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The Soundtrack of Stagnation:

Paradoxes within Soviet Rock and Pop of the 1970s

A dissertation submitted in partial satisfaction of the  
requirements for the degree Doctor of Philosophy  
in Musicology

by

Alexandra Grabarchuk

2015



## ABSTRACT OF THE DISSERTATION

The Soundtrack of Stagnation:  
Paradoxes within Soviet Rock and Pop of the 1970s

by

Alexandra Grabarchuk

Doctor of Philosophy in Musicology

University of California, Los Angeles, 2015

Professor David MacFadyen, Chair

The “underground” Soviet rock scene of the 1980s has received considerable scholarly attention, particularly after the fall of the USSR when available channels of information opened up even more than in the *glasnost* years. Both Russian and American academics have tackled the political implications and historical innovations of *perestroika*-era groups such as Akvarium, Mashina Vremeni, and DDT. Similarly, the Beatles craze of the 1960s is also frequently mentioned in scholarly works as an enormous social phenomenon in the USSR – academics and critics alike wax poetic about the influence of the Fab Four on the drab daily lives of Soviet citizens. Yet what happened in between these two moments of Soviet musical life? Very little critical work has been done on Soviet popular music of the 1970s, its place in Soviet society, or its relationship to Western influences. That is the lacuna I address in this work.

My dissertation examines state-approved popular music – so-called *estrada* or “music of the small stage” – produced in the USSR during the 1970s. Since detailed scholarly work has

been done on the performers of this decade, I focus instead on the output and reception of several popular composers and musical groups of the time, exploring the relationship formed between songwriter, performer, audience, and state. I do so in order to investigate and answer the following question: in the larger narrative of Soviet culture, what was the role of pop and rock music in the 1970s, a decade so ostensibly barren that even Russians refer to it as “the stagnation” (*zastoi*)?

An examination of the popular composers and songwriters who literally and figuratively wrote the soundtrack to this decade of Soviet life shows how room for flexibility and openness to certain Western rock influences could exist within Soviet state-approved music – so often dismissed as ideologically conservative. Likewise, a better understanding of the men and women behind the songs and groups of this era sheds light on the contrary forces that drove both musical production and promotion within the USSR, and opens the way for *estrada* as both an enthusiastically created and received phenomenon. Finally, and most broadly, this dissertation considers and explores the notion that popular music from rigidly political systems can be used as a way of constructing highly personal meaning in a realm obliquely parallel to – and simultaneously embedded within and enabled by – the political sphere.

The dissertation of Alexandra Grabarchuk is approved.

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2015

For Viktor and Evgenia ~

In gratitude for bringing me here in more ways than one.

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I am exceptionally lucky to have completed this dissertation under the guidance of David MacFadyen. In the last five years, it has been David's incredible breadth of knowledge, constant willingness to help, and sometimes hard-to-believe connections within the Russian musical community that have guided me through the different – and sometimes difficult – stages of this project. He has been a patient mentor, an incredibly supportive advocate, and a perceptive and careful editor. His work on Soviet *estrada* and his commitment to representing Russian popular culture have indelibly shaped not only my work, but also my entire view on Eastern Europe.

I am grateful to have had the opportunity to work with the amazing scholars who have supported me throughout my graduate student career, and especially those who served on my dissertation committee. Peter Schmelz's assistance on this project has been invaluable. In addition to being a vital source in my area of interest, Peter's 2009 book and his continued involvement with my project allowed for more subtle and nuanced possibilities to my approach to Soviet music as a whole. Robert Fink played an integral role in the development of this project

when he served as my mentor for a 2011-2012 Graduate Research Mentorship. The seeds of many of the ideas I present in this dissertation were first developed in conversation with Bob, who encouraged me to draw necessary parallels between Soviet and Anglophone popular music from the start. Mitchell Morris graciously stepped in and lent his encyclopedic knowledge of all things Russian and twentieth-century to this project. I will always remember his indispensable advice about music, dissertating, and life. I would also like to thank other members of the UCLA faculty for their assistance and support, including Tamara Levitz, who trusted me with important Stravinsky work and helped me grow into my scholarly identity; Elisabeth Le Guin, who has been my Early Music hero since 2009 and gave me a chance to be such to others; and Raymond Knapp – an incredible mentor, and the very first to support me when I was an undergraduate. Thanks also to Nina Eidsheim, who helped me conceptualize this dissertation in clear and simple ways I hadn't previously considered; Olivia Bloechl, who challenged my ways of thinking and helped me grow in the seminar setting; and Jessica Schwartz, whose Rock Analysis course inspired me to explore different approaches to popular music.

It is our close relationships that make all the toil possible and worthwhile. Particularly, I wish to thank Zara Rose Browne and Morgan Woolsey for their unwavering support over the years. These strong, beautiful women have kept me laughing and on track despite all odds. I am grateful also to my duo partner, Peter Yates, for opening The Library of Doubt to me. That space of acceptance has changed me for the better, and our co-creation has brightened my life immeasurably. Last but not least, my love and thanks go to Jamie Callahan. His patience, intellect, and back rubs inspired me throughout the final push – I couldn't ask for a better hype man.

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## INTRODUCTION

### LIVING BETWEEN THE OFFICIAL AND UNOFFICIAL

*Q: “Who was Brezhnev?”*

*A: “An insignificant Soviet political leader during the era of the Beatles and Alla Pugachova.”*

*~ Old Soviet joke from the 1970s*

One summer day in 2009 – a month or so before starting my M.A. program – I was driving up to Northern California with a dear friend. He was behind the wheel and I, as befitted a burgeoning musicologist, was acting as road-trip DJ. After playing some agreed-upon favorites (Aretha Franklin, Jeff Buckley, Mozart Requiem), I decided to venture into more adventurous territory and pull up some of the Soviet pop I grew up hearing around the house. I remember scrolling to David Tukhmanov’s name on my iPod, and launching his 1976 album *On the Wave of My Memory (По волне моей памяти)* – but what I recall most distinctly was my friend’s confused series of facial expressions as the first track unfolded. He couldn’t have endured more than two minutes of the ensuing semiotic pastiche, with musical references to The Beatles, Frank Zappa, and Queen all fighting for dominance, before he turned to me and said, “What the hell is this?” It was then I knew that I had found a potential dissertation topic.<sup>1</sup>

Official Soviet popular music, called *estrada*, had not only been the soundtrack to my parents’ youth in rural Ukraine, but also permeated and shaped decades of cultural consciousness

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<sup>1</sup> All music analysis in this dissertation was done with LPs and CDs; any YouTube or other internet links provided are for the sake of convenience for readers who may not have access to the original works.

in the USSR. The decade serving as my focus falls squarely in the middle of the rule of Leonid Brezhnev – second only to Joseph Stalin in his length of tenure as General Secretary of the Central Committee of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union. Although Brezhnev’s conservative economic approach meant the country experienced an overall decline during his eighteen-year term, many citizens of the former USSR still remember the 1970s fondly. Russian opinion polls show Brezhnev (along with Vladimir Putin) to be one of the two most popular Russian leaders of the last hundred years.<sup>2</sup> It is, of course, no coincidence that these two men appear together in the collective consciousness; comparisons ran rampant after Russia’s 2014 military takeover of Crimea, and European Commission President José Manuel Barroso has called for Putin to abandon the “Brezhnev doctrine” of limited sovereignty.<sup>3</sup>

Both Putin and his predecessor, former Russian President Dimitriy Medvedev, are of the generation that grew up witnessing Brezhnev’s time in office, while simultaneously listening to official state-sponsored Soviet music of the 1970s. Much like the musicians and songwriters discussed in this dissertation, Medvedev has openly admitted to enjoying groups such as Deep Purple, even flying them in to celebrate the fifteenth anniversary of state-controlled gas giant Gazprom in 2008.<sup>4</sup> With this same generation currently in power, tracing a narrative arc of cultural development through the popular music of the Soviet 1970s can illuminate a few related

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<sup>2</sup> Results taken from polls conducted by the Levada Center in 2013, and the Russian Public Opinion Research Center in 2000 and 2005. Summaries can be seen at <http://www.rosbalt.ru/main/2007/04/25/294470.html> and <http://www.rt.com/politics/brezhnev-stalin-gorbachev-soviet-638/>.

<sup>3</sup> “Barroso tells Putin to abandon ‘Brezhnev doctrine’ of limited sovereignty,” *EurActiv.com*, 14 May 2014, accessed 23 September 2015.

<sup>4</sup> S. Walker, “Putin’s heir rocks to sound of Deep Purple,” *The Independent*, 8 February 2008, accessed 28 September 2015.

processes of popular music and politics in today's Russia. In *Back in the USSR: The True Story of Rock in Russia* (1987), Moscow-based music critic and journalist Artemy Troitsky considers the origins of Soviet rock, its debt to the West, and its various stylistic features. From the outset, he challenges the idea of an isolated, ideological culture. He speaks with regard to the influential 1960s and '70s as follows:

The Beatles' happy, harmonious vocal choir proved to be just the voice for which our confused generation was waiting, but was unable to create for itself. Liverpool delivered the solution... I've often heard one and the same phrase from many people; The Beatles hit the bullseye. Yes, they had everything, and if you want to feel what millions of lonely Russian hearts were lacking so terribly, just listen to 'She Loves You'. Joy, rhythm, beauty, spontaneity.<sup>5</sup>

This account of Soviet Russia's attachment to the Beatles is certainly borne out in Soviet music-making of the 1960s and '70s. State-sponsored culture allowed room for some foreign voices, albeit in muted, permutated forms. For instance, composer David Tukhmanov's aforementioned album is not only a repository of influences of Anglophone rock from Queen to Frank Zappa – it can also be seen as a direct tribute to the medley-style format of the Beatles' *Abbey Road*, released seven years earlier in the UK (this time lag gave the LP time to reach Soviet listeners – illicitly). Although works by Tukhmanov and similar songwriters will be analyzed in great detail in various chapters of this dissertation, I cite this album in particular from the outset for reasons both public and private. The recording not only enjoyed “empire-wide” success; it was also something I grew up listening to in early 1990s Ukraine – without any ideas about the origin of

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<sup>5</sup>A. Troitsky, *Back in the USSR: The True Story of Rock in Russia* (Boston and London: Faber and Faber, Inc, 1987), 23-24. See PBS documentary *How the Beatles Rocked the Kremlin* for the most widely publicized example of the Soviet love for Beatles. In addition, émigré authors such as Alexei Yurchak and Sergei Zhuk have written about it in their respective works *Everything was Forever, Until It Was No More: The Last Soviet Generation* (Princeton and Oxford: Princeton University Press, 2006), and *Rock and Roll in the Rocket City: The West, Identity, and Ideology in Soviet Dnepropetrovsk, 1960-1985* (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 2010).



these sonic gestures. Only as I got older and became intimately familiar with the Beatles' catalogue did I realize that the opening bars of Tukhmanov's first track immediately evoke the tremulous, echoing Moog arpeggios of "Because," released seven years prior in 1969. Shortly thereafter, the same song lapses into a soft-shoe groove reminiscent of a hybrid between "Sun King" and the swing section of "You Never Give Me Your Money." These parallels between East and West will occur with remarkable frequency as our narrative of 1970s Soviet popular music unfolds.

