whole new scene. The soldier... doesn’t strengthen the line of the

¹⁴³ *Ibid.*, l.10.

¹⁴⁴ See Shaporin’s formal assent to this addition in a declaration addressed to the Bolshoi: RGALI, f.648, op.5, d.819, l.68.

¹⁴⁵ RGALI, f.648, op.5, d.820, l.26; lyrics l.32.

¹⁴⁶ RGALI, f.648, op.5, d.820, l.23.

¹⁴⁷ RGALI, f.2642, op. 1, d.583, l.23.

¹⁴⁸ RGALI, f.648, op.5, d.236, l.32.

narod or of the roots of the Decembrists' revolutionary impulse."¹⁴⁹ Apparently, Lukin had potential as a representative of the *narod*, but his correct setting was far from clear.

Shaporin found himself pulled in opposite directions. Like so many other emendations to the score, Lukin's cameo had been shoehorned into *The Estate*, where it made little sense. On the other hand, the new character clearly filled a need. In the final version, Shaporin did his best to compromise between the expediency of Lukin, the demands for other additions in the *Estate*, and the need to shorten the opera as a whole. In the end, he rejected Khrennikov's suggested new scene and cut Lukin from *The Estate*, where he had never quite belonged, leaving him only on Senate Square. Still, the result of Lukin's brief moment as a significant player in *Dekabristy* was not insubstantial. Though he ultimately became only a minor character, his creation caused a subtle but significant shift in Senate Square's tone. As an individual embodiment of the *narod*, a man with a name and personal history, though he did no more than sing a few lines and die, he succeeded in bringing the *narod's* role in the revolution to the fore.

The Decembrists as Political Heroes

Establishing the Decembrists' relationship to the *narod* was vital, but to fully guarantee the opera's historicity, Shaporin also needed to vibrantly depict their revered leaders. *Dekabristy* focused on the Northern Society, for understandable reasons; not only were Annenkov and Polina, the original central pair, from the North, but this focus enabled Shaporin to illustrate the events on Senate Square, by far the most enduring image of the revolution. But was it really possible to depict the Decembrists without their most charismatic leader, Pavel Pestel'? A driving force of the Southern Society, Pestel' was key to the Leninist understanding of the Decembrist Revolution, which failed in part, Soviet historians believed, because the majority of Decembrists were not ready to accept his radical political program. Unlike the constitutional

¹⁴⁹ RGALI, f.962, op.3, d.2414, ll.80-81.

monarchists of the North, Pestel' advocated overthrowing autocracy and establishing a democratic republic. To do justice to Decembrism and showcase its progressive potential, surely no Soviet artist could omit this all-important figure.

As early as 1936, Shaporin considered including Pestel', but set the idea aside as unworkable.¹⁵⁰ At the Bolshoi's suggestion, in the 1951 score he included members of both Societies in the Tavern, with Pestel''s program prominent in their discussion,¹⁵¹ but Druzhinin rejected this in his 1950 consultant review. After noting the ridiculousness of a group of conspirators meeting openly in public, he chided, "Trubetskoi wants to hurry to Kiev to arrange things with Pestel', but it's well known Trubetskoi returned from Kiev not long before, having agreed with... Murave'ev *against* Pestel'."¹⁵² In deference to the historian's expertise, the meeting was moved to a private room and references to Pestel' removed.¹⁵³

Pestel' could not be silenced so easily, however; by early 1951, momentum for his inclusion was growing. Atop the notes from Zaionchkovskii, Anisimov, Pokrovskii, and Khrennikov's January meeting with Shaporin, an additional purpose is scrawled: "adding the role of Pestel'," including an aria expressing his political program.¹⁵⁴ During a February discussion, several speakers called for at least mentioning Pestel',¹⁵⁵ and on May 11, this inclination escalated, with Kamenshikov demanding Pestel' be made a minor character, Zaionchkovskii suggesting creating a prologue for him, and Tarle asserting excitedly, "what you

¹⁵⁰ This inclination arose while Shaporin was living as an artist-in-residence at the Tchaikovsky House Museum in Klin between 1934 and 1938. It was recorded by fellow resident A.V. Zhivago, in his diary entry for August 10, 1936, quoted in Levit, 314.

¹⁵¹ RGALI, f.2642, op.1, d.583, l.2ob. This review is unsigned and undated. I have attributed it to the Bolshoi because its author(s) makes frequent reference to issues of staging. I have dated it between 1935-1938 based on the scenes discussed and its placement in the *delo*.

¹⁵² RGALI, f.648, op.5, d.820, l.14. Emphasis in the original.

¹⁵³ *Ibid.*, l.13.

¹⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, l.18.

¹⁵⁵ RGALI, f.648, op.5, d.192, ll.1, 2, 7.

need isn't a prologue but a large act."¹⁵⁶ Such eminent historians could hardly be ignored and the Bolshoi considered several avenues for Pestel's inclusion. Shaporin nixed the more labor-intensive recommendations, noting firmly, "The fundamental alterations suggested... would necessitate writing a new opera."¹⁵⁷ Willing to compromise, the Bolshoi proposed a narrative approach: detailing Pestel's republican program in the existing characters' debate.¹⁵⁸ Presumably, this would require less work and satisfy all concerned.

But Vsevolod Ivanov, the new Bolshoi-imposed collaborator, had more radical revisions in mind. Ignoring Shaporin's objections, in his August 1951 letter Ivanov outlined three new scenes, two at the opera's end: the first depicting the funeral held for the Decembrist leaders prior to their execution, which turned into a protest, and the second, in place of the finale at the Fortress, depicting the revolt of the Chernigov Regiment in the South.¹⁵⁹ Ivanov's third scene, reviving the original Paris prologue, would be Pestel's moment in the sun. Highlighting what he saw as one of the opera's essential political messages, Ivanov enthused,

In Paris we must depict... the faith of leading Russians not only in the future greatness of their motherland, but that she would find it *in her own way*... Bourgeois historians assert the Decembrists took their ideas... from France, to discredit their revolution, rob it of its roots in the history of the Russian people. We must destroy that conception... The absence of Pestel', the smartest, most active leader... is a major mistake.¹⁶⁰

¹⁵⁶ Ibid., l.13.

¹⁵⁷ RGALI, f.2642, op.1, d.187, l.3.

¹⁵⁸ RGALI, f.648, op.5, d.820, l.17.

¹⁵⁹ The Chernigov Regiment revolted on December 29 (old style), after news of the events on Senate Square reached its leaders. Though Pestel' had long been at the helm of the Southern Society, he was unable to lead this action, having been arrested on December 13 as a result of A.I. Maiboroda's betrayal. Briefly more successful than their northern counterparts, the southern rebels marched through the region without clear direction for five days before being captured by loyalist troops. See Trigos, *The Decembrist Myth*, xvii-xix.

¹⁶⁰ RGALI, f.2642, op.1, d.583, ll.7-8. Emphasis in the original.

In a postscript, he was forced to admit that while Shaporin was willing to consider the prologue, he had refused the other scenes absolutely. He asked Okhlopkov and the KDI to adjudicate and bring Shaporin on board if possible.

Evidently, this is just what occurred. Despite his strong objections, Shaporin soon signed an agreement not only to write the two new final scenes, but to add Pestel' in the flesh to the Tavern, where "in his argument with Northern Society representatives, the Southern Society's more radical program will become clear."¹⁶¹ Yet, thinking about Pestel' continued to evolve. In a Bolshoi memo just months later, Ivanov's new scenes were gone and Pestel' no longer slated to appear. Instead, Shchepin, rather than Trubetskoi, would be sent south from the Tavern to coordinate with Pestel' and report back at Ryleev's.¹⁶² The theater even considered another variant before affirming this strategy.¹⁶³ Amidst these near-constant changes, one thing became apparent: it was only a matter of time before Pestel' took his rightful place in *Dekabristy*.

Yet, as the scale of necessary reconstruction became clear, ardor for Pestel' cooled. Early the next year, the Bolshoi contemplated two fundamental questions: "Is it desirable to bring into an opera dedicated to the Decembrists the image of Pestel', a historical actor of enormous scale, head and shoulders above other leaders? And is it possible to bring Pestel' into Shaporin's existing opera?"¹⁶⁴ After thorough consideration, the Bolshoi concluded Pestel' was so important historically, he could serve as the basis of an entire opera himself. But that opera would not be *Dekabristy*. As for the work as it stood, moving the first scene from Shchepin's estate to Pestel''s

¹⁶¹ RGALI, f.648, op.5, d.819, l.68. In a short reminiscence written for a collection dedicated to Shaporin, Mikhail Chulaki later recalled that Shaporin had in fact sketched a new version of the Tavern scene featuring Pestel', which he played for a small group of friends, though it was later discarded. M. Chulaki, "Naslednik mogikan" in Grosheva, 315.

¹⁶² RGALI, f.648, op.5, d.820, l.11.

¹⁶³ RGALI, f.648, op.5, d.820, l.20 (Bolshoi internal memo); RGALI, f.648, op.5, d.820, l.21ob (Bolshoi report to KDI).

¹⁶⁴ Ibid., l.67.

was rejected, because the latter was atypical and would require rewritten, Ukrainian musical characterization. Nor could Pestel' be inserted in the Tavern, because he would then be only a minor character, which would not do justice to his eminence. Even so, "this does not mean Pestel' must be excluded. That would be an enormous sin against history... We suggest broadening the theme of Pestel' in the main characters' speeches."¹⁶⁵ In the Tavern, Bestuzhev would now wax poetic about the success of a revolution conceived in concert with Pestel'. At Ryleev's, the host would praise the unity of North and South under Pestel''s leadership. Finally, in the Palace, Nikolai would cower before the possibility of Pestel''s success in fomenting a popular revolt in the South. Though this solution was indirect, a memo stated confidently, "Pestel' will attain sufficiently detailed characterization... [and] dramatic function," while receiving the full respect due his place in history.¹⁶⁶

The Bolshoi's remedy suited Shaporin, who had grown weary of endless revisions. Already on June 14, 1952, after a run-through of yet another version, followed by yet another discussion, he responded snippily, "I'd like to see this opera in the form I wrote it. If you want to change something, do it without me. I implemented last year's suggestions... I wrote my opera a second time. I can't do a third. I have neither strength nor desire."¹⁶⁷ In the end, Shaporin persevered. But when it came to adding Pestel' as a full-fledged character, he agreed with the Bolshoi that he would be unable to create a large enough role to do him justice. In December, Agitprop, the Party censor, called Shaporin in for its evaluation. Shaporin agreed to most of its demands, but as he wrote subsequently in a personal appeal to Agitprop chair Nikolai Mikhailov,

¹⁶⁵ Ibid., l.69.

¹⁶⁶ Ibid., ll.64-65.

¹⁶⁷ RGALI, f.648, op.5, d.236, l.15.

“Inserting Pestel’... meets with insurmountable difficulties, of which I cannot be silent.”¹⁶⁸ Still, Shaporin sensed this meeting had gone well; given “the unusually hearty warmth I received,”¹⁶⁹ he felt emboldened to ask Mikhailov to intervene in the interminable cycle of modifications. A full exposition of Pestel’ would require bringing a new scene and new characters from the South into an already overburdened work, he explained. Furthermore, it would require providing a detailed exposition of the political differences between the two Societies, which “goes beyond the boundaries of opera, which can hardly sufficiently persuasively depict complex political doctrines without vulgarization.”¹⁷⁰ Ameliorating this shockingly un-Soviet assertion of the limits of opera’s political potential, Shaporin suggested giving Pestel’ a presence through existing characters’ speeches: the three identified above, plus a final speech for Bestuzhev, imprisoned in the Fortress.¹⁷¹

The final verdict was not to be reached so simply, however. Though theater and composer agreed, Shaporin had evidently misjudged the Central Committee. In January 1953, shortly after Shaporin’s letter to Mikhailov, a confident Bolshoi Director Anisimov reported to the KDI confirming the decision to depict Pestel’ through others’ speeches. “Having judged it from all sides,” he wrote, “authors, staggers, and theater leadership concluded that... inserting Pestel’... essentially requires writing a new opera, which... is hardly advisable.”¹⁷² This would seem the final word. Yet, a month later, Shaporin contracted with the KDI to “insert new historical characters,” which could only mean Pestel’.¹⁷³ Apparently, the KDI had consulted

¹⁶⁸ RGALI, f.2642, op.1, d.184, l.24.

¹⁶⁹ Ibid., l.22.

¹⁷⁰ Ibid., l.24.

¹⁷¹ Ibid., ll.22, 24.

¹⁷² RGALI, f.648, op.5, d.820, l.92-93. The discussion from December 6, 1952 has not been preserved.

¹⁷³ RGALI, f.2642, op.1, d.543, l.7.

Agitprop, which, as a subsidiary of the Central Committee, had a direct line to higher authorities, and received a definitive answer: Pestel' *would* appear in *Dekabristy*. A dutiful Shaporin soon wrote Anisimov asking for a consultation. "Who knows," he mused despondently, "maybe after so many trials and tribulations, in you the opera will find its savior."¹⁷⁴

After Shaporin completed these revisions, the Bolshoi embarked on one last round of rehearsals. In the final version of *Dekabristy* Pestel' appears in person twice: first, visiting Shchepin at the Estate, where he asserts his republican program [**Fig. 4**], and second, in a new scene, The Prison Cell, where he envisions the significance of the Decembrist Revolution for Russia's future in a last conversation with Ryleev before their execution. As the Bolshoi and Shaporin agreed, Pestel' is also mentioned by others: extolled by Bestuzhev in the Tavern, affirmed by Ryleev during the conspiracy at his home, cursed by Nikolai in the Palace, and mourned by Bestuzhev in the Fortress.¹⁷⁵ After the final run-through in June 1953, composers, historians, and musicologists agreed the new character was well-written, successfully integrated, and supplied the presence that had been lacking.¹⁷⁶ Finally, Pestel' had found a politically and historically acceptable home in *Dekabristy*.

¹⁷⁴ RGALI, f.2642, op.1, d.184, l.15-15ob.

¹⁷⁵ Shaporin, *Dekabristy*, 53-73, 445-452 (appearing in person); 105, 240-242, 304-307, 469-472 (mentioned by others). Despite Druzhinin's objection in 1950, in the Tavern scene in the first edition of the published score (1953) after conveying the news of Tsar Aleksandr's death, Trubetskoi announces, "We'll hurry to Kiev to decide with Pestel'" whether the revolution would begin in the North or South. In the second edition (1975), this line is modified to remove Pestel''s name: "All must be weighed and decided in advance." Shaporin, *Dekabristy*, 99-100; Iurii Shaporin, *Dekabristy* (Moscow: Sovetskii Kompozitor, 1975), 72-73. The inclusion of the old lyrics in 1953 may have been an error on the publisher's part, of which there were several, most notably the printing of Pestel''s aria "*Konets vsemu*" twice, in its original position at the close of Senate Square and its revised position in the scene in The Prison Cell. For the debate about this aria, see below.

¹⁷⁶ See RGALI, f.648, op.5, d.821, ll.3, 9, 11-13, 14-15, 16-17, 19.

Figure 4 (Pestel' visits Shchepin at the Estate)

Shchepin

We'll con quer aut o cra cy!

Pestel'

And hyp no

Piano

This musical system consists of three staves. The top staff is for Shchepin, written in treble clef with a 3/4 time signature. The lyrics "We'll con quer aut o cra cy!" are written below the notes. The middle staff is for Pestel', written in bass clef with a 3/4 time signature. The lyrics "And hyp no" are written below the notes. The bottom staff is for the Piano, written in grand staff (treble and bass clefs) with a 3/4 time signature. The piano accompaniment features a complex rhythmic pattern with many beamed notes and rests.

Pestel'

4

tize the Rus sian peo ple with a cons titution? That's what Tru bets koi plans. No,

Piano

This musical system consists of two staves. The top staff is for Pestel', written in bass clef with a 3/4 time signature. A measure rest with the number "4" above it indicates a four-measure rest. The lyrics "tize the Rus sian peo ple with a cons titution? That's what Tru bets koi plans. No," are written below the notes. The bottom staff is for the Piano, written in grand staff (treble and bass clefs) with a 3/4 time signature. The piano accompaniment is mostly silent, with some chords and notes appearing at the end of the system.

SOURCE: Iurii Shaporin. *Dekabristy: Opera v 4-kh aktakh, 10 kartinakh. Klavir* (Moscow: Muzfond SSSR, 1953), 55-57.

Figure 4 (continued)

7

Pestel'

no! Re bell ing, we real ly must de

Piano

10

Shchepin

A re pub lic? But that is ex treme!

Pestel'

clare a re pub lic! Yes,

Piano

13

Pestel'

ex treme, but the on ly way ahead for our Fa ther land!

The image shows a musical score for three parts: Pestel', Shchepin, and Piano. The score is divided into three systems. The first system (measures 7-9) features Pestel' in the bass clef with lyrics 'no! Re bell ing, we real ly must de'. The Piano accompaniment consists of a bass line with triplets and chords. The second system (measures 10-12) features Shchepin in the treble clef with lyrics 'A re pub lic? But that is ex treme!' and Pestel' in the bass clef with lyrics 'clare a re pub lic! Yes,'. The Piano accompaniment continues with triplets and chords. The third system (measures 13-15) features Pestel' in the bass clef with lyrics 'ex treme, but the on ly way ahead for our Fa ther land!'. The Piano accompaniment is not shown for these measures.

Dramatizing Senate Square

The final and perhaps most frustrating historical issue for *Dekabristy* was how to portray the events on Senate Square, the central scene of the opera. As the most prominent and tragic event in the Decembrist Revolution, the singular moment of the Decembrists' triumph and defeat, Senate Square had become a milestone in Russian revolutionary history, elevated to the status of hallowed myth by the Bolsheviks after 1917. Its portrayal was unquestionably decisive to *Dekabristy*'s success.

Surprisingly, Tolstoi had not regarded Senate Square as so important. He included the scene, but preferring the love story, kept it brief and dialogue-based.¹⁷⁷ Only in the 1930s, as Shaporin shifted focus to the larger historical narrative at the Bolshoi's urging and in response to the new emphasis on pre-1917 history, did efforts to expand Senate Square begin. The Bolshoi offered various suggestions, two with long-lasting effects. First, conductor Aleksandr Gauk proposed lending the scene more excitement by inserting a symphonic episode, because "symphonic music can convey action very well."¹⁷⁸ Second, the theater urged a broader depiction of the crowd's reaction as the revolution unfolded.¹⁷⁹ Shaporin was enthusiastic about Gauk's recommendation and open to the Bolshoi's. In the 1951 version, Senate Square, fully-scored for the first time, included a surprising innovation. Following the arrival of the Decembrists' regiments, their turmoil over Trubetskoi's absence, the Metropolitan's failed intervention and Miloradovich's assassination, the scene now depicted not only Nikolai's order to shoot, a well-established historical occurrence, but also a Decembrist counter-attack, a purely

¹⁷⁷ Tolstoi and Shchegolev, 50-52. Senate Square (Scene 6 in this libretto) begins in front of the Winter Palace with Nikolai being informed of the revolt; then briefly shifts to Senate Square for a discussion of Trubetskoi's absence, negotiations with the Metropolitan and with Miloradovich, and the shooting of the latter; then returns to Nikolai when he orders the artillery to fire, after which screams are heard from offstage.

¹⁷⁸ Levit, 321.

¹⁷⁹ RGALI, f.648, op.5, d.820, l.3.

imaginative episode. Shaporin set these events over a brief symphonic interlude, followed by an expanded view of the crowd's shocked reaction, the dying words of an old soldier, Lukin, and finally Ryleev alone on the emptied square, singing a mournful aria of revolutionary defeat.¹⁸⁰

Not surprisingly, these alterations caused much debate at the May 11 discussion. Many felt the crowd's enhanced role was a positive step, but demanded it react more vividly still to events and more actively support the Decembrists. Kamenshikov complained that what popular support had been added came from the workmen building St. Isaac's Cathedral, though "there was not yet any proletariat. The mass of the *narod* was peasants and soldiers."¹⁸¹ On this point, Tarle came to the rescue. Throwing the weight of his expertise behind his easy-going approach to historicity, he assented to the fictitious counter-attack, then noted, "on Senate Square (this completely accords with history)... there was a moment when the workers, having stood neutrally, learned to hurl logs at his majesty."¹⁸² These workers may not have constituted the majority, and their political consciousness may not have been fully formed, but it was this process of learning, of becoming politically aware as a result of witnessing the Decembrists' defiance – this display of "reality in its revolutionary development," in Socialist Realist terms – that was key to the *narod*'s role on Senate Square.¹⁸³ For Tarle, provided peasants and soldiers were also given a more active role, there was no historical impediment to depicting workers doing their part for the revolution.

In fact, Tarle was more concerned the scene's pathos, the difficulty of the Decembrists' position as their plans disintegrated, came across insufficiently. And he was not alone;

¹⁸⁰ RGALI, f.2642, op.1, d.10, ll.75-110.

¹⁸¹ RGALI, f.648, op.5, d.194, l.6.

¹⁸² Ibid., l.17.

¹⁸³ This classic capsule definition of Socialist Realism first appeared in the Statute of the Union of Soviet Writers, established during the First Congress of Soviet Writers, August 8-September 1, 1934. See Luppol et al, eds. *Pervyi vsesoiuznyi s'ezd sovetskikh pisatelei*, 712-714, here 712.

musicologist Iosif Ryzhkin and composer Lev Knipper both lamented the lack of tension rising to climax. As a solution, Knipper suggested, “At the moment of terrible standing, you... must write a wonderful symphonic scene, about a minute and a half long... If you reveal the tragedy through music the feeling will be much stronger.”¹⁸⁴ This idea, echoing Gauk’s and indicating the brief symphonic interlude Shaporin had added was inadequate, would ostensibly lessen the scene’s stagnancy and divert focus from another problem, Ryleev’s defeatist closing aria, though that too required emendation. Clearly, Shaporin’s work on Senate Square was far from finished.

Shaporin began new revisions in short order. In his June letter to the Bolshoi, he included strengthening the crowd’s role among his intended alterations.¹⁸⁵ For its part, the Bolshoi affirmed its support for the counter-attack, even recommending ending Senate Square with it, to “conclude on the highest point of dramatic tension, without showing the Decembrists’ defeat... [or] Ryleev’s aria.”¹⁸⁶ This appealed to Vsevolod Ivanov; calling Senate Square the most important scene in the opera, he wrote the Bolshoi, “It demands a different ending. You can’t send out Ryleev singing despairing words... What does he mean, ‘It’s all over’?... Is it possible Ryleev didn’t believe in the strength of the revolutionary movement, of the Russian *narod*?” He assured the theater Shaporin was willing to “*significantly* augment” Senate Square and alter its ending.¹⁸⁷ Shaporin, in turn, signed a contract to “extend the symphonic fragment to create a dramatic culmination and rewrite the finale to exclude the theme of despair (Ryleev’s aria.)”¹⁸⁸ A subsequent memo restored the aria, with Ryleev exiting to the nighttime streets of St. Petersburg

¹⁸⁴ RGALI, f.648, op.5, d.194, ll.45-46.

¹⁸⁵ RGALI, f.2642, op.1, d.187, l.2.

¹⁸⁶ RGALI, f.648, op.5, d.820, l.17.

¹⁸⁷ RGALI, f.2642, op.1, d.583, ll.13, 15. Emphasis in the original. “It’s all over” was the opening line of Ryleev’s aria and lent a decidedly gloomy tone to the close of Senate Square.

¹⁸⁸ RGALI, f.648, op.5, d.819, l.68.

for his moment of solitary reflection. Evidently, Shaporin was fond of this number and sought to preserve it through relocation.¹⁸⁹

Finally, in late 1951, the Bolshoi assured the KDI Senate Square had been improved to “strengthen... the *narod*’s revolutionary mood and readiness to help the revolutionaries... [and] in Ryleev’s aria... strengthen the feeling of social optimism.”¹⁹⁰ Among future alterations, the theater noted it had asked Shaporin to “insert an orchestral episode or chorale for the *narod*” to enhance the dramatic culmination, and endorsed the composer’s decision to allow Ryleev his aria beyond the Square.¹⁹¹ Emendations detailed in a second memo demonstrate the crowd’s greater revolutionary inclination: after Kakhovskii shoots Miloradovich and Ryleev orders the troops to action, they shout, “Hurrah! Guards, sailors, to the square! God give them luck!” When Nikolai’s artillery arrives, they exhort them not to turn on their brothers-in-arms, crying, “Don’t shoot!”¹⁹² With these revisions in progress, by the close of 1951 *Dekabristy* appeared to have found the correct resolution for Senate Square.

As with Pestel’, however, there was substantial backtracking and disagreement over the course of 1952. One thing remained clear: no matter how vividly portrayed, the actual historical events of the abortive Decembrist Revolution, with the revolutionaries holding their ground indecisively, were simply not exciting enough for opera. But was the fictitious counter-attack the right solution? In an early 1952 memo, Okhlopkov echoed the praxis-driven rhetoric of Socialist Realism, opining, “To escape the impression of absurdity in the revolutionaries’ ‘standing’ on

¹⁸⁹ RGALI, f.648, op.5, d.820, l.11.

¹⁹⁰ Ibid., ll.26-26ob.

¹⁹¹ Ibid., l.26.

¹⁹² RGALI, f.2642, op.1, d.10, ll.96-101ob. Though this excerpt is not obvious as a later addition to the 1951 manuscript, I have concluded this to be the case because it is explicitly labeled as an insert in the 1953 collotype of the score, prepared on the eve of the opera’s premiere. See RGALI, f.2642, op.1, d.12, ll.216-229. RGALI, f.648, op.5, d.820, ll.38-40 (Bolshoi report to the KDI). The new lyrics are confirmed in Shaporin, *Dekabristy*, 352-359.

the Square, we must show them not ‘standing’ but awaiting the other rebelling regiments. We must show the *process of gathering*,”¹⁹³ Referencing Nechkina’s history of the Decembrists, Okhlopkov detailed various activities with which to enact this transformation, including the Decembrists’ regiments advancing with staggered timing, a “feverish” search for Trubetskoi, and the crowd’s agitation to join the counter-attack, a promising development ignored by the revolutionaries due to their bourgeois political limitations. Per the May 11 consensus, the *narod*’s support would be robust but limited to shouting and throwing materials. These revisions were put in place for June 14.

Unfortunately, as became evident in the post-run-through discussion, the Bolshoi’s consultants still had doubts. One staffer spoke enthusiastically about the counter-attack and returned to the idea of ending on this triumphant note. But Okhlopkov pointed out that such an ending, while glorious, could be confusing. Staging a fictitious counter-attack was one thing, but it still must be clear the Decembrists were defeated. Provisionally letting go of Ryleev’s aria, he suggested concluding with Lukin, who, “dripping blood, sings of death, and with him groans all of Russia, the whole *narod*.”¹⁹⁴ Composer Mikhail Chulaki was still unsure whether the counter-attack should be portrayed at all. “Liberties have been taken,” he mused. “For example, the counter-attack, which didn’t happen. But if we follow historical truth, we won’t find the means to convey what they wanted to do. So, we must approach this as an artistic work and keep in mind that deviations may be made.”¹⁹⁵ Here, Chulaki hit on the fundamental dilemma of staging the Decembrist Revolution with due diligence to historical and ideological concerns. His uncertainty about its proper resolution would be voiced by many through the following week.

¹⁹³ RGALI, f.2642, op.1, d.583, l.33. Emphasis in the original.

¹⁹⁴ RGALI, f.648, op.5, d.236, l.19.

¹⁹⁵ *Ibid.*, l.27.

After another run-through on June 17 with a broader audience of consultants, more controversy arose. Conductor Dmitrii Cherniakov raised the first objection, reacting harshly to the crowd's enhanced activity. In its attempt to answer the calls for a more active *narod*, the Bolshoi had apparently overcorrected. Furthermore, it soon became clear the consensus in favor of the counter-attack, always fragile, had fractured. Interestingly, Nechkina was its strongest advocate, proclaiming excitedly, "There must be a fight... You must do it more convincingly... The collision of sides absolutely must come across."¹⁹⁶ Composer Vladimir Zakharov was not so sure. Declaring himself "troubled," he asserted, "Historically this wasn't so. I got the sense they attacked, and maybe they won? This is dangerous."¹⁹⁷ Such a potential misinterpretation, raised by Okhlopkov three days before, would indeed be perilous. Yet, others were unwilling to let this electrifying moment disappear, not least because it would mean a return to the dull standing of the pre-1951 drafts. As soloist Mchedeli explained, echoing Chulaki's concern for conveying the Decembrists' intentions, "It's not that the Decembrists attack. But you don't get the sense they're killed... We know they stood aimlessly. But we must consider that Shaporin has written an opera for future generations. The Decembrists' action consists in their attack."¹⁹⁸ Mchedeli also advocated keeping Ryleev's aria, which had been performed despite the recent move against it. Despite its tragic inflection, he argued, it would conclude the scene with the proper understanding and even add poignancy. In his closing remarks, Anisimov allowed he too had doubts about this aria, but due to its "political and ideological meaning,"¹⁹⁹ it must remain.

The Bolshoi took a week to further revise, then held new run-throughs on June 24 and 26. In accordance with the Council of Ministers' post-scandal resolution, Anisimov wrote the

¹⁹⁶ Ibid., ll.35-36.

¹⁹⁷ Ibid., ll.41-42.

¹⁹⁸ Ibid., l.50.

¹⁹⁹ Ibid., l.53.

Council on June 20, informing it of the performances and assuring it *Dekabristy* had been substantially revised and consultants “find no violations of historical or ideo-artistic truth.”²⁰⁰ The Council ordered KDI head Nikolai Besselov, appointed, like Anisimov, in the wake of the *Ot vsego serdtsa* scandal, to attend.²⁰¹ Besselov did so, hosting a discussion with music and theater workers, historians, students, and representatives from the Party and state, on June 25. Here, the *narod*’s activity received scant but positive commentary, as did Ryleev’s aria, solidifying the move back toward preserving it. However, an issue dormant since May 11, 1951 now reemerged: the need for a broader symphonic climax. Musicologist Tamara Livanova raised this point directly, asserting Senate Square needed “a strong culmination... more development... There’s none of that in the music.”²⁰² Several speakers agreed: the brief symphonic interlude was insufficient. Shaporin would have to expand it before *Dekabristy* could gain approval.

Furthermore, the counter-attack remained contentious, with speakers divided evenly for and against it. In Nechkina’s absence, the historians opposed this invention. Druzhinin began mildly, demonstrating his understanding of Socialist Realism by positing that historians need not be sticklers, as “the demands of art often conflict with the data, and one must discard details if they interfere with expression of what’s important.”²⁰³ Nevertheless, he continued vehemently, “There are things against which historians must protest.” The counter-attack implied a level of organization the Decembrists did not possess, and “this destroys truth. I understand the director has to bring out the dynamics, but he must do it another way.” Okhlopkov protested that he had made every effort to proceed historically, but Druzhinin retorted, “You didn’t... You can’t have this attack... It didn’t happen and couldn’t, because the whole course of events would’ve been

²⁰⁰ RGALI, f.648, op.5, d.244, l.1.

²⁰¹ RGALI, f.962, op.3, d.2357, l.44.

²⁰² *Ibid.*, l.34.

²⁰³ *Ibid.*, l.10.

different.”²⁰⁴ Zaionchkovskii and Syroechkovskii agreed, though the latter questioned whether there might be some justification in the audience’s enthusiastic applause. Among musicians, Zakharov remained anti-attack, joined by Khrennikov, who saw it as an inadequate cover-up for the lack of symphonic culmination.²⁰⁵ But several voices also spoke in its favor, including Aleksandr Shaverdian, who opined, “I can’t agree the attack is a directorial sin. It’s the most moving thing in the opera.”²⁰⁶ Sergei Skrebkov concurred, and returning to Chulaki’s thoughts, framed it as a question of “artistic and historical truth... Art has the right to show this objectively possible event, and here it’s given an artistically truthful resolution... So, I think there’s no deviation from historical truth; rather, historical truth is expressed by artistic means.”²⁰⁷ This proved a difficult argument to contradict, especially as one of the opera’s primary objectives was to inspire the audience with patriotic love for the Decembrists.