In this way, my auditory field of reference first opened up in relation to Soviet-issued popular music, and – concurrently – a number of questions emerged: how and where did Tukhmanov get Western records? How was it possible for *On the Wave of My Memory* to be issued by the official state record label, Melodiya? Was this Tukhmanov's knowing wink at a select few urban listeners or a genuinely patriotic attempt in creating a homegrown version of "bourgeois" culture for socialist audiences? Finally, and most importantly, where did the act of writing, recording, and producing this album position Tukhmanov – and other composers like him – in relationship to the alleged "stagnation" of 1970s state culture? By better understanding the space and ways in which songwriters of this decade functioned, I hope to begin unpacking the complicated relationship between "official" musicians and the Soviet government, and to further elucidate the role of popular music in shaping intimate spaces and personalized identities within a controlled society. It is easy to assume that music under dictatorial pressures is forced to choose between endorsement or subversion of the status quo: as much recent research has demonstrated, matters are much more complicated.

These incidences within popular music generate remarkable evidence for a more nuanced

and revealing view of Soviet popular culture. A form of purportedly “light” entertainment permits a unique and lasting view of state-sponsored media – and its strange freedoms – across the world’s biggest nation. As Gleb Tsipursky puts it, “expressing fascination with some aspects of western popular culture did not necessarily mean that young people sought to emulate a western lifestyle or demonstrate nonconformism.”<sup>6</sup> The modest sample of musicians under investigation here will help to elucidate larger issues and similar paradoxes within equally restrictive cultures or systems. Rock and/or popular song together form a two-way bridge between self-expression and state control: put differently, rock represents a “pressure valve” of both restraint and release simultaneously.

### **Literature Review**

The only existing Russian-language history dedicated exclusively to Soviet rock music (none address popular music as a whole) is Artemy Troitsky’s aforementioned volume, *Back in the USSR: A True Story of Rock in Russia*. Troitsky both tells the story of and valorizes those dissident rock musicians who were actively persecuted by the government, ignoring hundreds of state-sponsored rock musicians – including those considered in this dissertation – because of their ambivalent relationship to the regime. In what I will show to be a recurring pattern, ambivalence is dismissed in favor of an “official-unofficial” binarism. Troitsky’s definition of

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<sup>6</sup> G. 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), 11. Tsipursky purposely does not capitalize “western” in his work.

“rock” is based solely on the political affiliations of the musicians involved, discounting music that allied itself with existing forms of rock through stylistic or aesthetic means. A socially oriented form of Soviet genre formation is addressed at length in Chapter Two of this dissertation.

Troitsky’s “true story of rock in Russia” – like much contemporaneous research of Soviet culture – places important figures within a dualistic system relative to the regime. Musicians are discussed in terms of endorsing or rejecting political norms. This overly simplistic approach lacks both the depth and flexibility necessary to fully explore the daily workings of socialist popular entertainment: it takes official dictates at face value, excluding and ignoring real audiences. Most people in the USSR were neither avid proponents of socialist policy nor its opponents; they existed somewhere in between. By focusing on exclusively urban areas where subversive musical communities could form, Troitsky’s study applies a subjectively elitist or qualitative approach to a fundamentally quantitative problem – the vast majority of Soviet listeners could not have access to this politically charged music, and therefore developed very different listening habits.

Nonetheless, Troitsky’s book represented the first attempt by a Soviet writer to document the “series of overlapping youth cultures, each of which presented its own challenge to the bewildered, surly, and often cruel monolith of the Soviet Communist State” that took place throughout the second half of the twentieth century.<sup>7</sup> Troitsky is still an active Russian journalist, music critic, concert promoter, broadcaster, and academic, who lived through much of the Soviet

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<sup>7</sup> Troitsky, 8.

rock scene as an observer and participant. In this volume, he gives rock its due as a social catalyst, honoring it as a conduit of energy, defiance, and bona fide change for millions of people across the USSR. As suggested, however, his definition of “rock” is indelibly shaped by his experience living in the Soviet 1970s. Scholars within Russia are not the only ones who tend to frame this music reductively. Diaspora scholars and non-Russians have researched Soviet rock as well, but few of them consider all aspects – or at the very least, all influences – of that genre in the USSR.

The earliest English-language contribution to the topic of Soviet rock predates Troitsky’s book by four years, although it is by no means a comprehensive source. Published in 1983 in *The Wilson Quarterly*, S. Frederick Starr’s article “The Rock Inundation” accurately, albeit briefly documents the spread of Western rock in the USSR, while simultaneously cataloguing some homegrown performers. In his article, Starr documents the formation of Soviet bands in the 1980s that idolized English or American groups and sang only in English; he also describes the illicit organization of their performances. Such illegal concerts allowed many enterprising and so-called “private entrepreneurs” to profit with impressive success on the black market. One of the very first of these impresarios, Rafail Mkrtchian, had even organized annual “Festivals of Rock Music” that took place primarily in Armenia in the late 1960s. Surprisingly, these events enjoyed the direct sponsorship of the Young Communist League. This overlap of politics and profit rolled in the 1970s; it also drew closer to Moscow. With these examples, Starr sketches the very early and confusing years of rock counterculture in the USSR, and even goes on to discuss

the relationship of the state and state-sponsored music to such underground activity.<sup>8</sup>

However, only the briefest acknowledgement is made of what most people heard on most days – in most places around the empire. Starr, like so many others, focuses instead upon governmental decree and those who saw themselves as its strident opponents. Two years later, Starr published his monograph on the role of jazz in the USSR, which includes a final chapter as an expansion of his earlier article.<sup>9</sup> His consideration of Soviet jazz, including its fleeting nods to rock music, was genuinely groundbreaking. No previous history of Soviet music had mentioned any kind of statistically popular genre within the USSR, indigenous or foreign. However, the scope of Starr's work was always – and understandably – limited by a few factors. These limitations included the still-extant binarism of “Iron Curtain” rhetoric and the difficulty of doing sociocultural research from America (a Cold War enemy).

In 1985, the same year Starr's jazz monograph became available, Pedro Ramet (now Sabrina Petra Ramet), a Professor of International Studies at the University of Washington, published an article called “Rock Counterculture in Eastern Europe and the Soviet Union.”<sup>10</sup> This was a precursor to Ramet's future collaboration with Sergei Zamascikov, a former political officer in the Latvian branch of the Soviet Army during the 1970s. Published in 1990, their longer joint study, “The Soviet Rock Scene,” came close on the heels of Troitsky's history and used his research as a key source. Ramet and Zamascikov's work points to one of the difficulties

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<sup>8</sup> S.F. Starr, “The Rock Inundation,” *The Wilson Quarterly*, 7.4 (1983): 58-67.

<sup>9</sup> S.F. Starr, *Red & Hot: The Fate of Jazz in the Soviet Union* (New York: Limelight Editions, 1985).

<sup>10</sup> P. Ramet, “Rock Counterculture in Eastern Europe and the Soviet Union,” *Survey*, 29.2 (1985): 155-158.

of working on Soviet history per se: so much happened “off the books,” so to speak, that a Western historian could never wholly rely on printed, official sources of information. Oral history was – and would continue to be – a huge, yet often inaccessible aspect of Soviet historiography. Research conducted even today into the 1970s, for example, will always involve some level of ethnographic zeal, be it working with subjects on this side of the Atlantic or traveling to Russia itself in order to gather first-hand, spoken data. Although that process is still by no means easy, it has fortunately become considerably simpler of late, thanks to the internet – social networks such as VKontakte are incredibly popular in Russia, making reconsiderations of the past a frequent, nationwide topic of debate. The Russian web is a goldmine of cultural memoirs.

Ramet and Zamascikov’s article, as an early admission of some cultural paradoxes, offers some expanded arguments from Starr’s 1983 text. The authors compile a much more comprehensive musical timeline entitled “Stages in the Evolution of Soviet Rock,” and discuss indigenous rock output in the USSR in relation to its foreign roots.<sup>11</sup> However, much is still made of this musical style and its presumed opposition to the state; there is – in the same manner – no mention of state-approved and therefore more recognizable, even renowned rock groups. A few aesthetic trends propagated by these “softer” bands are at least name-checked, yet not discussed in any detail. Rock therefore remains a wholly underground, subversive, and contrary practice. It is deemed peripheral and elitist. As a result, we get little insight into the musical

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<sup>11</sup> P. Ramet and S. Zamascikov, “The Soviet Rock Scene,” *Journal of Popular Culture*, 24.1 (1990): 149-174.

tastes and desires of most Soviet citizens; the only two voices we hear are those of the state and its loudest opponents.