The next day, KDI officials met with Anisimov to hash out their report to the Council of Ministers and resolve whether to proceed with the premiere. They returned to the assessment that the crowd had been overcorrected. In the words of consultant Sysoev, “The *narod* must... make a majestic impression, but now they flit and run about; their behavior smacks of operetta.”²⁰⁸ Fortunately, this was a directorial issue, easily rectified. Revisiting the counter-attack, they came to renewed consensus in its favor. The need for action was simply too pressing; as Sysoev put it, “If there’s no attack, there’s no Senate Square.”²⁰⁹ Some suggested improvements, but absent the historians, no one proposed removing the counter-attack entirely. In their report, Bespalov and Anisimov again emphasized the extensive revisions and praised *Dekabristy*’s music, libretto, and

²⁰⁴ Ibid., ll.12-14.

²⁰⁵ Ibid., ll.81-82.

²⁰⁶ Ibid., l.41.

²⁰⁷ Ibid., ll.76-77.

²⁰⁸ RGALI, f.962, op.3, d.2415, l.2.

²⁰⁹ Ibid., l.3.

staging in terms directly answering the criticism against *Velikaia druzhba* and *Ot vsego serdtsa*. They conceded it still had defects, “for example, doubt is raised by... the counter-attack on Senate Square, which conveys their impulse convincingly artistically but contradicts factual historical events.”²¹⁰ In light of such ongoing difficulties, the KDI recommended delaying the premiere until October. Shaporin, Okhlopkov, and conductor Aleksandr Melik-Pashaev, however, wanted to open before the theater season’s end. Bespalov and Anisimov asked the Council to adjudicate and promised to spend the summer continuing work, regardless.²¹¹ In the end, the Council sided with the KDI.²¹² It would be another year before *Dekabristy*’s premiere.

While the primary cause of delay remained Shaporin’s struggle against inserting Pestel’, Senate Square did not go unnoticed during the final year of production. After more revisions, on September 6 Anisimov informed the Council of Ministers the Bolshoi would soon conclude work and asked permission to premiere in time for the Nineteenth Party Congress, beginning October 5.²¹³ The theater held another run-through on September 20.²¹⁴ Despite this move, and KDI letters to the Council on October 31 and directly to Stalin on November 27, inviting him to view the production and assuring him Shaporin had used “the latest data of Soviet historical science... and consulted with the most distinguished specialist historians,” permission to premiere remained elusive.²¹⁵

²¹⁰ RGALI, f.962, op.3, d.2357, ll.48-49.

²¹¹ Ibid., 49.

²¹² The Council of Ministers’ reply is not preserved, but its content is apparent from the continued delay of the opera’s premiere.

²¹³ RGALI, f.648, op.5, d.244, l.3.

²¹⁴ Date given in RGALI, f.648, op.5, d.820, l.80 (Bolshoi/KDI memo to Council of Ministers). The discussion of the September 20, 1952 run-through has not been preserved, though several positive comments from it are excerpted in this memo.

²¹⁵ RGALI, f.962, op.3, d.2357, ll.81-82; RGALI, f.962, op.3, d.2357, l.83.

After the December 6 run-through, when Shaporin finally agreed to add Pestel', he also revised Senate Square.²¹⁶ Answering the call for a broader symphonic culmination, the instrumental section between Nikolai's artillery's arrival and Lukin's swansong was lengthened, though only by eight measures. More significantly, the counter-attack, which remained the scene's climax, was given more definition and moved earlier within the symphonic stretch. In the 1951 score, the only indication given is the word "shooting," sixteen measures after the artillery's arrival.²¹⁷ Apparently, the artillery spent this time getting into position and staring down the revolutionaries, leaving less than ten measures after its discharge for the counter-attack. In the final version, the artillery fires immediately, after which Bestuzhev's regiment counter-attacks, followed by a second barrage, Shchepin's regiment's counter-attack, and finally a third barrage, after which the Decembrists are defeated, the crowd scatters, and only Lukin remains to sing his last [Fig. 5]. Answering concerns about the *narod's* decorum, and the distaste for Ryleev's maudlin finale, Shaporin removed Ryleev's aria and, taking the Bolshoi's previous suggestion, replaced it with a ten-measure choral lament sung by the crowd offstage.²¹⁸ Ryleev's aria was not jettisoned entirely; Shaporin transferred it to the new scene, The Prison Cell, where he sings it prior to his final meeting with Pestel', before their execution.²¹⁹ With this new setting and partially altered text (taken from Ryleev's aria during the conspiracy in his home), the aria now sounded more resolute than downtrodden.²²⁰

²¹⁶ This analysis is based on a comparison of RGALI, f.2642, op.1, d.10, ll.75-110 (1951 manuscript, significantly marked up), RGALI, f.2642, op.1, d.12, ll.224-234 (1953 collotype, Scene 6 insert); and Shaporin. *Dekabristy*, 308-372.

²¹⁷ RGALI, f.2642, op.1, d.10, l.103ob.

²¹⁸ RGALI, f.2642, op.1, d.12, l.234; Shaporin, *Dekabristy*, 367-368.

²¹⁹ Shaporin, *Dekabristy*, 437-444.

²²⁰ In a nod to the Bolshoi's concentration on historical sources, the new text is a quotation from the historical Ryleev's poem *Nalivaiko*, written in 1825 on the even of the Decembrist Revolution. Shaporin introduced it into the 1951 score as an aria for Ryleev during the

Figure 5 (The Decembrist counter-attack on Senate Square)

The musical score is divided into four systems. The first system features the Chorus (Narod) with the lyrics "Don't shoot! Don't shoot!" in a 3/4 time signature. The piano accompaniment consists of a rhythmic pattern of eighth notes in the right hand and a bass line in the left hand. The second system is a piano solo in 3/4 time, featuring a melodic line with triplets and a bass line with chords. The third system is a piano solo in 4/4 time, featuring a melodic line with triplets and a bass line with chords. The fourth system is a piano solo in 3/4 time, featuring a melodic line with triplets and a bass line with chords.

SOURCE: Iurii Shaporin. *Dekabristy: Opera v 4-kh aktakh, 10 kartinakh. Klavir* (Moscow: Muzfond SSSR, 1953), 359-365.

conspiracy scene. In the 1953 score, with this text transposed to The Prison Cell, Ryleev sings a new aria in the earlier scene, "Oh, My Rus'," which became popular with critics and audiences alike. Kondratii Ryleev, "Nalivaiko (Otryvki iz poemy)" in *Russkaia romanticheskaia poema*, ed. M.N. Bychkov (Moscow, *Pravda*, 1985), 151-161. RGALI, f.2642, op.1, d.10, ll.35ob-41; Shaporin, *Dekabristy*, 260-264. For press reviews praising "Oh, My Rus'," see P. Apostolov, "Dekabristy, Opera Shaporina na stsene Bol'shogo teatra," *Sovetskoe iskusstvo* (27 June 1953), 2-3; Georgii Khubov, "Dekabristy, Opera Iu. Shaporina v Bol'shom teatre," *Pravda* (2 July 1953), 2; V. Zakharov, "Opera Dekabristy v Bol'shom teatre," *Izvestiia* (4 July 1953), 2.

Figure 5 (continued)

Led by Bestuzhev, the first rank of rebelling soldiers counter-attacks.

Piano

10

12

14

17

20

22

Second tsarist barrage. Shchepin rouses the rebelling troops for a second attack.

[Shchepin's] second rank of rebelling soldiers counter-attacks.

Piano

Figure 5 (continued)

24 Third tsarist barrage. 3

Piano

26

Piano

28

The remaining soldiers fall to the side of Nikolai's troops.

Piano

Artistic vs. Historical Truth

In May 1953, Shaporin submitted the final version of *Dekabristy*, and the Bolshoi performed one last run-through.²²¹ With the Council of Ministers' sanction, the Ministry of Culture, recent successor to the KDI, finally granted its approval.²²² Premiering on June 23,

²²¹ RGALI, f.2642, op.1, d.543, l.7; RGALI, f.648, op.5, d.821, l.1.

²²² RGALI, f.648, op.5, d.370, l.4.

Dekabristy was a major critical success.²²³ Reviewers agreed Shaporin had successfully transformed his love story into a mighty historical epic. Shchepin was deemed overly romantic, but still a satisfactory hero, and Elena was praised for embodying “the spiritual beauty of Russian women.”²²⁴ Shaporin’s depiction of the *narod* was also acclaimed, though the Fair was judged too chaotic. *Sovetskaia muzyka* felt the *narod*’s revolutionary potential was conveyed insufficiently, but *Sovetskoe iskusstvo* asserted the opera “leaves no doubt ‘Pugachev lives in the *narod*’ ... though the Decembrists don’t see it.”²²⁵ Critics applauded Shaporin’s portrait of the Decembrists as a group, though many wished for more individualization, their arias being cut from similar musical cloth. Most also found Pestel’s inclusion a substantial improvement. Senate Square, however, generated a mixed response. Its effectiveness was unquestionable and the counter-attack strongly approved. As *Sovetskaia muzyka* wrote, “though [it] contradicts real events... [it] answers the demands of theatrical action and musical dramaturgy.”²²⁶ Still, one author worried Lukin’s swansong was too mournful a culmination, and others found the symphonic development still inadequate. Overall, Shaporin’s music garnered acclaim for its accessibility, *narodnost*, and drama, reminiscent of the Russian classics.

Indeed, in its final version, *Dekabristy* is an ideal Socialist Realist opera: lovely, well-written music, predictable but not dull, emotional but not overly so, inhabiting a comfortably nineteenth-century sonic universe. As Frolova-Walker notes, “There is a certain fascination in

²²³ For premiere dates (Bolshoi Theater June 23, 1953 and Kirov Theater July 15, 1953), see Levit, 325. The following summary of press coverage is based on Georgii Khubov, “*Dekabristy*: Opera Iu. Shaporina v Bol’shom teatre,” *Pravda* (7 July 1953); Elena Grosheva, “*Dekabristy*: Opera Iu. Shaporina,” *Sovetskaia muzyka* 21:8 (Aug 1953), 9-18; P. Apostolov, “Opera *Dekabristy* na stsene Bol’shogo teatra,” *Sovetskoe iskusstvo* (24 June 1953), 2-3; V. Zakharov, “Opera *Dekabristy* v Bol’shom teatre,” *Izvestiia* (4 July 1953), 2. All four of these reviewers helped shape *Dekabristy* as consultants to the Bolshoi during the production process.

²²⁴ Grosheva, “*Dekabristy*: Opera Iu. Shaporina,” 10.

²²⁵ Apostolov, “Opera *Dekabristy* na stsene Bol’shogo teatra,” 2.

²²⁶ Grosheva, “*Dekabristy*, Opera Iu. Shaporina,” 18.

seeing how much a composer can do when originality is ruled out.”²²⁷ So, why was *Dekabristy* such a struggle to bring to the stage? The answer lies at the crossroads of the tense, failure-ridden history of Soviet opera and the contradictory goals of Socialist Realist aesthetics. Other Soviet musical triumphs aside, an increasingly desperate topic in the late 1940s and early 1950s was the continued lack of an exemplary Soviet opera. This became all the more urgent amidst two interlocking events: the rapid-fire, denunciatory Central Committee resolutions of the *zhdanovshchina* in 1946, and the failure of the Bolshoi’s first two postwar new Soviet operas, *Velikaia druzhba*, subject of the final *zhdanovshchina* resolution in 1948, and *Ot vsego serdtsa*, denounced in *Pravda* in 1951. After these disasters, the Bolshoi, under intense pressure to try again, proceeded with extreme caution. In this context, Shaporin and his opera seemed safe bets. *Dekabristy*’s topic was historical, which kept it from the charges of inaccurate portrayal of Soviet life leveled at *Ot vsego serdtsa*, and far enough in the past to avoid the political snares in which *Velikaia druzhba* may have become entangled.²²⁸ Furthermore, while the resolution on

²²⁷ Frolova-Walker, “The Soviet Opera Project,” 212. The author’s brilliant capsule description of *Dekabristy* is worth reading in full.

²²⁸ The resolution “On the Opera *Velikaia druzhba* by V. Muradeli” accused the work of falsely depicting the political relationships of the peoples of the Caucasus to nascent Soviet power. See “Postanovlenie Politbiuro TsK VKP(b) ‘Ob opere *Velikaia druzhba* V. Muradeli’ 10 fevralia 1948 g.” in Artizov and Naumov, 630-634. Boris Schwarz has suggested that a larger problem was the opera’s heroic portrayal of Sergo Ordzhonikidze (the original title was *The Extraordinary Commissar*), who fell out of favor with Stalin in the mid-1930s. In his memoir, Agitprop official Dmitrii Shepilov says only that he was told Stalin objected to the opera’s “distortion of historical truth.” In his comprehensive study, Kiril Tomoff argues that valorization of Ordzhonikidze was a less significant factor in the opera’s denunciation than internal Composers’ Union politics and the Party’s largely unsuccessful attempt to firmly assert its financial and administrative authority over the Union. See: Boris Schwarz, *Music and Musical Life in Soviet Russia, 1917-1981* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1983), 213-214; Dmitrii Shepilov. *The Kremlin’s Scholar: A Memoir of Soviet Politics under Stalin and Khrushchev*, ed. Stephen Bittner (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2007), 97; Kirill Tomoff. *Creative Union: The Professional Organization of Soviet Composers* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2006), 122-151. For a supporting view with fuller examination of contemporaneous musical politics, see Herrala, *The Struggle for Control of Soviet Music form 1932-1948*, 145-229.

Velikaia druzhba had deplored the “formalist direction” in Soviet music and denounced six leading composers, Shaporin was free of this list.²²⁹ Aside from some modernist dabbling in the 1920s, his musical record was pristine and his major works unimpeachable.

Still, one could never be too careful. Reviewing the *zhdanovshchina* resolutions, there was some indication of the direction from which the Bolshoi might anticipate criticism, not in the resolution on music, but the one on film. Like all *zhdanovshchina* resolutions, “On the Film *Bol’shaia zhizn’* [*A Great Life*],” while nominally focused on one production, took aim at larger trends in the genre. Beyond *Bol’shaia zhizn’*’s contemporary theme, it condemned historical films like Pudovkin’s *Admiral Nakhimov*, in which the director “distorted historical truth... [creating] a film not about Nakhimov, but about balls,” and Eisenstein’s *Ivan Groznyi* (*Ivan the Terrible*), *Part 2*, which “displayed ignorance in the depiction of historical facts, presenting Ivan’s progressive warrior-*oprichniki* as a gang of degenerates.”²³⁰ Thus, while a historical opera

²²⁹ Herrala notes Shaporin’s name was shouted from the floor during a meeting at the Central Committee to determine the identity of musical “formalists” in January 1948. However, it is unclear who spoke, and the suggestion was apparently not taken seriously. Herrala, *The Struggle for Control of Soviet Music from 1932-1948*, 160.

²³⁰ “Postanovlenie Orgbiuro TsK VKP(b) ‘O kinofil’me *Bol’shaia zhizn’*” 4 sentiabria 1946 g.” in Artizov and Naumov, 601. *Bol’shaia zhizn’* (*A Great Life*) told the story of the reconstruction of the Donbass after its liberation from Nazi occupation by the Red Army. The Resolution accused the film of depicting Donbass mining operations as far more primitive than they actually were, and of mischaracterizing state and Party representatives. *Admiral Nakhimov* portrayed the life of the eponymous character, who earned his fame by successfully defending Sevastopol against Ottoman siege during the Crimean War. *Ivan Groznyi* (*Ivan the Terrible*), *Part 2* focused on the later part of Ivan IV’s reign, including the period of the *Oprichnina*, which has often been compared to the Stalinist Purges of the 1930s. The *oprichniki* were a band of several thousand warriors established by Ivan IV in 1565, who terrorized large swathes of Muscovy hunting “traitors,” murdering, pillaging, and most notably, sacking Novgorod in 1670. Having accomplished little besides destabilizing the realm, the *oprichniki* were disbanded by Ivan and the territory under their control reintegrated in 1572. The Soviet turn toward glorification of historical Russian national heroes spurred a reassessment of Ivan, which gained momentum after the Nazi invasion in 1941. The Ivan-as-national-hero narrative was encouraged by Stalin, who wished to see him portrayed as a strong state-builder and national leader. Stalin personally authorized the release of Eisenstein’s film *Ivan the Terrible, Part 1* in 1945 and was understood

avoided one set of problems, it had the potential to land squarely in another. As work on *Dekabristy* proceeded, the Bolshoi focused intensely on its accuracy as a historical document.

Such concerns were certainly on the minds of the Bolshoi, its consultants, and the KDI, who mentioned the *zhdanovshchina* resolutions frequently between 1950 and 1953. During the May 11, 1951 discussion, composer Georgii Tikhomirov paraphrased the criticism of *Admiral Nakhimov* before complaining *Dekabristy*'s authors "approached the historical theme untruly... We have no right to forget the Central Committee's dictates."²³¹ A year later, during the June 17, 1952 discussion, Mchedeli used the *Ot vsego serdtsa* scandal as a guidepost, observing that afterwards, "work [on *Dekabristy*] began from a completely different perspective."²³² Even when the KDI approached the Council of Ministers about premiering in October 1952, Bupalov noted the Bolshoi had been "led by the Central Committee resolutions... and critical *Pravda* editorials on opera," in judging the production worthy of performance.²³³ Clearly, the rigor with which all approached *Dekabristy*'s historicity had its roots in the *zhdanovshchina*.

Yet, as the Bolshoi discovered time and again, historical accuracy would not actually guarantee *Dekabristy*'s success. As Agitprop head Dmitrii Shepilov summarized the dilemma in his memoirs, *Dekabristy* "needed a historically accurate plot and, at the same time, a dramatic and heroic framework that conformed to the operatic genre."²³⁴ This caused difficulties with each of the opera's key issues. Annenkov and Polina were documented historical figures, but unsuitable as the central pair. In fact, no real-life Decembrist couple, if portrayed entirely

to be behind the condemnation of *Part 2* in 1946. See Maureen Perrie. *The Cult of Ivan the Terrible in Stalin's Russia*. New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2001.

²³¹ RGALI, f.648, op.5, d.194, ll.75-76.

²³² RGALI, f.648, op.5, d.236, l.49.

²³³ RGALI, f.648, op.5, d.820, l.82. This document is an expanded draft of RGALI, f.962, op.3, d.2357, ll.81-82. For unknown reasons, the paragraph containing this remark was not included in the final version.

²³⁴ Shepilov, *The Kremlin's Scholar*, 246.

accurately, would fit the bill. The historical *narod*'s revolutionary consciousness was low-level and little connected to the Decembrists', a reality that hardly fulfilled the need to portray their revolution as a crucial step toward 1917. Furthermore, a truly Soviet historical interpretation would require a far more substantial role for Pestel'. As Shaporin assured the Bolshoi, this simply could not be done within the structural limits of his opera. Finally, and perhaps most damningly, a completely faithful historical representation of Senate Square, where the revolutionaries stood for hours until they were shot at, in no way accorded with opera's requirements as a dramatic genre. Historical accuracy, desirable in principle, demanded by the Central Committee, was simply inadequate for portraying the Decembrists on the operatic stage.

How could Shaporin and the Bolshoi escape this dilemma? The answer lay in a theme recurrent in discussions of *Dekabristy*: the need for artistic, rather than historical, truth. Historically, Shchepin may not have been a long-standing Northern Society member or had a selflessly devoted Russian wife, but as artistically generalized Socialist Realist images, he and Elena were inspiring examples of Russian revolutionary fervor. Indeed, historically, the *narod* may have been relatively monarchist and uncomprehending of the Decembrists' revolution, but as an artistic instrument, singing clever allegorical songs at the Fair and reacting sympathetically on the Square, they brought to life a key moment in Soviet mythology, when the *narod* learned political rebellion from the progressive aristocracy. Similarly, while *Dekabristy*'s representation of Pestel' may not have done justice to his historical importance, as an artistic image it left an indelible impression of his greatness. And as for the counter-attack on Senate Square, by far the most radical digression from historical fact in the opera, it conveyed artistically what could not be conveyed by strict historicity: the spirit of the Decembrist Revolution, its potential to transform Russia, the tragedy of its failure, and its legacy for future movements.

The promotion of artistic over historical truth found surprisingly strong support among the Bolshoi's historian-consultants. As early as January 1950, Druzhinin opined that artists might permissibly “digress from historical truth... as demanded by the laws of creativity.”²³⁵ During the May 11, 1951 discussion, Zaionchkovskii agreed, noting, “In artistic productions, there's no need to maintain absolute precision ... Events must be represented in the true spirit of our Marxist-Leninist methodology... We can't demand too much of opera; it's not a history lecture.”²³⁶ Choreographer Lev Kramarevskii pointed out that if complete accuracy were demanded, beloved masterworks like *Khovanshchina* and *Pikovaia dama (Queen of Spades)* would be done for.²³⁷ Finally, musicologist Igor Belza focused on what opera could offer as an interpretive medium. “In the music I felt... a vivid, historically truthful image,” he affirmed. “It's an artist's right to sense historicity with his heart.”²³⁸ Fundamentally, historical truth was not merely a question of the information art could provide. Rather, art had the ability, even the *right*, to foreground the emotional side of events, creating, in a sense, its own form of historical truth, even where historical accuracy was lacking.

Thus the true reason for the endless debates over *Dekabristy*'s historicity, and for the content of its final version: after the upheaval and fear of the *zhdanovshchina* – from the Central Committee's 1946 resolutions on literature, theater, and film, which put all Soviet artists on notice and hung the sword of Damocles over Soviet music; to the 1948 resolution “On the Opera *Velikaia druzhba*,” when the sword fell, taking with it the leadership of the Composers' Union, Bolshoi, and KDI; to the 1951 failure of *Ot vsego serdtsa*, which was to have redeemed Soviet opera, but instead dealt a second blow – there simply was no room for another operatic failure.

²³⁵ RGALI, f.648, op.5, d.820, l.15.

²³⁶ RGALI, f.648, op.5, d.194, l.8.

²³⁷ *Ibid.*, l.64.

²³⁸ *Ibid.*, ll.87-88.

Having settled on *Dekabristy*, the Bolshoi scrutinized the work intensely, believing salvation lay in complete historical accuracy. Yet, ultimately, historical truth was not sufficient. Artistic truth was even more necessary. In a review just before the premiere, Syroechkovskii alluded to this idea. Noting *Dekabristy* contained inaccuracies any half-educated citizen could identify, he declared, “Digressions from factual truth... are inescapable and legitimate... in opera.” Far more important, “The audience leaves the theater moved by sympathy for the Decembrists and inspired by their heroism... Shaporin’s opera will not only bring Soviet audiences artistic satisfaction, it will have definite politico-educational significance.”²³⁹ With this sentiment, Syroechkovskii identified the overarching goal of Soviet artistic production: to provide beauty while educating the masses in correct ideological interpretation. To do so with complete historical accuracy would be ideal. But as *Dekabristy*’s long journey to the stage reveals, when historical truth fell short of its mark, artistic truth would carry the day, satisfying Soviet authorities and winning the hearts and minds of the Soviet mass audience.

Many Cooks in the Creative Kitchen

During the many years of *Dekabristy*’s production, an extraordinary number of individuals, institutions, and state and Party agencies became involved in shaping its development. Even from the beginning, Shaporin worked on the opera with collaborators: his librettists, Shchegolev, whose contribution was brief but lasting, and Tolstoi, with whom he continued to negotiate revisions for 20 years. From the mid-1930s, he also worked closely with Vsevolod Rozhdestvenskii, first on the side, then as a full-fledged partner after Tolstoi’s death. With the Bolshoi’s imposition of Vsevolod Ivanov in January 1951, the authorial collective as traditionally defined was complete, weighing in at one composer and remarkably, four librettists.

²³⁹ RGALI, f.648, op.5, d.821, ll.14, 15ob.

But this was only the beginning. The Bolshoi used its contractual powers to press Ivanov on Shaporin and Rozhdestvenskii. Contracting with the theaters was a pragmatic, even necessary move for Shaporin, guaranteeing him an income while he worked, in the form of his initial advance and sums added with each new extension, as well as establishing the theaters' firm intention to stage the opera upon completion. But such contracts also brought an army of music and theater professionals into the production process. Starting with Malinovskaia, successive Bolshoi directors took an active role in shepherding *Dekabristy* forward, asserting their right to influence its content. By the third year of their contractual relationship, with Shaporin already far behind schedule, the Bolshoi put together a production group, to help (or push) him on with his work. Significantly, this group consisted of not only a director and conductor, but also a philologist, setting the stage for the active participation of outside, non-music theater specialists as consultants in the creative process. As time went on and the theater required ever more assessments of *Dekabristy*, its list of consultants grew, most notably to include leading historical experts from whom it commissioned reviews. Finally, once active work on the opera resumed after the war but well before it was completed, the Bolshoi appointed Okhlopkov as director and Melik-Pashaev as conductor, later joined by a dedicated choreographer and set designers, and paired Melik-Pashaev with Pokrovskii and four soloists to serve as a "creative brigade" to aid Shaporin's endeavors.²⁴⁰ It was also in this phase of work that the 22-member Opera Section of the Bolshoi's *khudsovet* took on an advisory role.²⁴¹

²⁴⁰ See RGALI, f.648, op.5, d.819, ll.44, 45 for the appointment of Pokrovskii and Melik-Pashaev (requested by Shaporin in place of the theater's first choice, Kirill Kondrashin) in December 1948 and RGALI, f.648, op.5, d.152, l.1 for the appointment of the creative brigade in March 1949. Set designers A.G. Petritskii and T.G. Starzhenetskaia are first mentioned in a report from the Bolshoi to the KDI in January 1951 (RGALI, f.648, op.5, d.819, l.63). Choreographer L.M. Lavrovskii is first mentioned a year later, in a Bolshoi memo confirming

While the Bolshoi was the most prominent institution involved in *Dekabristy*'s creation, it was far from the only one. Being a subsidiary of the KDI, all contracts concluded by the Bolshoi and modifications to them required approval by the parent agency, in its capacity as primary state censor.²⁴² This brought the KDI to the table on *Dekabristy* from the beginning, a role the agency took quite seriously, as evidenced by its appointment of an expert commission to review the opera in January 1937, the Bolshoi's regular reports to its parent agency at every step in the opera's progress, and KDI representatives' participation in all broad-format discussions of run-throughs from February 1951 onward. This close relationship in shaping *Dekabristy* only became closer that April, when former KDI Assistant Director Anisimov was appointed General Director of the Bolshoi. As a measure of the KDI's growing dedication to and control over the production's fate, the agency itself hosted the presumptive final post-run-through discussion on June 25, 1952, and Anisimov and his KDI superior, Bespalov, worked together intensely the next day to determine the content of the report to the Council of Ministers, signed by both of them. By 1952, there could be no doubt *Dekabristy* was as much the KDI's baby as the Bolshoi's.

As far as censorship was concerned, Agitprop also had a role to play in shaping *Dekabristy*, though it did not assert itself beyond sending its representatives to the post-run-through discussions until late in the process, calling Shaporin in for a meeting only in December 1952, when it seemed the opera was on the cusp of completion. But the Composers' Union, in its capacity as self-regulator for the compositional community, also became actively involved from *Dekabristy*'s early days. Malinovskaia initiated this relationship in 1933, asking for the Union's

the cast list (RGALI, f.2642, op.1, d.546, l.20), but had almost certainly become involved with the production shortly after Shaporin submitted the 1951 score.

²⁴¹ For the membership of the *khudsovet*, or artistic council, see Oreshnikov's October 1951 memo addressed to each one personally, RGALI, f.648, op.5, d.820, ll.9-11.

²⁴² For example, see RGALI, f.2642, op.1, d.543, l.26 (Letter from KDI to the Bolshoi authorizing the modification of Shaporin's existing contract to raise his fee).

help in keeping Shaporin on schedule. Citing several missed deadlines, she wrote the Union in desperation that September, “Having exhausted all available means of influencing Shaporin, the Directorate asks you to inform it of any measures you may take to move this issue past its current hopeless position.”²⁴³ The Union took up the cause, threatening Shaporin to submit a completed score or return his advance and even signing a contract with him to that effect, but to no avail.²⁴⁴ Nevertheless, the effect was to draw the Union into closer contact with the theater, resulting in a wealth of consultant reviews by composers and musicologists, Union members all, their participation in post-run-through discussions, and the involvement of Union head Khrennikov in critical events like Shaporin’s Bolshoi-facilitated January 1951 meeting with Pokrovskii, Zaionchkovskii, and Anisimov (then still at the KDI) to hash out the major flaws of the 1951 libretto. In a sense, at the Bolshoi’s invitation, the Union’s members carried their discussion-based method of professional group creative control down Tverskaia, across Okhotnyi Riad, and directly onto the theater’s main stage.

The final contingent involved in shaping *Dekabristy* was the upper echelons of the Party and state hierarchies, the Council of Ministers and Central Committee. Though Malinovskaia invoked the Central Executive Committee to back up her threats to Shaporin as early as 1932, the state’s real involvement began in April 1951 with Resolution no. 1337, when the Council of Ministers demanded its approval be secured prior to *Dekabristy*’s premiere. In fact, the theater’s employees were not at all averse to a top-level governing body taking this role, even anticipating it a few days earlier, just after the *Ot vsego serdtsa* scandal broke, by expressing a desire to create a commission to liaise with the Central Committee. In the event, the Bolshoi and KDI

²⁴³ RGALI, f.648, op.5, d.819, l.8.

²⁴⁴ RGALI, f.648, op.5, d.819, l.10 (SSK letter); RGALI, f.2642, op.1, d.543, l.2 (SSK contract); RGALI, f.648, op.5, d.819, l.12 (subsequent letter from Malinovskaia to SSK lamenting the failure of this endeavor).

diligently followed the Council's order, reporting to it frequently from June 1952, when it seemed *Dekabristy*'s had at last reached an acceptable form, until June 1953, when it finally opened before the public, often without receiving a response.

And in familiar Soviet fashion, when official pathways failed to generate the desired response, the opera's partisans turned to personal appeals. After the Bolshoi and KDI declined to push for an immediate premiere in their report to the Council of Ministers at the end of June 1952, the frustrated Shaporin, Okhlopkov, and Melik-Pashaev drafted a letter to Stalin warning that the decision to delay a work ripe for performance would "disorient" compositional society and requesting he "give an order to the appropriate organizations and people to accept the production... as soon as possible."²⁴⁵ The KDI took a similar tactic that autumn, when it, too, agreed the opera was ready for the public, first sending its report to the Council with the heading "To the Chairman of the Council of Ministers, Comrade Stalin," then, when the Council failed to respond, writing directly to that comrade a month later.²⁴⁶ For his part, Shaporin first tried his luck circumventing the ponderous state apparatus by appealing to a Party leader, Central Committee Secretary Georgii Malenkov, in November. After outlining the opera's situation, he wrote cautiously, "I'm not criticizing the KDI or its evaluation, but in light of the unexplained delay, I ask you to assist in the quickest resolution of the issue of the premiere."²⁴⁷ But when this yielded no results, he, too, turned to Stalin, as head of both state and Party bureaucracies. Apparently too shy to disturb the great man directly without a personal connection, in his December letter to Mikhailov he pleaded carefully, "I have no right to ask you to convey my

²⁴⁵ RGALI, f.648, op.5, d.819, l.72. The version of this letter in the archive is only a draft, marked "1951-1952" by the archivist. I have dated it to late June 1952 and attributed its authorship to Shaporin, Okhlopkov, by context but cannot determine whether it was actually sent.