Ramet's research subsequently led her to assemble an edited volume entitled *Rocking the State: Rock Music and Politics in Eastern Europe and Russia*. This was published in 1994 – three years after the collapse of the USSR – and included essays on rock in the GDR, Poland, Czechoslovakia, Hungary, Yugoslavia, Bulgaria, Belarus, and Ukraine. As Ramet writes in the preface, “this is the first scholarly attempt to treat systematically all the countries and regions of the Western USSR and Eastern Europe.”<sup>12</sup> *Rocking the State*, however, was not the first book-length manuscript devoted wholly to Eastern European rock. Three years prior, just before the dissolution of the Soviet Union, Oxford University Press published Timothy W. Ryback's *Rock Around the Bloc: A History of Rock Music in Eastern Europe and the Soviet Union*. The book was, as one reviewer put it, “not so much an examination of rock music or rock musicians as a chronicle of the rock and roll generations in the Soviet-bloc countries.”<sup>13</sup> Sociology took precedence over sound. Ultimately, Ryback's book was intended for audiences unfamiliar with both popular music studies and the postwar history of Eastern Europe. Consequently, it rarely focuses on the actual music. Ryback is to be commended for building a rich historical context, but because of his focus and lack of breadth, his work cannot ultimately be considered a comprehensive study.

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<sup>12</sup> S.P. Ramet, *Rocking the State: Rock Music and Politics in Eastern Europe and Russia* (Boulder, San Francisco & Oxford: Westview Press, 1994), ix.

<sup>13</sup> D. Browne, “Rock around the Bloc by Timothy W. Ryback, A Review,” *The Slavic and East European Journal*, 34.4 (1990): 563.

The last text I wish to mention in this introductory overview is Thomas Cushman's 1995 volume, *Notes From Underground: Rock Music Counterculture in Russia*. A commendable "sociological case study of a community of rock musicians in St. Petersburg," it epitomizes the predominant research done on Soviet rock to date.<sup>14</sup> In straightforward terms, Cushman "present(s) a sociological account of rock counterculture in St. Petersburg (i.e., Leningrad) as a poignant case study...dramatiz(ing) the struggle of human expressivity and agency in the face of the changing social circumstances, each of which posed a different set of constraints on cultural expression."<sup>15</sup> Despite the laudable goals on display, this work focuses solely on politically dissident music and counterculture, once again avoiding much Soviet popular music and its audiences. Cushman deems ideology more important than aesthetics, and as the only relevant issue to be examined. Similarly, sociologists, historians, and international studies scholars have all shown interest in the Soviet rock scene – but have bypassed its sounds and listeners. Troitsky, a musician himself, does spare some discussion for sound. Most English-language sources, however, tend to focus solely on the political implications, as epitomized by the classical epigraph to Paul Easton's 1989 essay on the rock music community in Soviet youth culture:

Any musical innovation is full of danger to the whole State, and ought to be prohibited; when modes of music change, the fundamental laws of the State always change with them.

*Plato, The Republic, Book IV*<sup>16</sup>

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<sup>14</sup> T. Cushman, *Notes from Underground: Rock Music Counterculture in Russia* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1995), x.

<sup>15</sup> *Ibid.*, xi.

<sup>16</sup> P. Easton, "The Rock Music Community," *Soviet Youth Culture*, ed. J. Riordan (Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1989), 45.



In fact, there are a number of other scholarly works one could consider here, all of which discuss Soviet rock solely as a political phenomenon.<sup>17</sup> However, as the 1990s came to a close and the Soviet Union broke apart, more inspiring and genuinely comprehensive studies began to emerge. In conclusion, I wish to highlight the work of several scholars whom I find groundbreaking and indicative of a positive new direction.

David MacFadyen has done significant research on Russian music pre-, post-, and during the Soviet era. His 2001/2002 troika of books on Soviet popular song (*Songs For Fat People: Affect, Emotion, and Celebrity in the Russian Popular Song, 1900-1955*; *Red Stars: Personality and the Soviet Popular Song, 1955-1991*; and *Estrada?! Grand Narratives and the Philosophy of the Russian Popular Song since Perestroika*) is the first serious body of work done on the music that was produced for and broadcast to the vast majority of the Soviet population. I do not mean to discount the fan base of underground Russian rock – as one discovers in the aforementioned literature, it was extremely important. However, that importance was evident within a fairly small demographic, i.e., a certain percentage of young people living in big cities like Moscow and Leningrad where such communities could even be formed or officially tolerated. *Estrada* or light entertainment, on the other hand – precisely because it was state-sponsored – reached millions and millions of listeners or viewers via national radio and television. Much of *estrada*, although it shunned such tags at the time, aligns aesthetically and stylistically with forms of rock

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<sup>17</sup> Many of these works were produced shortly after the fall of the USSR, such as T. Mitchell's "Mixing Pop and Politics: Rock Music in Czechoslovakia Before and After the Velvet Revolution" (1992) and J. Pekacz's "Did Rock Smash the Wall? The Role of Rock in Political Transition" (1994).

around the globe.<sup>18</sup> As MacFadyen explains in his introduction to *Red Stars: Personality and the Soviet Popular Song, 1955-1991*:

This is the first of three books designed to investigate a subject virtually passed over by English-language scholarship, and very rarely researched in Russia: the performers and texts of the Soviet popular song. Here I have in mind not the two specialized fields of jazz and the so-called bards, both of which have enjoyed serious attention. Instead I mean those considerably more influential and widely disseminated songs broadcast every day on Soviet radio for decades, on occasion garnering sales figures in the hundreds of millions. Songs so frequently broadcast and purchased had a profound social significance in the Soviet Union, yet remain unstudied, save their occasional inclusion in some broader studies of Soviet popular culture as a whole.<sup>19</sup>

Although Russian popular music has been interesting to many Anglophone academics solely because of its political context, scholars like David MacFadyen have started to address what it meant to the millions of people who ultimately chose to consume it – a consideration that serves as the driving force for my dissertation. MacFadyen ends the introduction with the following poignant remark:

Political generalizations and elitist attitudes have stopped us so often from asking perhaps the most important question of all in this field: ‘What did Russians *like*?’ My hope is that these pages go some way towards an answer to that question.<sup>20</sup>

Similarly, although it focuses on avant-garde music and not *estrada*, Peter Schmelz’s 2009 book *Such Freedom, If Only Musical: Unofficial Soviet Music During the Thaw* is a

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<sup>18</sup> Related issues of politicizing genre formation are discussed in Chapter Two.

<sup>19</sup> D. MacFadyen, *Red Stars: Personality and the Soviet Popular Song, 1955-1991* (Montreal & Kingston, London, Ithaca: McGill-Queen’s University Press, 2001), ix.

<sup>20</sup> *Ibid.*, x.

significant contribution to the study of Soviet music in the twentieth century.<sup>21</sup> Schmelz uses the theories and concepts put forth by Russian émigré anthropologist Aleksei Yurchak to illustrate how the “unofficial” (yet not necessarily *anti*-official!) music of Khrushchev’s Thaw (1956-1964) helped create a space of inner freedom, private life, moral ambiguity, neutrality, indifference, and sincere feelings after the demise of Stalinism. In discussing the lives and creativity of composers such as Alfred Schnittke, Sofia Gubaidulina, Arvo Pärt, and Edison Denisov, he argues that their music was misunderstood by Soviet officials and continues to be misunderstood by Anglophone scholars wishing to interpret it as the work of dissidents. Using Yurchak’s idea of *vnye* (in brief, existing “outside of” or “external to” the official realm), Schmelz explains how the unofficial concert subculture took advantage of the gaps in the official musical structures. It neither fulfilled official Socialist Realist requirements, nor was it strictly illegal. It was neither subservient nor subversive. I wish to use the work of Peter Schmelz as a model for how to fully delve into Soviet *estrada* of the same time period, which was subject to similar models and processes of cultural production.

Schmelz closes his book with an insightful quote from scholar Boris Groys on this music’s role today, which I strongly believe holds true for *estrada* as well:

...in this post-Soviet time, as the majority of Russians try either to forget that unhappy century entirely or to glorify the Soviet past without actually remembering it, the

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<sup>21</sup> P.J. Schmelz, *Such Freedom, If Only Musical: Unofficial Soviet Music During the Thaw* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2009).

unofficial art of the Soviet era functions paradoxically as the only cultural space where the private memories from the Soviet era are kept.<sup>22</sup>

In addition to his work on the avant-garde scene, Schmelz has also written about Soviet popular music in his articles “‘Crucified on the Cross of Mass Culture’: Late Soviet Genre Politics in Alexander Zhurbin’s Rock Opera *Orpheus and Eurydice*,” and “From Scriabin to Pink Floyd: the ANS Synthesizer and the Politics of Soviet Music Between Thaw and Stagnation.” Here Schmelz has begun bridging the insistent academic distinction between “high” and “low” cultures, not to mention any bifurcation into crudely defined camps of “official” and “unofficial.” Gleb Tsipursky also dismantles such binaries in his 2011 dissertation, which investigates state-sponsored youth activities of the early Cold War. Tsipursky’s research acknowledges the ambivalent nature of this Soviet cultural network: “By speaking of youth agency, I do not wish to convey the image of resistance and subversion, which fails to convince by juxtaposing state and society in postulating an inherent rift between a genuine, everyday culture and an official, state-managed one.”<sup>23</sup> Other scholars in the twenty-first century have started to investigate popular music under communist party rule, and the nuanced social contexts in which it was made. Some fruitful studies include Peter Barrer’s inquiries into Slovakian pop,

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<sup>22</sup> B. Groys, “The Other Gaze: Russian Unofficial Art’s View of the Soviet World.” In *Postmodernism and the Postsocialist Condition: Politicized Art under Late Socialism*, ed. A. Erjavec (Berkeley & Los Angeles: University of California Press, 2003), 88.

<sup>23</sup> Tsipursky, 14.