²⁴⁶ RGALI, f.962, op.3, d.2357, l.81, ll.83-87.

²⁴⁷ RGALI, f.2642, op.1, d.184, l.12.

views to Stalin, but if you consider it possible, I would be deeply grateful to you.”²⁴⁸

Unfortunately, not a single one of these appeals succeeded in hastening *Dekabristy*’s premiere. However, as a group they demonstrate clearly how very important the highest levels of state and Party leadership were in shaping *Dekabristy*’s final form, whether or not they responded to the letters they received. Without explicit approval, the opera simply could not premiere; the KDI was unwilling to interpret silence as permission and grant a performance visa, for fear of triggering another scandal. In this tense climate, each appeal that went unanswered sent Shaporin, the Bolshoi, and their consultants back to the drawing board, accounting for much of the alteration made to *Dekabristy* during the last nine months of its production.

The Party also crucially influenced *Dekabristy* in another way. As the debate over historical and artistic truth reveals, the *zhdanovshchina* resolutions as a whole, and especially the “Resolution on the Opera *Velikaia Druzhiba*,” along with the notorious April 1951 *Pravda* editorial denouncing *Ot vsego serdtsa*, and the less prominent but equally disturbing one just a few months later denouncing Konstantin Dan’kevich’s opera *Bogdan Khmel’nitskii*, as performed by the Kiev Opera and Ballet Theater on tour at the Bolshoi²⁴⁹, all of which were Party documents (though the editorials were technically anonymous), had a huge impact on the musical community in the late 1940s and early 1950s. The Party’s views on the arts and opera in particular, foregrounded by these interventions, were thus a source of constant consideration and high anxiety for all involved with *Dekabristy* and a major factor in their creative decisions.

The Bolshoi pursued two major avenues for coping with this issue. On one hand, the theater openly embraced the political aspect of its work on the opera, frequently referencing the resolutions and editorials in reports and discussions concerning *Dekabristy*. For example, in

²⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, 1.22.

²⁴⁹ “Ob opere *Bogdan Khmel’nitskii*,” *Pravda* (20 July 1951), 2-3

November 1948, Rozhdestvenskii wrote the Bolshoi asking for an increase in his fee.²⁵⁰ In a memo, Oreshnikov supported his claim, confirming that while the libretto had been approved in March 1947, Rozhdestvenskii had subsequently been asked to complete major revisions, alterations “having no connection to the composer’s demands or faults of the existing libretto, but raised exclusively by a change in the demands of the theater.”²⁵¹ In a letter to the KDI shortly after requesting an increase in Shaporin’s fee on the same grounds, the Bolshoi left no doubt as to the reason for its heightened standards, noting the “immense political and artistic significance of *Dekabristy*... and the very great work undertaken by the composer to complete it in light of the Central Committee resolution on the opera *Velikaia druzhba*.”²⁵² Similarly, during the May 11, 1951 discussion, after Fidel’man complained his colleagues were not framing their criticism in terms of the resolution and *Pravda* editorial, Kaloshin countered, “I think everyone who spoke today is perturbed by the government’s articles... I understood each speech to be oriented from this starting point.”²⁵³ Even in the special meeting called by the KDI to discuss the *Pravda* editorial, several speakers addressed *Dekabristy*, including Pokrovskii, who declared the *Ot vsego serdtsa* debacle “an enormous lesson for us... We have very serious questions about [*Dekabristy*’s] libretto.”²⁵⁴ Mchedeli, also a member of the creative brigade, seconded this opinion. “It’s interesting to assess how we’re working on *Dekabristy* by the experience of work on *Ot vsego serdtsa*,” he noted. “I want to draw one useful conclusion, so we don’t repeat this mistake... We’ve called on professors and consultants but haven’t reached an accord, and if it

²⁵⁰ RGALI, f.648, op.5, d.819, l.43. The *khudruk* was the artistic director of the theater.

²⁵¹ RGALI, f.648, op.5, d.819, l.42.

²⁵² *Ibid.*, l.47.

²⁵³ RGALI, f.648, op.5, d.194, ll.38, 68.

²⁵⁴ RGALI, f.962, op.3, d.2313, l.77.

weren't for this article, we would have premiered the production not having verified it."²⁵⁵

Clearly, the theater would not now be guilty of such a grievous error.

On the other hand, the Bolshoi's second tactic, which arguably proved more effective, was to bring as many people as possible, representing as many sources of expertise as possible, into the production process, to provide a united front as strong as it was rich in numbers. Beginning with theater consultants from within and without the Bolshoi organization and quickly growing to include musical consultants from the Composers' Union, historical consultants from Moscow State University and the Academy of Sciences, and censors from the KDI and Agitprop, this tide reached its peak at the May 11, 1951 discussion, which included in addition to these forces representatives from the Central Committee, Komsomol, Union of Soviet Writers, *Pravda*, Moscow State Conservatory, the State Institute of Theater Arts, and assorted literary critics and philologists.²⁵⁶ Indeed, at this meeting, even as Selivanov made an effort to bring the Central Committee into closer collaboration on *Dekabristy* by suggesting the creation of a special joint commission, Aleksei Ogolevets called upon yet a higher group of "consultants," sainted Marxist theoreticians, bolstering his demand for greater realism by noting, "Dobroliubov said much about this in his theory of practical criticism, Plekhanov spoke of it, and Engels."²⁵⁷ Amidst this great accumulation of expertise, the theater was careful to publicize the depth of its bench to higher authorities. In its December 1951 petition to the KDI to re-launch rehearsals, it noted that it had "thoroughly studied the criticism of the theater's creative workers and musical society," resulting in its hiring Vsevolod Ivanov to help revise the libretto.²⁵⁸ Six months later, in

²⁵⁵ RGALI, f.962, op.3, d.2314, l.49.

²⁵⁶ I have combined the list of invitees to the May 8 performance and list of participants in the May 11 discussion. RGALI, f.648, op.5, d.819, ll.66, 67.

²⁵⁷ RGALI, f.648, op.5, d.194, l.60.

²⁵⁸ RGALI, f.648, op.5, d.820, l.26.

their joint report to the Council of Ministers, the Bolshoi and KDI boasted that the late-June post-run-through discussions had included “Music and theater professionals, historians, students, representatives of the largest enterprises, workers from the Party and Soviet *apparatus* and the press... the majority [of whom] evaluated the opera positively.”²⁵⁹ Finally, in its November 1952 plea to Stalin, the KDI took up the mantle and not only touted the participation of “the entire creative collective of the Bolshoi... representatives of musical society, specialist historians, and arts workers,” but even went so far as to quote reviews submitted by Druzhinin and Nechkina, commentary given by composers Vladimir Zakharov and Ernst Kapp at post-run-through discussions, and an analysis published in *Sovetskaia muzyka* by musicologist Tamara Livanova, as well as noting that “an analogous evaluation... was expressed at the Composers’ Union’s Fifth Plenum” earlier that year.²⁶⁰ Amidst this barrage, one might begin to wonder if there were anyone in the creative community who had not taken a hand in *Dekabristy*’s production.

Instrumental as it may have been, the collectivity emphasized in such reports was far from superficial. During their many years of work, the Bolshoi’s employees and consultants came to feel a true sense of ownership and responsibility for *Dekabristy*. This mentality was reflected not only in their assumption that they had the right to tell Shaporin how his opera ought to proceed musically and narratively, but in their approach to doing so. For instance, opening the first large discussion in February 1951, Solodovnikov noted Shaporin was unable to participate due to travel, but “We have gathered to give our notes... and he awaits our decision.”²⁶¹ And after the scale of the suggested alterations became clear, Melik-Pashaev intervened, cautioning,

²⁵⁹ RGALI, f.648, op.5, d.819, l.73.

²⁶⁰ RGALI, f.962, op.3, d.2357, ll.83-87. This letter is a condensed version of an even longer one filled with more names and quotations, which the KDI sent to the Council of Ministers at approximately the same time. The letter to Stalin may have been prompted by the Council’s failure to respond.

²⁶¹ RGALI, f.648, op.5, d.192, l.1.

“We must take a careful approach so he understands what we want from him.”²⁶² For the conductor, it was not a question of whether Shaporin would fulfill the theater’s requests, but merely of what they would ask him to do.

Yet, during the discussion of the *Ot vsego serdtsa* denunciation two months later, a more vulnerable angle emerged: the perception of all involved that *Dekabristy*’s ultimate success or failure rested on their shoulders as much as on Shaporin’s. Though the theater hoped to premiere *Dekabristy* soon, a chastened Solodovnikov noted, “We mustn’t do so without treating the fundamental work of a Soviet composer and the Bolshoi with full seriousness. We’ll mobilize all our forces, but if there are doubts... we must decline.”²⁶³ Musing on the multifaceted nature of their work, Pokrovskii added, “When we write an opera, that’s one thing. But when we see it concretely on stage, we encounter a whole range of circumstances requiring correction.”²⁶⁴ Indeed, as the Bolshoi’s History Sector noted in its late-1951 memo, “The performance collective must apply all its strength and mastery to correcting flaws in the process of staging. As the theater’s sad experience bears witness, forgetting this most important factor inevitably leads to serious mistakes.” It emphasized the active participation required of director, conductor, and set designers to bring out the opera’s central themes and called the performers to “a lively, creative relationship to the dramatic material, not negatively criticizing but creatively participating in the work on it. Much depends on the artistic feeling and tact of the performers.” Composer and librettist were responsible for what they had written, it conceded, “But the theater is responsible a thousand times over for what it brings to its stage.”²⁶⁵ The following June, after the next set of run-throughs, composer Aram Khachaturian revealed this sense was still as strong

²⁶² Ibid., l.5.

²⁶³ RGALI, f.648, op.5, d.2313, l.35.

²⁶⁴ Ibid., l.77.

²⁶⁵ RGALI, f.648, op.5, d.820, ll.22, 24-25.

as ever, affirming, “The people wait for operas, and we all, musical society... decide whether to allow this work... It’s an enormous duty.”²⁶⁶ Even many years later, Chulaki recalled, “Bespalov half-jokingly said, ‘Shaporin writes his opera under me.’ He took full responsibility for the forthcoming premiere of a work on such an important historico-revolutionary theme and thus strove to barricade himself in meetings to which were invited besides musicians, philosophers, historians, and other specialists, to present composite recommendations.”²⁶⁷

Occasionally, despite their sense of themselves as necessary contributors to *Dekabristy*’s success, some consultants began to feel they had overstepped their bounds. During the second day of the *Ot vsego serdtsa* discussion, when Mchedeli asserted, “every composer who has worked with our creative brigades has been satisfied with this method,”²⁶⁸ Zakharov scoffed in reply, “Shaporin told us he’ll never allow himself ‘for the rest of my life’ to write an opera for the Bolshoi, because ‘the Bolshoi is torture.’ He was talking about the brigade.”²⁶⁹ Though Zakharov clarified that he was not seeking to do away with the brigades, only to reform their methodology, Solodovnikov’s response was uncompromising. “If there were no brigade,” he stated flatly, “there would be no *Dekabristy*.”²⁷⁰ Similarly, at the May 11 discussion, Kabalevskii worried that while many important comments had been made that day, “If you summarize what’s been said, it turns out the first part must be written anew, the last part liquidated, and the middle part reconstructed,”²⁷¹ leaving nothing of Shaporin’s original behind. But Tikhomirov brushed this concern aside, saying, “Shaporin must listen to criticism... It’s very good the Bolshoi opened its doors wide and heard criticism from various points of view... The Bolshoi and its

²⁶⁶ RGALI, f.962, op.3, d.2414, l.50.

²⁶⁷ Grosheva, 315.

²⁶⁸ RGALI, f.962, op.3, d.2314, l.49.

²⁶⁹ *Ibid.*, l.57.

²⁷⁰ *Ibid.*, l.59.

²⁷¹ RGALI, f.648, op.5, d.194, l.51.

composers... must rely on the opinion of the masses, composers, directors, writers, theater workers... Only then can we finish what we've started, and finish we must, for we're dealing with a deeply talented composer."²⁷² Interestingly, Zakharov now spoke in support of consultation, which he apparently saw as separate from the use of creative brigades. "If as a result of today's meeting Shaporin feels the strength and desire to carry his work to its end, we can truly say this opera will be such as our Party and *narod* await from us," he began.

Sympathizing with the composer's potential frustration, he continued,

I understand that to Shaporin, an author who worked long and hard on this opera, some comments may seem harsh, even painful; his nerves are shot. But if he catches the substance, the most important thread decisively underlying all the speeches, it's an ardent wish that the opera be finished, because we all feel this opera is a colossal achievement and that it may succeed. If Shaporin honestly takes our advice, returns to the opera with passion, it will succeed and we'll all take a great joy in it.²⁷³

Zakharov's emphasis on hard-won success is telling. Despite Kabalevskii's concern Shaporin might be overburdened and his creative voice stifled, despite the frustration Zakharov, as his close friend, knew the composer felt, on balance the opera's many consultants believed their advice represented *Dekabristy*'s best chance, musically and politically, to become the first successful Soviet opera, an achievement that ultimately would be both Shaporin's and their own.

Indeed, this idea came across with yet more urgency a year later, during the June run-throughs. Though just a few weeks earlier, during the Composers' Union's Opera Commission's discussion of Aleksandr Kas'ianov's *Stepan Razin*, Shaporin sagely advised his colleague to "listen quietly to everything ... Then, having peacefully considered it, say, 'This I will do, and this I won't,'"²⁷⁴ on June 14, 1952 he lost his temper once again, declaring that he simply could not, *would* not, substantially revise *Dekabristy* again. Okhlopkov, equally frustrated by this time,

²⁷² Ibid., l.80.

²⁷³ Ibid., ll.95-96.

²⁷⁴ RGALI, f.2077, op.1, d.750, l.11.

supported his claim. “I’m an honest guy,” he asserted desperately. “I took to this work ardently, with love, inspiration, I wanted to make a really good production. I fought a lot with Shaporin, we stood in the street and had it out.” Okhlopkov believed the two had finally worked through *Dekabristy*’s issues and found the way forward. “But now it seems I’m on the wrong path,” he mused sadly. “Now all is lost, I work because I must finish what I started. But I work without desire, without fire, and no one offers concrete help.”²⁷⁵ If either anticipated sympathy from Anisimov, they were sorely mistaken. Ever businesslike, he snapped, “Of course this staging demands intense work... We understand your nerves are strained... But it’s useless to be so pessimistic. Watch that your mood isn’t transferred to your depiction of the Decembrists.”²⁷⁶ Shaporin still managed a parting shot, noting wryly that if he were to make all the suggested cuts, half the opera would be discarded and length no longer an issue. But echoing Zakharov, Chulaki chided him, “It’s not worth getting offended; everyone is offering what they think will improve the production... Each wants to help... You’ve got to sort through and select those notes you find necessary.”²⁷⁷ Confronted with his own recent advice to Kas’ianov, Shaporin could only acquiesce. This bitter pill was made somewhat easier on June 17, when Anisimov, having made his point, took a softer tone. Emphasizing once again the sense of ownership all involved had come to feel for *Dekabristy*, he averred, “We all ache for it and want everything to be in its place. So I ask Shaporin, Okhlopkov and Melik-Pashaev to check all the details, though I know they also feel this ache. Peacefully take all the criticism, aimed at improvement, and together we’ll carry this work to its end.”²⁷⁸

²⁷⁵ RGALI, f.648, op.5, d.236, l.20.

²⁷⁶ Ibid., l.21.

²⁷⁷ Ibid., l.28.

²⁷⁸ Ibid., l.56.

In fact, Shaporin frequently expressed frustration with the myriad advice he was given throughout the process of composing and staging *Dekabristy*. Sometimes he complained to friends, as evidenced by Zakharov's comments and the later recollection of Evgenii Svetlanov, then Shaporin's composition student, that after the June 1952 run-throughs, "Iurii was depressed. He threw up his hands... Revise it again! How many times could he do it? He spent 30 years writing it, and now more?"²⁷⁹ Once in a while he even spoke out during post-run-through discussions, as on May 11, 1951, when he noted bitterly that he felt he had been treated as a "villain" or sacrificial lamb since the *Ot vsego serdsta* scandal²⁸⁰ and on June 14, 1952, when he lost his temper completely. But for the most part, charmer that he was, he preferred to reserve his ire for private communications, as in his post-May 11 letter to the Bolshoi detailing the alterations to which he would and absolutely would not agree, the similar conversation related by Ivanov in his August letter to the theater, and the more refined expressions of grievance couched in his personal appeals to Malenkov and Mikhailov in late 1952. Even before these last two overtures, which proved equally fruitless, in autumn 1951 Shaporin wrote Anisimov personally, professing that the constant discussions and reversals of *Dekabristy*'s fortune had driven him to despair. "I make no pretense to the ideal resolution of my theme," he wrote. "But among non-ideal resolutions, the one I've done is at least possible... I'll tell you a secret," he continued. "I can't stand to hear more and more suggestions, which in most cases take the character of ultimatums. I can only undertake those revisions that don't contradict my artistic credo."²⁸¹

²⁷⁹ Grosheva, 330. Svetlanov does not specify the timeline for this comment exactly. I have dated it after the June run-throughs because he claims the production was "already prepared and demonstrated at the Bolshoi," but that Pestel' then became an intractable issue.

²⁸⁰ RGALI, f.648, op.5, d.194, l.100.

²⁸¹ RGALI, f.2642, op.1, d.187, ll.6-8.

Yet even at the height of his frustration, Shaporin continued to fulfill such “ultimatums.” And two months later, in a formal letter sent to the Bolshoi and the KDI, he voiced a different grievance, regarding their joint decision on June 26 to postpone *Dekabristy*’s premiere from spring to fall 1952. “Never mind that I’ve worked endlessly on this opera,” he seethed. “I found the strength to rewrite it. And don’t think it immodest if I say that recomposing the first three scenes cardinally changed its ideological direction. I’d like to believe the second and third acts will do the same. But I won’t work on them until I know my opera will open at the start of May. If you put it off until fall, I’ll have to stop work.”²⁸² It was an odd and revealing complaint; however much Shaporin chafed at the demands placed on him, even he tacitly admitted the collaborative process had improved his work. In this second letter, he was no longer concerned with what he would and would not do, but with how soon he could show the results to the public.

Conclusion

In each of these instances, Shaporin expressed a very deep, very real sense of frustration. Yet, his resentment was fundamentally misplaced. Beyond the many declarations of mutual responsibility for the production and Anisimov’s assurances the Bolshoi and its consultants wanted as badly as he to see the work acclaimed, the same people who pushed Shaporin so hard also helped him meet their demands. As Svetlanov continued, in the composer’s moment of despair, “we, Shaporin’s students and theater professionals, gave him our maximum attention, supported his creative spirit, not allowing him to slacken. Shaporin sat down to work and courageously overcame all obstacles.”²⁸³ And what were these obstacles, really, but the pains of the collaborative creative process, made more painful by Shaporin’s own stubbornness and mistaken clinging to a romantic 19th-century notion of individual genius? Mezzo-soprano Vera

²⁸² RGALI, f.2642, op.1, d.187, l.10.

²⁸³ Grosheva, 330.

Davydova, who originated the role of Stesha, pushed this point further. Recalling the issue of the opera's great length, which came to the fore in 1952, she later reminisced, "I witnessed the fights between Iurii and the production group... The composer wouldn't agree to any abridgement... They had a real battle. But in the end, Iurii had to resign himself to it. The opera only gained from the cuts and achieved enormous success."²⁸⁴ Indeed, whether Shaporin appreciated it or not, his many consultants not only pushed him to expand and reframe the storyline and pursue new creative avenues for its musical realization, but in doing so, they fundamentally reshaped *Dekabristy* and, in the process, made it the success it was. Their profound influence is evident in the heavily layered markings in the manuscript score itself [**Fig. 6**]. Here, the formula used so often in discussions – "without the counter-attack there will be no Senate Square" or "without the creative brigade there can be no opera" – can be aptly repurposed. However onerous Shaporin found his consultants, without them there could have been no *Dekabristy*.

Shaporin was not the only one who clung to the narrative of individual genius. When *Dekabristy* finally premiered in June 1953, *Pravda* hailed it as his personal triumph. With brief references to Tolstoi and Rozhdestvenskii (omitting Ivanov entirely), critic Georgii Khubov observed that while the opera had begun as a love story, "The composer himself soon recognized the naïveté and limitedness of such an idea. Thus began a long period of creative searching, profound work on historical and literary sources. The libretto and musical-scenic plan more than once underwent serious alterations, rewriting, correction. Heeding the exacting criticism of society, using the advice of historians, Shaporin again and again reworked his opera."²⁸⁵ Khubov

²⁸⁴ Grosheva, 358.

²⁸⁵ Georgii Khubov, "Dekabristy: Opera Iu. Shaporina v Bol'shom teatre," *Pravda* (2 July 1953), 3.

duly noted the Bolshoi's contributions, but only to staging. In this account, others might offer Shaporin advice or help him realize his vision, but ultimately, he alone created *Dekabristy*.

Figure 6 (A marked-up page from the 1951 score: multiple cuts, additions, erasures, cross-outs, paste-ins, etc.)



SOURCE: RGALI, f.2642, op.1, d.9, l.132ob. Courtesy of the Russian State Archive of Literature and the Arts. Photo by Dmitrii Viktorovich Neustroev.

Yet this was true neither in the other participants' perceptions, nor in actual fact. A year earlier, when the theater and KDI reported to the Council of Ministers that "The Bolshoi collective has worked on *Dekabristy* with great intensity," they were careful to detail both the performative and conceptual aspects of this work, highlighting the contributions of Melik-Pashaev, Okhlopkov, and set designers Petritskii and Starzhenetskaia, then noting, "besides this, at meetings devoted to discussion of *Dekabristy*, along with the general positive evaluation of the opera, its artistic level and ideological direction, a whole list of notes were given."²⁸⁶ In other words, whatever *Dekabristy* had become, the Bolshoi collective had helped to create it, from the ground up. Following the final run-through on June 6, consultants affirmed this assertion in their written reviews. As composer Vano Muradeli wrote, "I've known this opera in the process of its creation through my creative association with its author... The theater's creative collective, the composer and librettist have done great, fruitful work, carrying a significant and difficult piece to its conclusion."²⁸⁷ For Muradeli, his own approval was the culmination of this process, the final, necessary step in the opera's path to completion. And this was not an overstatement. Without the Bolshoi, without the KDI, without the army of musical, theatrical and historical consultants to which Muradeli belonged, the opera could not be completed. As such, these participants are best understood not as consultants, but as collaborators, as co-authors of *Dekabristy*.

In actuality, Shaporin was never alone in writing *Dekabristy*. Nor, despite his complaints, would he have wanted to be. As a deeply social person and deeply Soviet composer, collaboration was both a desired and necessary part of his compositional method. From its inception, *Dekabristy* was a collaborative project, eagerly undertaken by three close friends, working together. Shaporin was forever performing his musical ideas for the creative circle to

²⁸⁶ RGALI, f.648, op.5, d.819, ll.74-75.

²⁸⁷ RGALI, f.648, op.5, d.821, l.3.

which they belonged and seeking their response. As his biographer later wrote, “The Detskoe Selo crowd remember many evenings at Tolstoi’s when Shaporin, sitting at the piano, sang one or another scene, demonstrated a song or aria.”²⁸⁸ And when his primary collaborators were not at his side, Shaporin sought others, as with the circle of artists-in-residence in Klin, for whom he regularly played excerpts and solicited opinions. Even after the war, with Shchegolev long since dropped out and Tolstoi passed on, he gladly resumed work with Rozhdestvenskii, not batting an eye when the latter laid out his vision for the collaborative creative process in a late 1946 letter. After completing a new draft of the libretto, Rozhdestvenskii wrote, “the second stage will begin, the period of working together, when in the process of writing the music cuts, additions and corrections may become necessary... Having brought the text into agreement with our mutual creative intentions, we can bring it to Moscow... to read in the [Bolshoi’s] *khudsovet*.”²⁸⁹ Clearly, to Shaporin, complain though he might, such collaborative practice appeared both natural and beneficial. Moreover, as Chapter 2 demonstrates, it was integral to the Soviet musical creative process, extending beyond the Composers’ Union to include the music and theater professionals who premiered newly composed works. As a Soviet composer, who experienced his final year of conservatory and entire musical career under Soviet power, which he apparently embraced from the start, Shaporin was fully integrated into this collaborative system.²⁹⁰ Though he willingly accepted the accolades directed to him alone as *Dekabristy*’s author, though he intermittently mobilized the age-old rhetoric of pure artist plagued by soulless bureaucracy, Shaporin never walked away from the collaborative process, always acquiescing to and even taking inspiration from the advice and criticism he received from various quarters as he toiled on

²⁸⁸ Levit, 308.

²⁸⁹ RGALI, f.2642, op.1, d.393, ll.1-2.

²⁹⁰ See Levit, 32-87 (esp. 44) on Shaporin’s conservatory and early career experience and apparent early embrace of the Soviet aesthetic agenda and practices.

the opera's many versions. And not without good reason. *Dekabristy* as it emerged in 1953 was worlds away from 1925's *Polina Gebl'*. The main characters had been exchanged for new ones, whole scenes added and deleted, the plot substantially altered, arias and ensembles written, rewritten, scrapped, replaced and rewritten yet again. And at the end of this process, a miracle emerged: a successful Soviet opera. In this context, it is neither useful nor sensible nor to argue about authorial intent or attempt to determine the form of the "original" *Polina Gebl'*, the one Shaporin "would have written" if not for the dictates of Soviet bureaucracy. *Dekabristy* was not *Polina*, but it was a triumph. As a Soviet composer, Shaporin was a dyed-in-the-wool collaborative artist and *Dekabristy* the successful product of wide-ranging creative collaboration.

Conclusion

In the midst of the Composers' Union's March 1945 discussion on improving the state of Soviet opera, Viktor Belyi turned to what he believed was a particularly compelling argument for reconstituting the Union's prewar Opera Section. Soviet composers as a professional group needed an internal body, within the Union, he argued, through which they could regularly check up on each other's works-in-progress, to ensure their colleagues' musical visions were being realized at a sufficiently high artistic level and completed in a timely manner. For instance, he averred, "If we had more often taken an interest in Iurii Shaporin's *Dekabristy*, it might've been finished much sooner. When a composer is left to himself, he loses his sense of perspective, and it seems to him he hasn't been working on his opera for so very long."¹ Yet, as this dissertation demonstrates, it was precisely when Union members and their fellow artists at the Bolshoi began to devote intense attention to *Dekabristy* that Shaporin's work slowed down, becoming mired in endless discussions and demands regarding its aesthetic and ideological qualities. What's more, the final product, while quite successful on the Soviet stage, could no longer be considered Shaporin's musical vision alone, but rather the collective vision of the broader operatic community. In seeking to help Shaporin move forward and successfully navigate the state's heightened yet never entirely clear musical standards, members of the Composers' Union had preserved their collective professional autonomy but enmeshed the composer himself in a thicket of new, internally created constraints.

Throughout its length, this dissertation has sought to answer one overarching question: How did Soviet composers navigate the intense pressures brought to bear on creative production during the late-Stalinist era, particularly those engendered by the *zhdanovshchina*, while

¹ RGALI, f.2077 (Soiuz sovetskikh kompozitorov), op.1, d.122, l.31.

continuing to function as creative artists working within the system of official Soviet music? As its contents demonstrate, rather than withdraw from creative life, Soviet composers in this period mobilized a range of proactive strategies, drawing on the dual traditions of professional collectivism and professional autonomy, in composing new works and shepherding them through the internal vetting processes of the Composers' Union and the external ones implemented by state and Party censors, particularly the KDI. These strategies ranged from the earnest to the instrumental. On one hand, in the immediate postwar years, composers made a genuine effort to discover the essence of musical Socialist Realism, to finally delineate exactly what the state expected of them, so they might fulfill its creative program, which many of them truly wished to serve. Likewise, through the process of discussion and revision within their Union's consultative sections, they sincerely endeavored to help one another improve their works-in-progress and raise Soviet music to higher aesthetic and ideological standards. And in their dealings with the KDI, they honestly sought to forge partnerships with individual censors, striving to work with them to shepherd their new works through to performance, purchase, and publication.

But on the other hand, as Part I of this dissertation reveals, in each of these aspects of their professional endeavors, Soviet composers also employed more calculated and coercive strategies. To ensure the collective safety of the professional group, they imposed significant restrictions on their own and each other's creative production. Unable to precisely define musical Socialist Realism on a theoretical level, Soviet composers engaged in an act of Socialist Realist vision, effectively concluding that musical Socialist Realism was best identified in practice by the consensus of the professional group. In other words, they came to understand musical Socialist Realism as a matter of collective recognition – a rubric that for the most part worked to stifle individual innovation and experimentation. Similarly, applying this interpretation of

musical Socialist Realism to their work in the Composers' Union's consultative apparatus, Soviet composers used the consultative sections' power over their colleagues' professional careers to ensure they conformed to a safe, conservative aesthetic in their new compositions. Fearing the individual and collective consequences of incurring the state's unpredictable wrath, section participants hardly hesitated in limiting each other's creativity. Though they might phrase their demands politely, the coercive force behind them was unmistakable, as when Vano Muradeli advised a colleague in late 1950, "You can take [my advice] or not. But I'm deeply convinced it has to be as I've said. If you don't do it, I won't be offended, but your work will have less significance" – or, more accurately, none at all, because without the Symphony and Chamber Music Section's recommendation, it would never reach the public.² Finally, in their interactions with the state censors of the KDI, by resorting to such tactics as mistrustfully following up, trickery, guilt-tripping, and mobilizing the language of rights, legality, and fairness, Soviet composers played into the dysfunctional system that kept them in the position of cautious supplicants, rather than confident citizens of a modern bureaucratic state.

As the manifest dysfunction of the KDI attests, the Soviet state on its own was by no means up to the task of efficiently and effectively censoring art music composers' creativity. Amidst its haphazard operations and frequently dropped lines of communication, the state's strongest weapon for censoring creative production was, in fact, its ability to strike fear into the hearts of its creative citizens. It did so with exceptional acuity during the late-Stalinist period through the mechanisms of the *zhdanovshchina*. By very publicly and unexpectedly denouncing creative works that had already been approved by their respective artistic communities, first in literature, film, and theater in 1946, then finally in music in 1948, the Central Committee made it

² RGALI, f.2077, op.1, d.364, l.34.

abundantly clear that culture was on its agenda, and it would brook no further mistakes. Reviving the defamatory language of the Cultural Revolution, imposing severe collective consequences for the “failure” of Muradeli’s opera *Velikaia družba*, the subject of its 1948 resolution on music, and topping off its campaign by condemning Evgenii Zhukovskii’s opera *Ot vsego serdtsa* in an unsigned *Pravda* editorial, a move reminiscent of the 1936 denunciation of Dmitrii Shostakovich’s opera *Lady Macbeth*, the Central Committee acutely frightened composers and put them decidedly on the defensive. But on the defensive against what, exactly, composers could never be sure. The state never clearly defined its aesthetic demands, beyond the use of a standard set of frustratingly broad terms, and the *zhdanovshchina* denunciations put into question what little certainty composers had developed by the 1940s. Faced with this complex of pressures, Soviet composers, desperate to shield themselves and each other from the capricious ire of the state, turned to the coercive imposition of what they hoped would be a safe, conservative aesthetic on their fellow artists. In this way, as this dissertation has demonstrated, Soviet composers’ efforts at mutual self-protection shaded into a form of collective professional group self-censorship, which proved far more effective at controlling their creative production than the state could have achieved alone.