Kevin Karnes' investigation of Latvian rock opera, and Nick Tochka's examination of Albanian *estrada*.<sup>24</sup>

My own study of popular music in the Soviet Union respects, amends, and then continues the efforts of the scholars I catalog above. Like those same scholars before me, I have dealt with a lack of reliable information in print, the fickleness of post-Soviet archives, and unreliable or revisionist oral histories by living subjects. The traumas caused by the demise of an empire make a balanced, theoretically broad, and entirely inclusive story of Soviet popular music challenging indeed. The following chapters, summarized below, are my contribution to this difficult area of study, and a step toward a post-Cold War popular musicology – one that does not fetishize any musical subversion of the “‘captive nations’ of a Soviet-led communist Second world.”<sup>25</sup> It instead works toward, as Nicholas Tochka suggests in his brief 2013 examination of Pussy Riot, an elucidation of “the modes by which state-socialist orders obligated the composition, performance, and mediation of popular music.”<sup>26</sup>

## **Chapter 1: Ideological Transmission & Transmutation in Soviet *Estrada* Under Brezhnev**

The political system of the Soviet 1970s allowed a unique series of relationships between

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<sup>24</sup> See P. Barrer's "World Famous in Slovakia: Domestic Popular Music During and After Communist Party Rule," in *New Zealand Slavonic Journal* (2006): 73-89; K. Karnes' "'Where Space Becomes Time': Music, Landscape and Memory in the Latvian Rock Opera *Lāčplēsis*," in *Across Centuries and Cultures: Musicological Studies in Honor of Joachim Braun*, ed. K.C. Karnes and L. Sheptovitsky (Frankfurt on Main: Peter Lang International Academic Publishers, 2010); and N. Tochka's "Voicing Freedom, Sounding Dissent: Popular Music, Simulation and Censorship in Democratizing Albania, 1991-1997," in *European Journal of Cultural Studies* (2013).

<sup>25</sup> N. Tochka, "Pussy Riot, Freedom of Expression, and Popular Music Studies After the Cold War," *Popular Music* 32.02 (2013), 307-8.

<sup>26</sup> *Ibid.*

*estrada* composers, performers, and audience members to unfold.<sup>27</sup> Their interactions were very different from the cultural production evident in today's capitalist Russia. Much has been written about the live performance and stagecraft of Soviet *estrada* – this introductory chapter will instead focus on the popular songwriters of the Soviet Union and their intermediary role between dual obligations to both state and audience. Those composers had to be extremely mindful of political implications in their work and lifestyle choices; Soviet newspapers of the Stagnation teem with composers' pronouncements on what their genre means.<sup>28</sup> The same figures also help explain how their craft can and should elevate listeners culturally while still appealing to their youthful desires. These men and women bore an enormous responsibility; they both acted and created accordingly. Focusing on how Soviet ideology was transmitted and transformed by *estrada* songwriting, I intend to give a brief history of Soviet Socialist Realism as a doctrine, and – through two case studies of especially active and outspoken state composers Aleksandra Pakhmutova and Raimond Pauls – examine how its traces (as well as those of other ideologies) are present in Soviet song of the 1970s.

Finally, I will examine the role of the Soviet songwriter in articulating the relationship between popular music and Soviet dogma. I intend to relate Pakhmutova's and Pauls' public

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<sup>27</sup> Some of these relationships are discussed indirectly in the *Composers of Moscow* series, a compilation of articles on featured popular composers. For an example, see I. Likhachëva's *Kompozitory Moskvyy: Sbornik statei, vypusk tretiy* (Moscow: Sovetskiy Kompozitor, 1988). These essays are frequently retrospective, and demonstrate how the composer negotiated the craft throughout the span of his/her career.

<sup>28</sup> These pronouncements include articles with titles such as “V glavnoi roli – muzyka” (Starring – Music) in *Komsomol'skaya pravda* (8 October 1968); “Raymond Pauls: Ne uvlechenie, a dolg” (Not a Passion – a Duty) in *Trud* (18 August 1982); and, my personal favorite, “Liuboviu rozhdaetsya pesnya” (Love Gives Birth to Song) in *Komsomol'skaya pravda*, (29 August 1981).

pronouncements and the creative endeavors of their generation to a centralized system of cultural production. Ultimately, so much of *estrada* came into existence because the state and the artists had different assumptions about values they wanted art objects to convey. Here, I would like to examine the songwriters' agency in navigating and exploiting this gap. Overall, a broad soundscape transpires, reaching from subversion to acquiescence. In between those poles lie the most popular and culturally consequential forms of musical expression in the world's largest nation. They acted as conduits for both state ideology and personal expression; they existed in between, negotiating a space for both dignity and desire.

## **Chapter 2: “Soviet Prog” and Vocal-Instrumental Ensembles: In-Between Policy & Privacy**

One of the ways in which the Soviet government dealt with burgeoning rock music trends at home and abroad was by instituting their own version of “rock bands” – officially called Vocal-Instrumental Ensembles (hereafter VIAs, as in Russian).<sup>29</sup> This phenomenon appeared in the 1960s and quickly became the primary model for *estrada* musical groups. In order to gain VIA status, a band needed official recognition from the state. This arrangement involved an artistic director (frequently the lead singer and/or songwriter) who bore responsibility for conforming to Soviet ethics and ideals. Using retrospective autobiographical and historical

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<sup>29</sup> More on this can be found in V.K. Yashkin's *Vokal'no-Instrumental'nye Ansambli* (Moscow: Znanie, 1980); B.P. Sokolovskiy's *Samodeyatel'nye VIA i diskoteki* (Moskva: Profizdat, 1987); and V. Shchëlkin & S. Frolov's *Legendy VIA*, (Moscow: Grifon, 2007). A fascinating account from within the VIA scene itself, Ariel' frontman Valeriy Yarushin's autobiography has also proven very informational: V. Yarushin, *Sud'ba po imeni 'Ariel'* (Moscow: Russkaia nov', 2005).

sources as well as the press materials mentioned above, this chapter will examine the influence of Western progressive rock on well-known VIA Ariel' (officially recognized in 1970) and *estrada* composer David Tukhmanov. Beginning with a consideration of a progressively tinged “folk rock” track by Ariel', I will unpack the creation of a late Socialist soundscape. I will then turn to the composition and production of Tukhmanov's 1975 album *On the Wave of My Memory*, which gained tremendous popularity across the Soviet Union. In reconstructing these narratives (and constructing them anew), I will inquire into genre formation within the Soviet Union, as well as deal with matters of censorship and how it affects – for better *and* worse – creative freedoms. Finally, this chapter will explore how the 1970s allowed for the nurturing of a distinctly Soviet rock aesthetic, something that nonetheless took much from Western rock of the period.

### **Chapter 3: People Sing When They're Happy: Popular Music on the Soviet Screen**

This chapter will examine the experience of several members of the Union of Composers who wrote music for the screen in the 1970s. Soviet films – much like state-sponsored *estrada* – had to tread a fine line between being acceptable to official organs, yet managing to appeal to the average citizen. Using interviews and editorials, as well as contemporary and retrospective biographies, I will demonstrate how those men and women both perceived and articulated the responsibility of popular song in cinematic media. Music – and popular music especially – was an important factor contributing to how filmmakers could alternately uphold Soviet ideology and also carve out space for intimate and personalized self-expression. This chapter will explore two



key movies that embody that same tension: *The Twelve Chairs* (*Двенадцать стульев*, 1971, dir. Leonid Gaidai) and *The Irony of Fate, or Enjoy Your Bath!* (*Ирония судьбы, или с легким паром!*, 1975, dir. El'dar Riazanov). These films – two of the most famous during the Soviet 1970s – demonstrate how popular music could fit into a complex and multi-faceted relationship of public exposure and private intent.

#### **Chapter 4: The Third Direction on Stage: Rock Opera in the USSR**

Building on the discussion of VIAs, this chapter will discuss rock operas in the Soviet Union, a phenomenon striking for its obvious Western roots – yet inextricably tied up with *estrada* songwriters and performers. The genre sprang up in the USSR in the mid-1970s with *Orpheus and Eurydice* (*Орфей и Эвридика*, 1975), produced and performed in conjunction with the popular VIA Singing Guitars (Poyushchie gitary). This chapter will trace the development and reception of this rock opera and Aleksei Rybnikov's *The Star and Death of Joaquin Murieta* (*Звезда и смерть Хоакина Мурьеты*, 1976). In addition to exploring the concept of merging academic and popular music in what the Composers' Union began calling "The Third Direction," I will argue that the transposition of rock music to the stage appeared as an elevation of its status to official organs. Those state bodies prized the theater's educational and artistic potentials, and provided a brand-new venue for Western-rock-inspired *estrada* composers and performers.

## CHAPTER 1

### **IDEOLOGICAL TRANSMISSION & TRANSMUTATION IN SOVIET *ESTRADA* UNDER BREZHNEV**

*“We are all worried about the state of today’s popular songs.”*<sup>30</sup>

*~ Raimond Pauls*

#### **Introduction**

A retrospective essay from 1987 by Latvian composer Raimond Pauls on Soviet popular music opens with the telling generalization quoted above. This epigraph encapsulates the responsibility undertaken by popular Soviet composers when it came to producing socially responsible popular music. This referred to songs that avoided “primitive texts and music, a vulgar stage presence, [and] a total lack of musical taste and culture.”<sup>31</sup> Soviet composers of all genres were trained to feel a pedagogical duty to their public – particularly toward its more youthful members – and this same duty became more urgent as Western materials continued to infiltrate the USSR. As Sergei Zhuk explains in his testament to rock music in Soviet Ukraine:

During the 1960s and 1970s, Soviet ideologists paid more attention to the organization of leisure time and cultural consumption among the Soviet population. Soviet consumers had to be provided not only with consumer goods but also with new services and new healthy goals for consumption. According to the ideological requirements of developed socialism, socialist consumption differed from ‘capitalist consumerism’ and excluded notions of individual profitability and the accumulation of wealth. Soviet ideologists tried to combine the traditional Stalinist goals of ‘rational consumption’ and the ‘rational use of leisure’ with the new requirements of the ‘developed socialism’ theory.<sup>32</sup>

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<sup>30</sup> B.P. Sokolovskiy, *Samodeyatel'nye VIA i diskoteki* (Moscow: Profizdat, 1987), 24.

<sup>31</sup> Ibid.

<sup>32</sup> S. Zhuk, *Rock and Roll in the Rocket City: The West, Identity, and Ideology in Soviet Dniepropetrovsk, 1960-198* (Washington, D.C., Woodrow Wilson Center Press, 2010), 10.

These years saw various and conflicting goals inherent in entertaining a citizenry of “developed socialists,” while navigating both forbidden influences and homegrown values.