The case studies that form Part II illustrate the effects of these processes on the careers and creativity of individual Soviet composers. In the case of Zhukovskii’s *Ot vsego serdtsa*, the Soviet musical community seized on the work as an opportunity to redeem themselves after the Central Committee’s 1948 denunciation of *Velikaia družba* and enact their new approach to musical Socialist Realism. Confidently declaring the opera a Socialist Realist triumph, simply because they all agreed it was so, and touting it as the professional group’s “practical creative answer... to just criticism,” the Composers’ Union and Bolshoi rushed the work through

production and all vetting processes, straight to the stage.³ Yet, their efforts were to no avail. A mere three months after its January 1951 premiere, *Ot vsego serdtsa* was denounced in *Pravda*, and shortly after, Zhukovskii was stripped of his Stalin Prize and the heads of the Bolshoi and the KDI were replaced. The Soviet musical community had proven unable to protect itself or its allies, and all concerned suffered from its vilification. To be sure, it is impossible to know how the opera might have fared had the musical community taken a different approach to its production. Nevertheless, its history is deeply revealing of the musical politics of the *zhdanovshchina*, and its ultimate fall from grace only increased composers' caution in approaching each other's new works-in-progress.

It is little surprise, then, that in vetting Shaporin's *Dekabristy* the musical community adopted a far more vigilant approach. Beginning well before the *Velikaia družba* and *Ot vsego serdtsa* affairs, and continuing even more guardedly in their wake, Soviet composers, theater professionals, and their historical consultants debated every aspect of the opera in minute detail, transforming it from a relatively circumscribed, lyrical love story into a grand, heroic epic filled to the brim with aesthetically conservative music and ideologically unimpeachable historical messages. More crucially, along the way they also transformed it from Iurii Shaporin's latest work into a collaborative product in which the whole community shared authorship. In its way, *Dekabristy* became the apotheosis of 19th-century Russian collaborative compositional methods, a stunning collective accomplishment. Yet, it also served as proof positive that under the intense pressures of late Stalinism, Soviet composers simply did not have the option to write as they saw fit and be done with it. Every work Shaporin or any of his colleagues composed, they wrote in

³ This famous phrase was used by Dmitrii Shostakovich in a brief newspaper piece in 1938 to describe his Fifth Symphony, the work with which he redeemed himself after the denunciation of *Lady Macbeth* two years earlier. See Dmitrii Shostakovich, "Moi tvorcheskii otvet," *Vecherniaia Moskva* (25 Jan 1938), 3.

the name of the entire professional group. Because they thus exposed their fellow-composers to collective risk, they were also compelled to abide by the professional group's collective judgment as to when the work had achieved a form suitable for premiere before the public. In writing *Dekabristy*, Shaporin met with the exciting prospect of an experiment in collaborative creativity, one he seemed often to embrace. Yet, at the same time, given the constraints of late-Stalinist musical politics, he had no real choice but to participate in it.

Though Andrei Zhdanov died in 1948 and Stalin in 1953, after which the Soviet musical landscape slowly but surely began to open up, late-Stalinist musical politics continued to have a profound impact on Soviet musical life throughout the later Soviet period. This impact was most clearly visible in the system of official music, where composers continued to present, discuss, and evaluate each other's works-in-progress in the Composers' Union's consultative sections, which devolved to the republic-level Union branches after 1957. To be sure, these sections adopted increasingly permissive standards as the years went by, but they never abandoned their attention to both aesthetic and ideological criteria, and they maintained their coercive power to shape the compositions of all who sought to advance their careers through the official system. Official composers also continued to employ the strategies developed during late Stalinism to navigate their interactions with the state censor. The KDI was transformed into the Ministry of Culture in March 1953 but remained as haphazard in its operations as ever. And in fact, the influence of late-Stalinist musical politics made its presence felt in the unofficial music scene that began to develop in the late 1950s and early 1960s, as well. Composers of the younger generation who chose this path drew on the intensely protective collectivism of their late-Stalinist forebears and teachers, gathering themselves into a tight-knit, mutually-supportive community, while at the same time reacting against inherited norms by prizing individual

expression and experimentation above all else in their creative endeavors.⁴ Indeed, the legacy of late-Stalinist musical politics has even found echoes in post-Soviet Russia, through the continued existence of the Composers' Union, which maintains an active consultative apparatus today in its Moscow branch.⁵ Of course, the post-Soviet Composers' Union's is a voluntary organization and its authority largely moral, but it is notable that Russian composers, including those of the emergent post-Soviet generation, have chosen to maintain this organization, with its collaborative structure and collectivist ethos, nearly 25 years after the Soviet Union's demise.

In its examination of late-Stalinist musical politics, this dissertation has sought to shed light not only on the specifics of Soviet musical life in the period of its investigation, but also on this broader legacy in the later Soviet and post-Soviet periods, which for the most part has yet to be explored in depth. In addition, it has sought to provide a detailed comparative for the study of Soviet censorship in other creative genres such as literature, film, fine art, theater, and dance, enhancing our scholarly understanding of the Soviet state's overall approach to creative censorship, while demonstrating the particularities that made Soviet censorship of art music, as every genre, to some extent unique – a valuable reminder that censorship is far too complex a process to be encompassed by a single theorization. Similarly, this dissertation has sought to provide a comparative context for the study of myriad other forms of official, unofficial, and self-imposed censorship, which functioned in the past and continue to function today around the

⁴ For more on this, see: Peter J. Schmelz. *Such Freedom, If Only Musical: Unofficial Soviet Music During the Thaw*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009 and William Quillen, "After the End: New Music in Russia from *Perestroika* to the Present." PhD diss., University of California, Berkeley, 2010. ProQuest (UMI Number 3556040).

⁵ For the Russian Union of Composers, see <http://www.soyuzkompozitorov.ru> (accessed July 21, 2015). For the history and structure of the Moscow Union of Composers, see www.союзмосковскихкомпозиторов.рф (accessed July 21, 2015). The Moscow Union is somewhat independent from and more active than the Russian Union, but both organizations continue to operate. My thanks to Bill Quillen for clarifying these organizations' activities and relationship.

world, from the Eastern Bloc, to modern China, to the nominally censorship-free milieu of contemporary Western Europe and America.

Finally, through its interrogation of the key concepts of authorship and censorship, this dissertation has sought to demonstrate the primary factors contributing to and the practical manifestations of the unique understanding of those terms that developed in the Soviet art music milieu during the period of late Stalinism. In keeping with long-standing Western art music tradition, Soviet composers outwardly projected a conceptualization of their work as the product of individual creative genius, speaking and writing in terms of “Shostakovich’s” symphony, “Miaskovskii’s” cello sonata, and even “Shaporin’s” opera. Yet, as we have seen, drawing on the legacy of 19th-century Russian compositional methods and working together extensively within the Composers’ Union’s consultative sections, in practice Soviet composers developed a singularly intense form of collaborative creativity, which affected new musical works so profoundly that the compositions that resulted are best understood as products of truly collective authorship. Likewise, the censorship of Soviet art music in this period, while nominally a force imposed by the state on creative artists, was in reality far too multifaceted to fit into a simplistically Manichean state-vs.-artist paradigm. From their consensus-based approach so Socialist Realism; to their fear-driven coercion of their colleagues in the Union’s consultative sections into conforming with a safe, conservative aesthetic; to their attempts to form piecemeal partnerships with KDI censors to shepherd their works through to purchase, performance, and publication, in the final accounting Soviet composers in the late-Stalinist era censored themselves far more effectively than the state could have managed on its own. Ultimately, in censorship as in authorship, Soviet composers as a professional group played a far more decisive role in their individual and collective musical fates than they were able to realize.

**APPENDIX A:
DRAMATIS PERSONAE FOR CHAPTERS 3-5**

I. Chapter 3: List of KDI/GUMU Officials

<i>KDI</i>	
Bespalov, Nikolai Nikolaevich:	Vice Chair of KDI
Khrapchenko, Mikhail Borisovich:	Chair of KDI (1939 – Jan. 1948)
Lebedev, Polikarp Ivanovich:	Chair of KDI (Feb. 1948 – 1951)
<i>GUMU</i>	
Anisimov, Aleksandr Ivanovich:	Head of GUMU (Feb. 1949-1951)
Boni, Venedikt Aleksandrovich:	Head, GUMU Dept. of Concert Organizations (1948-1965)
Endrzhhevskii, V.:	Head, GUMU Dept. of <i>Estrada</i>
Gotgel'f, Sofia Mikhailovna:	Senior Inspector, GUMU
Kholodilin, A.A.:	Head, GUMU Dept. of Repertoire
Orvid, Georgii Antonovich:	Head of GUMU (1946-1948)
Os'kin, Ion Mikhailovich:	Assistant Head of GUMU
Pustov, M.:	Head Bookkeeper, GUMU
Sakva, Konstantin Konstantinovich:	Head, GUMU Dept. of Concert Organizations (1946-1948)

II. Chapter 4: *Ot vsego serdtsa*, Major Characters

Grunia Vasil'tsova:	(The heroine) Collective farmer and brigade leader, wife of Rodion
Rodion Vasil'tsov:	(The hero) Collective farmer and returned frontline soldier, husband of Grunia
Gordei Il'ich:	Party organizer for the collective farm (<i>partorg</i>)
Novopashin:	Secretary of the regional Party committee (<i>raikom</i>)
Krasnoperov:	Chairman of the collective farm
Natasha Soloveiko:	Frontline soldier, Rodion's comrade-in-arms

III. Chapter 4: List of Major Players in the Case of *Ot vsego serdtsa*

Anisimov, Aleksandr:	KDI/GUMU official, appointed General Director of the Bolshoi Theater after the 1951 <i>Ot vsego serdtsa</i> scandal
Bagmet, A.:	Ukrainian-language librettist of <i>Ot vsego serdtsa</i>
Bespalov, Nikolai:	First Deputy Chair of the KDI, appointed to replace Lebedev as Chair of the KDI after the 1951 <i>Ot vsego serdtsa</i> scandal
Bondarenko, Fedor:	General Director of the Bolshoi Theater prior to the 1948 <i>Velikaia druzhba</i> scandal
Filippenko, Arkadii:	Head of the Ukrainian Union of Soviet Composers
Goriainov, Nikolai:	Vice Chair of the KDI, head of GUMU, appointed in the wake of the 1948 <i>Velikaia druzhba</i> scandal
Khrapchenko, Mikhail:	Chair of the KDI prior to the 1948 <i>Velikaia druzhba</i> scandal
Khrennikov, Tikhon:	Head of the All-Union Union of Soviet Composers, appointed in the wake of the 1948 <i>Velikaia druzhba</i> scandal
Kondrashin, Kirill:	Conductor of <i>Ot vsego serdtsa</i> at the Bolshoi Theater
Kovalenkov, A.:	Russian-language librettist of <i>Ot vsego serdtsa</i>
Kukharskii, Vladimir:	Composers' Union secretary, rapporteur at the January 18, 1951 discussion of <i>Ot vsego serdtsa</i> , author of a laudatory article in <i>Sovetskaia muzyka</i>
Lebedev, Polikarp	Chair of the KDI, appointed in the wake of the 1948 <i>Velikaia druzhba</i> scandal
Mal'tsev, Elizar:	Author of the novel <i>Ot vsego serdtsa</i>
Pokrovskii, Boris:	Stage director of <i>Ot vsego serdtsa</i> at the Bolshoi Theater
Sakva, Konstantin:	Senior editor at Muzgiz, former KDI/GUMU official, author of a laudatory article in <i>Sovetskoe iskusstvo</i>
Solodovnikov, Aleksandr:	General Director of the Bolshoi Theater, appointed in the wake of the 1948 <i>Velikaia druzhba</i> scandal
Zhukovskii, German (Evgenii):	Composer of the opera <i>Ot vsego serdtsa</i>

IV. Chapter 5: *Dekabristy*, Major Characters

Polina Gebl'/Elena Orlova:	(The heroine) A French emigrée shopgirl/An impoverished Russian noblewoman
Ivan Annenkov/Dmitrii Kamenkov/ Dmitrii Shchepin-Rostovskii:	(The hero) A liberal nobleman, officer, and Decembrist
Anna Ivanovna/Ol'ga Mironovna: Orlova:	A conservative noblewoman, Annenkov/Shchepin's mother An impoverished noblewoman, Ol'ga Mironovna's neighbor and Elena's mother
Mar'ia Timofeevna:	Anna Ivanovna/Ol'ga Mironovna's housekeeper
Bestuzhev:	A Decembrist
Iakubovich:	A Decembrist
Kakhovskii:	A Decembrist
Pestel':	A Decembrist, leader of the Southern Society
Rostovtsev:	A Decembrist turncoat
Ryleev:	A Decembrist
Trubetskoi:	A Decembrist
Aleksandr I:	Emperor of Russia
Nikolai I:	Heir to the Russian throne
Governor-General Miloradovich:	An official in the Russian government
Metropolitan Seraphim:	Head of the Russian Orthodox Church
Lukin (The Old Soldier):	A soldier killed on Senate Square
Night Watchman:	A night watchman
Sergeich:	A prison guard
Stesha:	A gypsy singer

V. Chapter 5: List of Collaborators on *Dekabristy*

Anisimov, Aleksandr:	KDI/GUMU official; appointed General Director of the Bolshoi Theater after the 1951 <i>Ot vsego serdtsa</i> scandal
Bespalov, Nikolai:	First Deputy Chair of the KDI, Chair of the KDI after the 1951 <i>Ot vsego serdtsa</i> scandal
Druzhinin, Nikolai:	Historian-consultant for <i>Dekabristy</i>
Ivanov, Vsevolod:	Co-librettist of <i>Dekabristy</i>
Khrennikov, Tikhon:	Head of the Union of Soviet Composers
Lavrovskii, Leonid:	Choreographer of <i>Dekabristy</i> at the Bolshoi Theater
Lebedev, Polikarp:	Chair of the KDI prior to the 1951 <i>Ot vsego serdtsa</i> scandal
Malinovskaia, E.K.:	General Director of the Bolshoi Theater in the early 1930s
Mchedeli, Dmitrii:	Soloist at the Bolshoi Theater
Melik-Pashaev, Aleksandr:	Conductor of <i>Dekabristy</i> at the Bolshoi Theater
Mikhailov, Nikolai:	Head of Agitprop
Mutnykh, V.I.:	General Director of the Bolshoi Theater in the late 1930s
Nechkina, Militsa:	Historian-consultant for <i>Dekabristy</i>
Okhlopkov Nikolai:	Stage director of <i>Dekabristy</i> at the Bolshoi Theater
Petritskii, A.G.:	Co-set designer of <i>Dekabristy</i> at the Bolshoi Theater
Pokrovskii, Boris:	Directorial consultant for <i>Dekabristy</i>
Rozhdestvenskii, Vsevolod:	Second librettist of <i>Dekabristy</i>
Shaporin, Iurii:	Composer of <i>Dekabristy</i>
Solodovnikov, Aleksandr:	General Director of the Bolshoi Theater between the 1948 <i>Velikaia družhba</i> scandal and the 1951 <i>Ot vsego serdtsa</i> scandal
Starzhenetskaia, T.G.:	Co-set designer of <i>Dekabristy</i> at the Bolshoi Theater
Syroechkovskii, Boris:	Historian-consultant for <i>Dekabristy</i>
Tarle, Evgenii:	Historian-consultant for <i>Dekabristy</i>
Tolstoi, Alexei:	Original librettist of <i>Dekabristy</i>
Zaionchkovskii, Petr:	Historian-consultant for <i>Dekabristy</i>