A large part of this endeavor involved packaging officially approved Soviet ideology in a way that made it palatable and appealing to younger audiences. Composers played a special role in this process as “experts” in their field, who still had to adhere to certain (often unspoken) extra-musical parameters in order to retain their position. Ideology played a central part in their role as middlemen between official policies and countless listeners. This meant that state-approved musicians were increasingly worried about a style of music they needed to produce in order to maintain some semblance of relevance. After all, illegal access to Western radio and records increased every year. What, then, was the relationship between ideology and innovation, between dogma and fashion? These are the questions this chapter aims to address through an examination of the composer’s role in Soviet popular song.

The sentiment of Pauls’ observation, which stresses an artist’s responsibility to the Soviet public, was first engendered during Stalin’s reign, and – as Zhuk points out in the above quote – remained an important driver of cultural production in the decades thereafter. Stalin died in 1953 and was followed by the ultimately unnerving liberalism of Khrushchev, whose desire to institute greater change within the upper strata of Soviet politics led to his “retirement” in October 1964. The elite wanted to maintain their status, and so began the era of Leonid Brezhnev, who was in office from late 1964 until 1982. Only Stalin had held office longer. Worried by the dangers of “reform” – be it liberal or neo-Stalinist – Brezhnev and his colleagues came to oversee the so-called Era of Stagnation. The Russian term is *zastoi*, redolent of stagnant waters. The high costs of the Cold War also meant that the desire for political or economic change was minimal. The status quo was controlled, yet devoid of Stalinist “excesses.”

In order to avoid the possibility of mass dissent, especially with a patently feeble economy, *some* degree of cultural liberalization was needed from the late 1960s onward. In literature, the utter tedium of actuality led to the increased influence of science fiction and, conversely, so-called “village prose” that bemoaned the loss of rural tradition or an ancient faith – both very begrudgingly endorsed by the state. Within music, Brezhnev’s era eventually ran parallel to such genres of Western popular song as country, disco, and funk in the 1970s. As we shall see in Chapter Two, Soviet interpretations and assimilations of Anglophone *rock* music became a particularly thorny issue for the authorities. This preference for Western cultural artifacts troubled and unsettled those in charge of preserving and transmitting official ideology. Pauls’ opening quote echoes that ambivalence, despite his own interest in drawing inspiration from sources considered ideologically unorthodox.

Our interest in ideology comes not from an assumption that it accurately captures what goes on in the average citizen’s head; rather, it is “materialized” in objects or discourses – which then enter the realm of public debate. The reception of ideology is where we can measure its efficacy. Music, a profoundly social or “dialogic” process, is simultaneously an object *and* a discourse: both of those meanings were fraught endeavors in the Soviet Union whether one wrote, censored, or simply listened. Music was produced with one set of intentions by the state, filtered through a second set of intentions belonging to the composer – and then interpreted by disparate listeners with their own agendas. Popular music, despite being dismissed as “light entertainment,” carried an even heavier burden than other forms of musicking, due to its pervasiveness and ease of accessibility.

So what was the popular music scene like in the Soviet Union during Pauls’ own career? As Peter Barrer states in his discussion of Czechoslovakia: “Communist party rule...profoundly

retarded the development of domestic popular music. The state's 'authoritarian' approach toward cultural production and dissemination took the form of 'a strict control of recording, a licensing system for live musicians and strict control of imports.'"<sup>33</sup> This was fundamentally the case all over the USSR, and points to the conflict between ideology and self-expression that will be central to our exploration of the Soviet 1970s.

No discussion of Soviet ideology – in any decade – would be complete without an opening contextualization of Socialist Realism and its changing forms; therefore, this chapter will begin by providing an insight into its genesis and relevance just prior to our chosen decade. More specifically, we will examine Soviet Socialist Realism – an empire's *official* style of art – as an intersection of various politico-aesthetic discourses. The nature of state art, songwriting included, was often set down in rigid and ideologically assured terms. When those guidelines were "followed" by artists and performers, matters were more complex. As already suggested, audience reception only made matters trickier still. The rules of artistic production were often ignored, given lip service, treated ironically, or used in order to employ other, apolitical or non-political forms of expression.

After tracing a brief history of Soviet Socialist Realism, I will turn to two famous composers responsible for much of Soviet popular music through the 1970s and beyond. They will serve as case studies of the often overlooked, yet key position of popular songwriter within the sphere of Soviet cultural production. These two individuals are the aforementioned Raimond Pauls (b. 1936) and Aleksandra Pakhmutova (b. 1929). Said to be Brezhnev's favorite composer, the diminutive yet lively Pakhmutova epitomized civic song in the 1970s. She was well-known

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<sup>33</sup> P. Barrer, "World Famous in Slovakia: Domestic Popular Music during and after Communist Party Rule," *New Zealand Slavonic Journal* (2006), 73.

for her up-tempo celebrations of Soviet achievement, as can be heard in her 1971 song cycle *Gagarin's Constellation* (Созвездие Гагарина), or the 1975 “Until the Train Leaves” (До отправления поезда), celebrating the construction of the grand and ill-fated Baikal-Amur Mainline Railway. Beyond such officious themes, she was equally renowned for more tender and personal numbers, such as “Melody,” (Мелодия) sung by the “Soviet Sinatra” – Muslim Magomaev – in 1976, or “Hope” (Надежда), a career-defining hit from 1971 for the Polish singer Anna German.

An exploration of Pakhmutova’s creative partnership with her husband, poet Nikolai Dobronravov, will show us how a composer interpreted and transmitted Soviet ideology musically between 1975 and 1979 – in other words, at the peak of so-called socioeconomic “stagnation” under Brezhnev. In this period, many art forms, including popular music, turned to capturing more intimate and personal scenarios than the collective narratives of the Stalinist era. Films, novels, and music became concerned with the everyday life of average Soviet people, known in Russian as *byt*. Aleksandra Pakhmutova is one of the foremost exemplars of Soviet composition engaging in both styles of artistic presentation – civic and lyric, public and private, big and small. Following an examination of Pakhmutova, we will then turn to Pauls, in particular to his stage musical *Sister Carrie* (1978), which – like Pakhmutova’s work – succeeded in both satisfying youthful audiences and placating official forces. These two figures will help us define where Soviet popular composers located themselves in the spectrum between official ideology and actual cultural production, between state theory and workplace practice. Where was the manageable, acceptable overlap between dictates and desire in Socialist culture during the Stagnation years?

## **An Initial Context: Soviet Socialist Realism in Public & Private**

Socialist Realism has always been an elusive concept that – although debated across various art forms – was rarely fixed with a precise definition, especially in areas such as music and dance. Yet this political and aesthetic system defined public cultural production in the Soviet Union for twenty years during Stalin’s term, and continued, in related forms, to affect the arts for decades after his death. Its name remained the same, yet its real-world application often changed. In order to gain a deeper understanding of the mechanisms of Socialist Realism, particularly as *sound*, it is initially useful to explore how this aesthetic ideology evolved.

We begin with language and literature, arguably the primary concern of Socialist Realism, which became part of official state policy after Stalin’s 1932 decree, “On the Reconstruction of Literary and Art Organizations.”<sup>34</sup> Literature and painting, to take but two examples, were henceforth to depict not (only) “objective reality,” but also to capture reality in its revolutionary development. This same year saw the formation of the first Soviet professional artistic union, which served as an organizational model in many areas, including the status, privileges, and financing of orchestras.<sup>35</sup> The actual definition of “Socialist realist music,” however, was vague. Composers and critics were expected to handle such issues empirically throughout the 1930s, while official guidelines spoke in abstract terms of an inspiring, rousing aesthetic to depict proletarian struggle and dignity.

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<sup>34</sup> A.I. Stetsky, “Under the Flag of the Soviets, Under the Flag of Socialism,” *Soviet Writers’ Congress 1934*. (London: Lawrence & Wilshart, 1977), 261-271.

<sup>35</sup> For more information on professional unions and their relationship to Soviet state policy on music, see K. Tomoff’s *Creative Union: The Professional Organization of Soviet Composers, 1939-1953*, (Ithaca, NY, and London: Cornell University Press, 2006).

Professionals notwithstanding, what was the average Soviet citizen's engagement with the arts? Where was private desire amid these system-wide rules? The answer lies between concepts of "private" and "public" in the Soviet Union. Cultural historian Svetlana Boym illustrates the interaction of these spheres, together with the importance of creating an individualized private space through artistic practice in her *Common Places: Mythologies of Everyday Life in Russia*. Even spaces traditionally considered private, such as apartments, became busy, noisy, unavoidably communal and therefore insistently public during the Cold War. Therefore, privacy was a rare realm in which the arts were both enjoyed and subjectively interpreted. Music, for example, could be listened to alone. It became a "personalizable" commodity, an increasing *alternative* to realms of raucous public debate. Boym lays out the stakes of this shift inward:

Privacy began to be seen as the only honorable and uncompromising response to the system of public compromise. Privacy was sought not only as an escape but rather as a way of carving an alternate space of personalizing and de-ideologizing the official maps of everyday life... Privacy was carved through unofficial everyday artistic practices.<sup>36</sup>

Of course, just because something took place in private, did not mean it was automatically anti-official. Gleb Tsipursky explains that "activities traditionally labeled public and private in many instances engaged in productive interactions that served the goals of the Party-state leadership while enriching the lives of individual citizens."<sup>37</sup> Yet these different realms abided by different rules, and the arising of a private sphere was inextricably tied up with – and, in turn, had implications for – all kinds of artistic activity.

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<sup>36</sup> S. Boym, *Common Places: Mythologies of Everyday Life in Russia* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1994), 94.

<sup>37</sup> G. 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), 16.



Public life, on the other hand, began undergoing a slow ritualization process – what anthropologist Alexei Yurchak calls “hypernormalization.”<sup>38</sup> Repetition became synonymous with normality. Katerina Clark sees the roots of the 1970s’ civic skepticism in the early stage of Soviet culture: “during the 1930s [in the early years of Socialist Realism] all public activity became more highly ritualized and...much of it was geared to legitimizing the hegemony of the Stalinist leadership by identifying its links with Lenin and Leninism.”<sup>39</sup> Tomorrow was always tied to yesterday; neither ambition nor aspiration was allowed much room for deviation. Through the years of World War II and continuing after Stalin’s death, public – i.e., “official” – discourse became saturated with over-crafted, repetitive, and frequently esoteric formulations. Art always had to be “accessible,” while “inspired by both the people and the Party.” Most famously after 1934, it was to be “national in form, socialist in content.”

This highly formalized and abstract discourse privileged the meticulous reproduction of signifiers – in other words, vague propagandistic concepts – and thus “catalyzed various modes of experiential and epistemic estrangement.”<sup>40</sup> Official views of reality became increasingly unreal. Artistic organizations were expected to reproduce the stereotypical *signifiers* of official speech, while the signified went adrift. Yet if citizens and organizations were sufficiently savvy, they could also use this public reproduction as part of a subjective, performative act – one that might actually enable new and unpredictable meanings. Put differently, artistic novelty had to be

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<sup>38</sup> For an explanation of this idea and its potential contribution to the collapse of the Soviet Union, see Alexei Yurchak’s *Everything Was Forever Until It Was No More: The Last Soviet Generation* (Princeton and Oxford: Princeton University Press, 2006).

<sup>39</sup> K. Clark, *The Soviet Novel: History as Ritual, Third Edition* (Bloomington & Indianapolis: Indiana University press, 1981), 10.

<sup>40</sup> D. Boyer and A. Yurchak, “American Stio: Or, what Late-Socialist Aesthetics of Parody Reveal about Contemporary Political Culture in the West,” *Cultural Anthropology*, 25.2 (2010), 182.

expressed against the background of endless, obligatory cliché. As the 1970s offered little in the way of inspiring social narratives, lyrical composers and their “private” audiences with transistor radios sought ways in which to turn ideology into smaller, less strident forms. In her book *Soviet Film Music: An Historical Survey*, Tatiana Egorova suggests that Brezhnev’s term – lasting from 1964 to 1982 – was marked by “a quaint and often paradoxical combination of the outdated clichés of Socialist Realism with the latest advances of modern music, which made the music of the ‘70s and the early ‘80s motley, eclectic, and unbalanced.”<sup>41</sup> As Boris Groys writes in regard to visual art in the 1970s: “The highly ideologized Soviet mass culture was extremely idiosyncratic. Selling ideology is different from selling Coca-Cola – even if there are some obvious similarities.”<sup>42</sup> My aim throughout this dissertation will be to explore and shed light on this “eclectic and unbalanced” state of affairs in Soviet popular music during the Stagnation. The first step is to examine public morale in the relevant years.

As can be seen in Figure 1.1, Moscow Conceptualist Il’ya Kabakov’s witty, semi-serious assessment of fear and hope in the Soviet ‘60s and ‘70s isolates the year 1974 as the pinnacle of “fear” for unofficial visual artists. In his forthcoming essay, “Selling Schnittke: Late Soviet Censorship and the Cold War Marketplace,” Peter Schmelz likewise points to “the stability (both perceived and actual) that emerged in the mid-1970s, most evident in Kabakov’s sense of the leveling off of fear.”<sup>43</sup> But how did that rising fearfulness – and the drastic drop in “hope” preceding it – affect artistic communities more closely tied to official resources than the

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<sup>41</sup> T. Egorova, *Soviet Film Music: An Historical Survey* (New York: Routledge, 1997), 213.

<sup>42</sup> B. Groys, “The Other Gaze: Russian Unofficial Art’s View of the Soviet World,” *Postmodernism and the Postsocialist Condition: Politicized Art under Late Socialism*, ed. A. Erjavec (Berkeley & Los Angeles: University of California Press, 2003), 57.

<sup>43</sup> P. Schmelz, “Selling Schnittke: Late Soviet Censorship in the Cold War Marketplace,” in *Forbidden Voices*, ed. P. Hall (Oxford University Press, forthcoming).

experimental Kabakov? How did the doctrine of Soviet Socialist Realism make itself known in song and poetry of the 1970s amid such tensions?

**Figure 1.1, artist Il'ya Kabakov's 1983 "chart of hope and fear"**

**Top line: "fear," bottom line: "hope"**



Socialist Realism was a style of art – an intention, as it were, incorporated into many different forms of artistic expression – that hoped to further the goals of socialism and communism. Especially in visual art and literary prose, perhaps the most straightforwardly representative forms of Soviet art, this doctrine often glorified such socialist themes as the struggle of the working class and its movement toward equality and eventual emancipation. In other words, Socialist Realism was a propaganda tactic ensuring that tales of Soviet society moved ever closer to a narrative of “mature” socialism.

In slightly more abstract forms of art – such as poetry, for instance – the guidelines were

not as clear and there was more freedom for artists to explore non-traditional and avant-garde trends. Rhythm, rhyme, and meter have no objective connotation. Zhuk expands on the tricky intersection of poetry and ideology, “According to KGB reports, the young, talented poets, members of the literary workshop, denied the ‘traditions of socialist realism,’ and insisted [instead] on new ‘revolutionary approaches to a changing reality.’”<sup>44</sup> As the decades wore on after Stalin’s death, the grip of Socialist Realism on Soviet art slowly relaxed – as did its efficacy. Ultimately, although the term Socialist Realism remained constant in defining artistic enterprise, its philosophical content and strategies changed throughout the twentieth century.

Granted, ideological aims remained rhetorically constant over the decades. Socialist Realist rhetoric hoped “to form a new generation of Soviet people... by debunking foreign, non-socialist ideas and downgrading the achievements of Western cultures... [It hoped to] develop positive attitudes and values among young Soviet people.”<sup>45</sup> Yet the ideological shifts of the late 1960s and 1970s made this an increasingly complicated goal. As Yurchak explains, in the final two decades before the Soviet Union’s inevitable collapse, “state power depended less and less on Soviet citizens’ belief in the communist ideology, and more and more on their simulation of that belief.”<sup>46</sup> In addition to this shift away from official pronouncements – and despite the state’s attempts at downgrading the achievements of Western cultures – much of the younger generation’s cultural consumption across the USSR also came from outside of the Soviet empire. Western popular music filled the gap left by officially approved songwriting:

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<sup>44</sup> Zhuk, 37.

<sup>45</sup> O. Klimova, “Soviet Youth Films Under Brezhnev: Watching Between the Lines,” (PhD diss., University of Pittsburgh, 2013), 64-6.

<sup>46</sup>A. Yurchak, “Gagarin and the Rave Kids: Transforming Power, Identity, and Aesthetics in Post-Soviet Nightlife,” *Consuming Russia: Popular Culture, Sex, and Society since Gorbachev*, ed. A.M. Barker (Durham, N.C.: Duke University Press, 1999), 80.

During the 1970s in Kyiv's black market, 25 to 50 percent of all new Western music records came directly from foreign visitors. In port cities like Odessa, almost 50 percent of all new popular music records came from foreigners, and the other 50 percent was brought by Soviet sailors and fishermen who visited foreign countries on a regular basis.<sup>47</sup>

Consumption of most foreign cultural product was forbidden, and one had to break the law in order to gain access to Western rock or pop records.

Contrary to popular opinion, however, Soviet culture did not solely consist of the juxtaposition between those faithful to state guidelines and an outraged dissident minority. Talk of a cynically resigned majority can be equally dismissive. Matters are typically more nuanced; in fact, we shall come to see that much of Soviet life took place in an oblique, ambivalent relationship to official and authoritative discourse. In the realm of music, as already suggested, private individuals found ways in which to make public song more personal in the studio, just as radio audiences would often look for the apolitical content of a work, thus ignoring all policy. No political message of brotherhood, for example, would survive without a melodrama, love story, or family saga in which to place it. Audiences preferred those quieter, more lyrical, and inherently apolitical aspects of a politicized artistic style.

With this historical backdrop in mind, let us return to the tension between insistent politics and audience preferences under Brezhnev. Cultural theorist Mikhail Epstein argues that due to discursive "hypernormalization" or the increasingly repetitious language of artistic propriety in Soviet society, a particular sense of surreality overtook much of "official" daily existence. State-approved activity and the narratives thereof became devoid of any content that mirrored ostensible reality. Here he speaks of widely reported, but falsified production quotas: "No one knows, for example, whether the harvests reported in Stalin's or Brezhnev's Russia

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<sup>47</sup> Zhuk, 95.

were ever actually reaped, but the fact that the number of tilled hectares or tons of milled grain was always reported down to the tenth of a percent gave these simulacra the character of hyperreality.”<sup>48</sup> This discrepancy between “the pragmatic and mythological levels of Soviet mentality” is also addressed in Vladimir Shlapentokh’s book *Soviet Public Opinion and Ideology*:

The evolution of popular attitudes toward official values supposes the gradual removal of these values from the pragmatic level of the mentality of the Soviet people and to their mythological level, demanding only verbal support. But, then, with the further erosion of ideology, official values abandon the mythological level, and cannot elicit even verbal recognition.<sup>49</sup>

In other words, Soviet authoritative language underwent a shift in late Socialism, operating at the level of the *poetic function* of language rather than its semantic content – “the function that is focused on the aesthetic form of language, on the message ‘for its own sake’; on how it says, not necessarily what it says.”<sup>50</sup> This overcompensating hypernormalization was felt in economics, everyday life, and – for our purposes – the language of official song.

Epstein continues: “Realism here can be understood not as an accurate reflection or copy coexisting with [ostensible] reality, but as the mechanism of its substitution, a recasting of reality into its sign and image, with the removal of the original.”<sup>51</sup> As official language – and the stories thereof – became mere fairy tales, reality remained in the apartments of Soviet citizens. Social

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<sup>48</sup> M. Epstein, “Postmodernism, Communism, and Sots-Art,” *Endquote: Sots-Art Literature and Soviet Grand Style*, eds. M. Balina, N. Condee, and E. Dobrenko (Evanston, Illinois: Northwestern University Press, 2000), 5.

<sup>49</sup>V. Shlapentokh, *Soviet Public Opinion and Ideology: Mythology and Pragmatism in Interaction* (New York: Praeger, 1986), 135.

<sup>50</sup> Yurchak, *Everything Was Forever Until It Was No More*, 78. For further description of poetic function in language, see Roman Jakobson’s “Closing Statement: Linguistics and Poetics” in *Style in Language*, ed. T.A. Sebeok (New York: Wiley, 1960), 350-77.