**APPENDIX B:
PLOT OUTLINES FOR THE FOUR MAJOR VERSIONS OF *DEKABRISTY*, COMPARED**

<u>Tolstoi and Shchegolev's 1925 Libretto</u>	<u>Shaporin's 1930s Manuscript Score (Incomplete Draft)*</u>	<u>Shaporin's 1951 Manuscript Score (Complete Draft)</u>	<u>Shaporin's 1953 Published Score (Final Version)</u>
<p style="text-align: center;"><u>Scene 1: Paris</u> Annenkov and his fellow officers rest in Paris after defeating Napoleon. They speak admiringly of French Revolutionary ideals and vow to bring equality, freedom, and democracy to Russia. Annenkov falls in love with Polina, daughter of a French revolutionary. He proposes marriage, but she refuses, thinking it unlikely a nobleman would keep his word to a shopgirl. She reveals she has taken a job with a fashionable dress shop in Moscow.</p>	<p style="text-align: center;">[No scene]</p>	<p style="text-align: center;">[No scene]</p>	<p style="text-align: center;">[No scene]</p>
<p style="text-align: center;"><u>Scene 2: The Estate</u> Annenkov visits his mother's estate outside Moscow and quarrels with her over her cruelty to her serfs. Annenkov reveals he has fallen in love and is horrified when his mother, discovering</p>	<p style="text-align: center;"><u>Scene 1: The Estate</u> The outline of this scene remains the same, though the characters are altered. Annenkov's mother's cruelty is emphasized, and his political views and moral outrage are</p>	<p style="text-align: center;"><u>Scene 1: The Estate</u> This scene is substantially the same. Annenkov's mother's cruelty is again emphasized, as are his egalitarian values and righteous anger. Polina rejects Annenkov, but more</p>	<p style="text-align: center;"><u>Scene 1: The Estate</u> The scene begins as before, with Shchepin's mother's cruelty and his righteous outrage, both again sharpened. Elena Orlova arrives with her mother, an impoverished noble-woman,</p>

<p>the woman is without means, counsels him to take her as mistress rather than wife. Polina arrives with dresses for the mother. Annenkov pleads with her, but she coldly pretends not to know him. Realizing Polina is the object of Annenkov's affections, his mother mocks him and gives him money to exhaust his passions with the gypsies, which he refuses. A messenger arrives with orders to return to the regiment, and Annenkov gladly leaves.</p>	<p>sharpened. Polina still rejects Annenkov's advances, but her role is much smaller. Ignoring his entreaties, she says only that she has come on business and brushes past him. Annenkov's mother mocks him. The messenger arrives with his orders. The scene now concludes with a postman singing a mournful ballad.</p>	<p>softly. Annenkov's mother mocks him, and the messenger arrives with his orders. The postman's song is removed. Bestuzhev will sing it in Scene 2.</p>	<p>to ask for a loan. The mothers exit. Shchepin pleads with Elena at length. She does not hide her love, but tearfully protests she is not his social equal. Shchepin's mother returns, and ascertaining the situation, sends the Orlovas away. She mocks her son and exits. Pestel' arrives. They discuss Russia's future, Pestel' arguing for a republic, Shchepin for constitutional monarchy. Pestel' sings a visionary aria, then advises Shchepin to go to Petersburg; the time for action is near.</p>
<p>[No scene]</p>	<p>[No scene]</p>	<p><u>Scene 2: The Tavern</u> In a Tavern just off the fairgrounds, the Decembrists discuss the need for revolution, under cover of the gypsy chorus. Annenkov enters, and they are surprised but glad to see him. They tease him for his dreamy romanticism, and Trubetskoi mentions they are headed to Kiev to confer with Pestel'. Bestuzhev arrives and informs them of</p>	<p><u>Scene 2: The Tavern</u> As before, the Decembrists meet to discuss revolution. They conceal themselves with the gypsy chorus and by taking a private dining room. Shchepin enters, and they call him a dreamer. Trubetskoi now says only that they must decide whether to begin the revolution in the North or South. Bestuzhev brings his news, and declares the time</p>

		Aleksandr I's death. The time for revolution has come. They decide to go to Petersburg. Annenkov hangs back to dream of Polina, but promises to follow soon. Nearby, Rostovtsev has overheard and vows to warn the new tsar. Bestuzhev sings the postman's song.	for revolution is upon them. United with Pestel', they cannot fail. They decide to leave, but Shchepin hangs back, now hoping to find Elena. The Decembrists sing "Comrade, Believe!" To one side, Rostovtsev vows to report them. Bestuzhev sings the postman's song.
<p><u>Scene 3: The Fair</u> Annenkov visits the Fair in Penza, a colorful mass scene with overlapping choral genre-songs and humorous vignettes. Against this background, Annenkov, accompanied by his servant, plays cards, loses badly, and laments his broken heart. Polina, at the Fair on business, overhears cardsharps plotting against Annenkov. She arranges to meet him and offers her love if he promises not to play cards again. He agrees.</p>	<p><u>Scene 2: The Fair</u> The genre-songs are expanded to fill two large choral numbers, while the vignettes are excised. Between the choral numbers, Annenkov, without his servant, plays cards. This more politicized Annenkov expresses outrage when one player places serfs as a bet. He vows to win and grant them, and by extension Russia, freedom. Annenkov encounters fellow Northern Society member Iakubovich and discusses revolution, though Annenkov cannot yet commit to regicide. After the second choral</p>	<p><u>Scene 3: The Fair</u> For historical accuracy, the Fair is now moved to Tver'. It opens with a single, massive choral number comprising four overlapping choruses singing invented "folk" songs. Annenkov no longer plays cards, but enters from the Tavern. The police arrive, announce the tsar's death, and close the Fair. The night watchman sings his song, but Polina's aria is removed. Annenkov spots Polina. When he approaches, she freely confesses her love. Annenkov is overjoyed, but laments he must leave immediately to join the revolution. She accepts this</p>	<p><u>Scene 3: The Fair</u> The opening choral number, while still substantial, is shortened, and the choruses' lyrics are now more explicitly political, allegorizing the masses' desire for freedom. Exiting the Tavern, Trubetskoi now expresses his fear of the masses' revolutionary potential to Iakubovich. The police close the Fair. Shchepin enters, actively searching for Elena. She sees him from afar, but he returns indoors. She writes him a note and sends a gypsy to deliver it. The night watchman sings his song. Shchepin returns with Elena's note. She explains</p>

	number and a night watchman's song, Polina overhears the cardsharps plotting. She sings an aria of lost love. As before, she saves Annenkov, but now through a declaration of love, rather than shrewd sexual bargaining.	news sadly, and they conclude with a love duet.	she has run away to be with him. He exults in her declaration of love, but laments he must depart for the revolution. She supports him wholeheartedly, and they conclude with their love duet.
<p><u>Scene 4: The Annenkovs'</u> At their new home in Moscow, Annenkov and Polina are happy, but he broods over Russia's political situation. Two Northern Society members arrive and inform Annenkov Tsar Aleksandr has died, Konstantin has abdicated, and Nikolai will become tsar. The time for revolution has come. They leave for Petersburg, and Annenkov soon follows, with Polina's blessing.</p>	<p><u>Scene 3: The Annenkovs'</u> Annenkov broods as before, interrupted by new Northern Society members, Kakhovskii and Bestuzhev, bringing news of the succession crisis. In expanded conversation, they discuss the coming revolution. Annenkov is now fully committed. Bestuzhev sings an inspirational aria, "Comrade, Believe!" He and Kakhovskii depart, while Annenkov stays to take leave of Polina, who supports him, reminding him she is a daughter of revolution.</p>	[No scene]	[No scene]
<p><u>Scene 5: At Ryleev's</u> The Northern Society meets at Ryleev's Petersburg home</p>	<p><u>Scene 4: At Ryleev's</u> This scene exists only in fragments, which suggest</p>	<p><u>Scene 4: At Ryleev's</u> The Decembrists meet and discuss the next day's</p>	<p><u>Scene 4: At Ryleev's</u> The Decembrists meet and discuss the next day's</p>

<p>and excitedly discuss the next day's revolution. They resolve to kill Nikolai, free the serfs, and establish a republic, electing Prince Trubetskoi interim dictator. Rostovtsev quails and announces his intention to confess and inform on the conspirators. Undaunted, the others resolve to proceed.</p>	<p>the same outline as before.</p>	<p>actions. Trubetskoi arrives with news of Konstantin's abdication. Hatred of Nikolai fires their resolve; they denounce him and swear to bring freedom to Russia. Rostovtsev appears, uninvited, and announces his intention to inform on them. They resolve to proceed, and Ryleev sings a defiant aria. The Decembrists elect Trubetskoi dictator and sing an idealistic chorus of "Comrade, Believe!"</p>	<p>actions. With more sharply political lyrics, they promise to write a constitution and defeat despotism. Trubetskoi brings news of Konstantin's abdication. Iakubovich swears to kill Nikolai. Rostovtsev's vignette plays out as before. Ryleev sings a new inspirational aria, "Oh, My Rus!" The Decembrists elect Trubetskoi dictator and sing "Comrade, Believe!" together.</p>
<p>[No scene]</p>	<p>[No scene]</p>	<p>[No scene]</p>	<p>Scene 5: The Palace Looking out to Senate Square, Nikolai tries to summon the courage to defend his throne. He calls the Governor-General and orders him to send the Metropolitan, but prepare the artillery. Revealing his tyrannical side, he declares he has the revolutionaries in his hands, thanks to Rostovtsev. Fear returns at the thought Pestel' may succeed in the South, but he fights against it, intoning that blood will flow.</p>

<p>Scene 6: Senate Square The scene opens on Nikolai standing before the Palace, receiving news the Decembrists are standing in defiance on Senate Square. Frightened, he confers with advisers. Briefly shifting to the Square, first the Metropolitan, then Governor-General Miloradovich negotiate with the rebels. Both are shouted down by a crowd of workers, who vow loyalty only to Konstantin. The rebels realize Trubetskoi has failed to appear, and they are left in confusion. Miloradovich provokes an argument, and Kakhovskii shoots him. The scene shifts back to Nikolai. His artillery has arrived, and he orders them to shoot.</p>	<p>[No scene]</p>	<p>Scene 5: Senate Square This scene now focuses fully on Senate Square. The Decembrist regiments arrive, cheered by workers building St. Isaac's Cathedral. They sing a soldiers' song and hold their ground. As tension builds, Annenkov and Bestuzhev exchange reassuring words. The Metropolitan arrives, but is shouted down by the crowd. The Decembrists realize Trubetskoi is absent and begin to panic, but Ryleev shores them up. Miloradovich arrives and is also shouted down by the crowd. He argues with Kakhovskii and is shot. The crowd announces the artillery's arrival. They fire. The Decembrists mount a brief counter-attack but are defeated. Lukin staggers to center stage for his swansong. Alone on the emptied square, Ryleev sings his final aria, "It's All Over!"</p>	<p>Scene 6: Senate Square The Decembrists' regiments arrive, singing a soldiers' song. The crowd cheers them more actively. Tension mounts, and Annenkov and Bestuzhev share their reassuring exchange. The crowd announces the Metropolitan's arrival and shouts him down. Trubetskoi appears to one side, sees the crowd's fervor, and flees. The Decembrists realize he has abandoned them and panic, but Ryleev steadies them. The crowd announces Miloradovich has arrived and shouts him down. He argues with Kakhovskii and is shot. The crowd voices approval, then reacts in fear as the artillery arrives, urging them not to shoot their brothers-in-arms. In an expanded symphonic interlude, the artillery fires, followed by the first counter-attack, a second barrage, a second counter-attack, a third barrage, and a third, weaker counter-attack. Defeated, the Decembrists</p>
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			scatter. Lukin sings his swansong. In place of Ryleev's aria, the crowd sings a brief lament offstage.
<u>Scene 7: The Interrogation</u> Nikolai interrogates Annenkov in the palace, reminding him of Tsar Aleksandr's leniency toward him and his poor repayment of it. Annenkov refuses to implicate others or forswear his ideals. Nikolai promises he will rot in prison.	[No scene]	[No scene]	[No scene]
[No scene]	<u>Scene ? : Masquerade-Ball</u> This scene exists only as sketches of a waltz and polonaise, without text.	<u>Scene 6: Masquerade-Ball</u> At a palace ball, against a mazurka, waltz, and polonaise, Polina arrives. She approaches Annenkov's mother, only to find she has disowned her son. Entirely alone, Polina approaches Nikolai, but is interrupted by an aide with news of the southern revolt and the high court's sentence on the Decembrists. Nikolai returns and, turning on his charm, asks what he can do for Polina. She begs permission to follow	<u>Scene 7: Masquerade-Ball</u> This scene proceeds as before, with Polina and Annenkov now called Elena and Shchepin.

		<p>Annenkov into exile. Nikolai grants it, threatening the frost will destroy her beauty and she may never return. Polina thanks him joyfully and departs.</p>	
[No scene]	[No scene]	[No scene]	<p>Scene 8: The Prison Cell Ryleev sings his mournful aria, "It's All Over!" The lyrics are partially altered (taken from his original aria in Scene 4 of the 1951 score), to create a more resolute tone. Offstage, the executioner summons the Decembrist leaders one by one to face their fate. When Ryleev is called, he declares himself ready. Pestel' is called next, and Ryleev rushes past the guard to embrace him. Pestel' sings an elegiac aria affirming their deeds will live on. Ryleev joins him for a final chorus of "Comrade, Believe!"</p>
<p>Scene 8: The Fortress With Annenkov imprisoned, Polina rushes from Moscow to see him. She begs, then</p>	<p>Scene ?: The Fortress This scene exists only in fragments. The surly guard is replaced by kindly</p>	<p>Scene 7: The Fortress Sergeich sings of his soldier days. Annenkov laments he has heard nothing from</p>	<p>Scene 9: The Fortress Sergeich sings of his soldier days. Shchepin and Bestuzhev are brought into</p>

<p>bribes a surly prison guard to let her in, and she and Annenkov meet in tearful reunion. She informs him she has given birth to a child, and has resolved to follow him to Siberia. He is awed by her self-sacrifice.</p>	<p>Sergeich, who sings of his soldier days. Polina's entry is not sketched, nor is her child mentioned. Instead, she and Annenkov sing a love duet. Sergeich then sings a ballad narrating the execution of the Decembrist leaders. Finally, the exiles set out for Siberia. A crowd of onlookers laments their suffering, and the Decembrists reprise "Comrade, Believe!"</p>	<p>Polina, and Bestuzhev tries to cheer him. He sees Sergeich and asks if he is happy to be free. Sergeich replies that he, too, lives in the prison, then intones his ballad of the Decembrist leaders' execution. Bestuzhev mourns them. Sergeich says they will soon leave for Siberia. Polina arrives and begs admission. Sergeich lets her in. Reunited, she and Annenkov sing a joyful duet. She promises to follow him into exile, and he is awed by her sacrifice. They share a farewell. As the Decembrists depart, the crowd laments their suffering, and Bestuzhev predicts their deeds will inspire future generations.</p>	<p>the prison yard. Bestuzhev exults in the fresh air, but Shchepin, in a slight revision, laments that he and Polina may never see each other again. Bestuzhev comforts him, and his exchange with Sergeich is the same. Sergeich sings his ballad of the Decembrist leaders' execution. Bestuzhev mourns his lost friends, and Sergeich says they will leave for Siberia that day. Elena arrives and begs entry. Sergeich lets her in, and her reunion with Shchepin proceeds as before. The scene ends with their farewell.</p>
<p>Scene 9: Viaz'ma Polina travels to Viaz'ma, where Nikolai is observing a military parade, and begs his permission to follow Annenkov into exile. Complaining about other Decembrist wives who have done the same, Nikolai</p>	<p>[No scene]</p>	<p>[No scene]</p>	<p>[No scene]</p>

disdainfully grants it, and she departs triumphantly.			
[No scene]	[No scene]	[No scene]	<p><u>Scene 10: The Siberian Road</u></p> <p>The Decembrists depart for exile. The crowd of onlookers laments their suffering, and Bestuzhev predicts their deeds will live on. Here, the chorus of Decembrists joins him to extend his thoughts. They are answered by a final chorus sung by the crowd, confirming they will be remembered as the first to rebel against the tsar.</p>

**In the interest of clarity, in the chapter I do not discuss the 1925 libretto separately from the 1930s manuscript score. My analysis is based on the 1930s score whenever possible, drawing on the 1925 libretto as necessary to fill gaps.*

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