<sup>51</sup> Epstein, 6.

planning was possible for a single family or a small school, say. Talk of nationwide planning, on the other hand, had turned into white noise. Songs of grandeur were commissioned, produced, and performed – yet audiences often sought to find some minor, private message therein.

An excellent example of this crosspollination between civic and lyric trajectories can be seen in Aleksandra Pakhmutova’s song about Yuri Gagarin, “You Know What a Guy He Was!” (Знаете, каким он парнем был!) Part of a five-song cycle released in 1971 and dedicated to the first man in space (1961), this song combines a quintessentially civic or public theme – the USSR’s proud emissary to the stars – and an intimate and friendly poetic tone. Nikolai Dobronravov’s poem addresses Soviet hero Gagarin as though he were any wholesome young man, embodying the wholesome Soviet qualities of happiness, audacity, and engagement in both song and sport with couplets such as “You know what a guy he was! How he went on the ice with his hockey stick!” This intersection of a nationally important theme and touching, personal portrait hooked listeners of all ages. Hence the claim, much later, that: “People have been listening to [Pakhmutova’s setting of her husband’s text] for many years, reliving the joy of Gagarin’s flight.”<sup>52</sup> The song speaks of both a hero and lovable young boy; it is both civic and lyric, big and small. It operates as a propagandistic and touching tale simultaneously. Either aspect of the song can be enjoyed independently of the other; ultimately, however, the former cannot operate without the latter. Politics was slowly losing ground to popularity.

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<sup>52</sup> D. Romendik, “The Story of the USSR in Song: Alexandra Pakhmutova’s Biggest Hits,” *Russia Beyond the Headlines* (4 May 2014), accessed 17 February 2015.

## **The Intentions and Impact of Ideology: Aleksandra Pakhmutova**

Mikhail Epstein's aforementioned "hypernormalization" in Socialist art – the constant need to reference canonical texts or terminology (at least in passing!) – led to a scrapbook or cut-and-paste aesthetic. A song could refer to a moment of Soviet history, by way of illustration, yet use that conservative gesture as a "trampoline" for a love story about two individuals caught in those events. Given what was said earlier about the lack of faith or belief in such public bombast, Soviet Socialist Realism in the 1970s arguably began to evince some features of postmodernism. It became a patchwork of prior references to Soviet canonical texts or narratives, preferring to reuse and requite the past, rather than risk novelty. As Groys explains: "The art of the Stalin era was optimistic, forward looking. The Socialist Realism of the Brezhnev era, in contrast, was retrospective, nostalgic. It wanted to take up cultural models of the past and to be worthy of them."<sup>53</sup> The future was made from interchangeable, endlessly quoted bits of the past.

A jumbled collection of leitmotifs and narrative structures from earlier epochs was assumed to be "inspiring" or "enlightening." Quotations were bundled together and promoted, loudly and insistently. As Marina Frolova-Walker puts it: "Socialist Realism was a discipline placed upon artists to provide a suitably dignified backdrop to state ritual. In this sense, it was a species of religious art, in which blandness, anonymity and tedium were by no means vices."<sup>54</sup> Abstractions were grand, self-assured, and reproduced to the point of meaninglessness. It is this combination of scale, constant reproduction, and increasing vagueness that leads the same scholar to speak of "a kind of atheist religion which gave rise to a rich system of rituals, based on

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<sup>53</sup> Groys, 68.

<sup>54</sup> M. Frolova-Walker, "Stalin and the Art of Boredom," *Twentieth-Century Music*, 1.01 (2004), 101.



a peculiar mixture of Christian and pagan models.”<sup>55</sup> Art in this system was meant to create a suitable framework for these public sacraments. It was a vehicle or vessel for politics. If artists “went through the motions” of those rites, a little room for liberty and lyricism opened up.

Socialist literature was a major victim of this postmodern cut-and-paste technique. It aimed, always, to be “inspiring,” “exciting,” “edifying,” and so forth. And yet its tendency towards replication, together with the contrary – and increasing – need to be both accessible and even fashionable on occasion, led to a middlebrow, eclectic mishmash borrowed from classic literature and potboiler bestsellers. Tales of effective policy increasingly needed to be *popular* tales. A tedious narrative would have zero effect upon its audience, no matter how patriotic it happened to be. So what, then, of popular song? In order to show how popular or “light entertainment” mapped onto Soviet Socialist Realism in this period, we need to outline a system of classification.

Another primary facet of Soviet popular music, discussed further in Chapter Two, was a hierarchy of genre. Some levels therein were accorded more respect than others. Popular music in the Soviet Union, generally speaking, was traditionally referred to as *estrada*, which literally means “small stage.” The term encompasses everything from popular song to magic, puppetry, satire, modern dance, and even the circus. These art forms, their creation and production, often evolved precisely in the gap between propaganda and escapism or private whim. They could be propagandistic, but often were not – or at least valued laughter over lecturing. As a result, *estrada* was dismissed as fundamentally shallow and “light” entertainment for decades. Popular song, whenever published through state-run publishing outlets, offered a way to be both official

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<sup>55</sup> Ibid, 103.

and yet alluringly lightweight. This intriguing lack of clarity brings us to Katerina Clark, discerning such complexity within even the dullest, most dogmatic novels.

It is an illusion to think that the two parties – the ‘regime’ versus ‘the intellectuals’ – could in any circumstances be completely autonomous and free systems. They are implicated with each other more closely than in most other cultures. Moreover, in the Soviet Union there is not something extra-historical called ‘the government’ or ‘the Party.’ Both are subfunctions of the larger system of the complete culture to which they belong... Moreover, [the Party] houses within its confines much internal debate and has been known on occasion to adopt values previously held by a dissident group. Likewise, there is no such thing as an independent literary system, as we are increasingly beginning to suspect.<sup>56</sup>

Deep in the heart of self-assured ideology lay self-doubt – and therefore stylistic diversity.

As we have seen, the 1970s represent a key moment in Soviet culture overall and for Socialist Realism in particular. In both visual and musical spheres, many artists had “turned away from the official art of Socialist Realism, attempting to link up with the traditions of Western and Russian modernism” as part of an unofficial art scene.<sup>57</sup> In the outside world, agricultural and industrial policies were increasingly unsuccessful. Globally, the Cold War was the very embodiment of immobility. Some slight degree of novelty was required. Several years before the Leningrad Rock Club opened in 1981, Soviet youth needed a form of music that was simultaneously respectful yet able to let off steam, something both learned and genuinely exciting. It was in this context that state media endorsed the homemade phenomenon of VIAs or vocal-instrumental ensembles, whose “safe” aesthetic often combined classical training with “modernized” folk performance, thus minimalizing risk.<sup>58</sup>

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<sup>56</sup> Clark, 6-7.

<sup>57</sup> Groys, 55.

<sup>58</sup> For a more thorough discussion of VIAs and Soviet “rock,” see Chapter Two.

One of the figures entrusted with the task of providing music for such groups was Aleksandra Pakhmutova, who even today remains one of the most prolific and best-loved figures in Soviet popular music. Author of over four hundred songs, she turned eighty-five in 2014 and was publically acknowledged in numerous ways, including a Kremlin concert and a special on the television show DOstoyanie REspubliki (Pride of the Republic).<sup>59</sup> Born in a small village in southwestern Russia – now a region of Volgograd – in 1929, Pakhmutova was evacuated from the area with her family at the beginning of World War II. Having narrowly escaped one of the bloodiest events of the war, the Battle of Stalingrad, young Aleksandra was educated in the prestigious Moscow Conservatory, studying with prominent Soviet composer Vissarion Shebalin and then going on to do graduate work.<sup>60</sup> This thorough musical instruction ensured not only that her youthful talent was nurtured and cultivated (she composed her first melodies at age three), but also that she became fluent in many styles and genres.

Like all composition graduates of the Moscow Conservatory, Pakhmutova wrote for symphonic orchestras – but her reach spread further. In addition to orchestral pieces such as *The Russian Suite* [Русская сюита] and *The Youth Overture* [Увертюра Юность], her oeuvre would come to include a ballet, a number of cantatas for children's choruses, and film music spread over four decades. She seemed well on the road to a successful career in the world of classical composition and pedagogy. Upon graduation, however, Shebalin told her class, "Don't think that after finishing conservatory, you will only compose and teach... It is up to you to take on full

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<sup>59</sup> The capitalized letters DO and RE are meant to reference solfege. This music-themed show airs on Russia's ORT – the first television channel to broadcast in the Russian Federation, and one of very few terrestrial channels available to all viewers nationwide.

<sup>60</sup>R. Sinel'nikov, "Biograficheskie svedenia," *A.N. Pakhmutova v internete*, accessed 17 February 2015. <<http://www.pakhmutova.ru/bio.shtml>>

responsibility for the fate of Soviet music.”<sup>61</sup> Pakhmutova evidently took his words to heart; it is her popular songs that have had the most lasting impact and which are still being celebrated today. More specifically, it is her engagement with themes both civic and lyric – and their intersection – that makes her an outstanding case study of the aesthetic *and* pedagogical responsibilities carried by Soviet songwriters under Brezhnev.<sup>62</sup>

**Figure 1.2, Nikolai Dobronravov and Aleksandra Pakhmutova look over a score**



She wrote in modes both public and private – sometimes simultaneously with equal success, as we saw in the case of “You Know What a Guy He Was!” As the liner notes to her 1967 album *Yuriy Guliaev Sings Aleksandra Pakhmutova* read: “You can sing [her songs] not only on the

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<sup>61</sup> R.I. Petrushanskaia, *Sovetskie kompozitory-laureaty premii Leninskogo Komsomola* (Moscow: Sovetskiy Kompozitor, 1989), 14.

<sup>62</sup> For more information about the civic/lyric distinction in Soviet popular song, see David MacFadyen’s *Red Stars: Personality and the Soviet Popular Song, 1955-1991* (Montreal & Kingston, London, Ithaca: McGill-Queen’s University Press, 2001).

stage in front of a large audience, but also at an intimate gathering, by a campfire, or on a hike – either when life is hard or when it is joyful.”<sup>63</sup> This “semantic versatility” frequently characterized Pakhmutova’s songwriting style; it made her a palatable figure both to official organs and a politically disinterested audience.

A few years before her celebration of Gagarin, Pakhmutova had written a song called “Tenderness” (Нежность). It premiered in December of 1965 in the monumental Columnal Hall within the House of Unions (Дом Союзов), sung by the wholesomely expressive Maia Kristalinskaia.<sup>64</sup> Yet despite both the singer’s and composer’s positive reputations, the official media reception was lukewarm and would likely have remained so, were it not for Kristalinskaia’s commitment to popularizing the song. Taken from the couple’s song cycle dedicated to Soviet pilots, “Tenderness” has since gone on to become a classic of Soviet *estrada*. But how? In large, the song’s salvation came from inclusion in the 1967 film *Three Poplars on Pliushchikha Street* (Три тополя на Плющихе). The movie, nationally loved to this day, involves a country girl who arrives in Moscow – very much out of place. A remarkably restrained and uneventful tale unravels, in which both the heroine and her taxi driver ponder not only the disconnect between city and country, but also between their lives and dreams. A song designed to evoke an open sky – in a song cycle for Soviet pilots – has more impact when applied to the miniature gap between two people. The opening lyrics mourn how “the earth has become empty without you; how can I survive these next few hours?” The lyric *made* the civic; an apolitical context gave a song written for airborne state heroes a new relevance.

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<sup>63</sup> R. Sinel’nikov, “Yuriy Guliaev poet pesni Aleksandry Pakhmutovoi,” *A. N. Pakhmutova v internete*, accessed 17 February 2015 <<http://www.pakhmutova.ru/songs/gul-disk.shtml>>

<sup>64</sup> For more information on Kristalinskaia, see A.A. Gimmervert’s *Maia Kristalinskaia. I vse sbylos’ i ne sbylos’* (Moscow, Olimp, 1999).

After gaining fame through this film, “Tenderness” has been showcased in many on-screen specials about Pakhmutova.<sup>65</sup> In the same year as its debut in Soviet cinema, it won first prize in the Red Carnation Festival for Youth Music in Sochi. When asked why a nationally recognized song might not have met with initial acceptance, Dobronravov disclosed in 1999 that after that first performance, he was approached by fellow composer Arkadiy Ostrovskiy, wary of his use of French writer and daredevil pilot Antoine St. Exupery in the text.<sup>66</sup> This was not the last time such a concern surfaced:

They actually banned quite a number of our songs. When we were recording “Tenderness” in the House of Audio Recording, I was taken out into the corridor and told, ‘Kolya, why do you need Exupery? Do you think we don’t have enough Soviet pilots?’... At that point, we were big names and they did not outright forbid it, but I had to seriously defend Exupery! It wasn’t just that he was a pilot; I needed a person who looked at Earth, at the galaxy, with the eyes of a poet.<sup>67</sup>

Although dedicated to Soviet pilots, the focus of the song was romantic intimacy; even the foreign Exupery – a staple of Soviet classrooms – was not intended as any kind of political reference. The poem is actually told from the point of view of a woman (most likely a pilot’s wife) who laments her lover’s departure, and compares this separation to “when Exupery flew, and the leaves fell in gardens. The Earth did not know how to live without him while he flew.” The song certainly gained popularity among the pilots to whom it was dedicated, and Pakhmutova became a household name for those who, like Exupery, left the earth “to receive tenderness from the stars.”

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<sup>65</sup> An entire documentary episode of *Istoriya odnoi pesni (History of One Song)* dedicated to “Tenderness” can be found here: <http://www.1tv.ru/documentary/fi5107/sn5>.

<sup>66</sup> Gimmervert, 395.

<sup>67</sup> Ibid.

## **Voicing a System of Ideas and Ideals: Composer as Ideological Conduit**

In October 1977, the Seventh Session of the USSR Supreme Soviet took place. The resulting rulings are sometimes called the Brezhnev Constitution. In Chapter 7, Article 39 of that document, citizens' ability to exercise their rights and freedoms was deemed to be inseparable from performance of their societal duties and obligations. In other words, individuals had the right to freedom of expression only if their interests did not threaten those of the collective.<sup>68</sup> Even as the 1970s drew to a close, ideology continued to make the same tedious declarations at a time when faith in social progress was weakening. Private skepticism grew and a miniature love story would seem a more convincing scale for "civic" themes than any primetime pomposity from a television set. It is in such a climate that composers like Aleksandra Pakhmutova were tasked with keeping the youth entertained.

One of the considerations in walking this tightrope between songs about "everybody" and "somebody" was how to engage young Soviet listeners who had access to exciting Western records on the black market.<sup>69</sup> A common tactic Pakhmutova (and others) used was combining themes very much aligned with Soviet ideals, with more modern, fashionably youthful instruments and timbres. One such example mentioned earlier comes in 1975, titled "Until the Train Leaves" – an ode to the ultimately unsuccessful Baikal-Amur Mainline project. Designed to run from European Russia to the Far East, it incurred horrendous expenses and would never fulfill its potential.

*And now we have unlocked the cosmic depths  
The great terrestrial mainline unfolds*

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<sup>68</sup> The third and final Constitution (Fundamental Law) of the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics, and its subsequent amendments, can be found here: <http://constitution.garant.ru/history/ussr-rsfsr/1977/>.

<sup>69</sup> For further discussion of the Soviet musical black market, see Chapter Two.

*We shall lay down an unprecedented route past Baikal  
There is only five minutes until the train leaves.*<sup>70</sup>

Sung by Vocal-Instrumental Ensemble Nadezhda (“Hope” – named after Pakhmutova’s aforementioned song), this up-tempo ballad was successful twice over.<sup>71</sup> The composition was designed for teenagers in the VIA pop-rock style that was gaining popularity in the mid-1970s, while being an ode to what Brezhnev termed “the construction project of the century.”<sup>72</sup>

The Baikal-Amur Mainline (hereafter BAM) was built as a strategic alternative to the Trans-Siberian railway, running north of and parallel to its more famous counterpart.<sup>73</sup> Its construction was an immense undertaking, with estimated costs at \$14 billion dollars and much of it laid down over permafrost. The 2,687 mile long broad gauge railway was first conceived in the 1880s, with sections built in the early part of the twentieth century using inmate labor from GULAG camps. In 1974, however, Brezhnev proposed the completion of the railway “with clean hands only!” (i.e. no prison labor) as part of the Tenth Five Year Plan (1976-80). Ultimately, the project was completed with the help of thousands of Komsomol members from all over the country. Komsomol – a syllabic abbreviation from the Russian phrase “All-Union Leninist Young Communist League” – was the youth division of the Soviet Communist Party. The construction of the railway came under criticism in the ‘80s for its poor planning and lack of facilities for workers who had uprooted their lives to contribute to the railway. BAM was

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<sup>70</sup> The full Russian text and an English translation can be found in Appendix A.

<sup>71</sup> For an entire book chapter dedicated to VIA Nadezhda and its relationship with Aleksandra Pakhmutova and other popular songwriters, see Chapter 19 of V. Shchëlkin and S. Frolov’s *Legendy VIA* (Moscow: Grifon, 2007), 263-270.

<sup>72</sup> For further discussion of Vocal-Instrumental Ensembles, see Chapter Two.

<sup>73</sup> For historical details and a contemporary analysis of this epochal undertaking (and its many problems), see C.J. Ward’s *Brezhnev’s Folly: The Building of BAM and Late Soviet Socialism* (Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 2009).



dissolved in 1996, with various sections becoming subsumed into other railway companies. It would become one of the greatest and most apt symbols of Brezhnevian culture: grand and yet increasingly irrelevant – a road to nowhere.

The song begins with an urgent beat resembling a train on the tracks, punctuated with an unrelenting piano ostinato and bursts of brass chords that are drawn out and then fade away, resembling the Doppler Effect.<sup>74</sup> The youthful voice of Nadezhda's frontman Mikhail Plotkin enters with back-up singers, as he sings "My fate, my dream – faraway roads!" It is a compelling sound, the drums revving up the energy in an almost schizoid shuffle – a sensible compositional choice given the fact that songs like this played a key role in maintaining morale, enthusiasm, and a sense of romantic adventure among the young builders. The chorus soars in vocal harmony with the words "It seems as though all of life is just ahead," warning, amidst more brass punctuation, "Do not err in choosing your path!" The musical choices accompanying Dobronravov's text serve to transform the poetry into one young person's call to another – to align one's choice with the collective – all orchestrated by Pakhmutova.

This was not Pakhmutova's first decision to commemorate a national project in song. The early '60s saw her setting several celebrations of electric-power transmission lines, for instance, with lyrics such as "LEP-500 is not a mere power line, let those who were not there [installing it] envy us!"<sup>75</sup> Other similarly themed songs include "What is LEP?" and "Stars Over the Taiga," in which workers building a dam across the Angara River can "bravely look [their] homeland in the eyes," because they have done their civic duty. These texts encouraged young people to align

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<sup>74</sup> VIA Nadezhda, "Do otpravleniya poezda," A. Pakhmutova, *Eto tol'ko nachalo* (Melodiya, 1977). A recording of this song can be heard here: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=EAiBZZRT9wI>.

<sup>75</sup> LEP is the Russian abbreviation for Electric-Power Transmission.

themselves with what was needed by the national collective, and thus take pride in participating in state-initiated projects – perhaps even amid envy from less motivated compatriots. As Rimma Petrushanskaia writes enthusiastically in her 1989 tribute to composer laureates of the Lenin Komsomol Prize, “The main strength of Pakhmutova’s songs is their organizing, uniting, guiding role!”<sup>76</sup>

**Figure 1.3, Pakhmutova receiving an Award “For Merit to the Fatherland”  
from President Vladimir Putin in 2000**



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<sup>76</sup> Petrushanskaia, 8.

In the same essay, Petrushanksaia relays poet Evgeniy Dolmatovskiy's story about encountering a young female mechanic at the Ust'-Ilim Hydroelectric Station. When asked what possessed her to come work in Siberia and help construct the station, the girl replied "Pakhmutova's song, 'A Letter to Ust'-Ilim.'" <sup>77</sup> As Boris Groys writes, "In the Soviet era, every private psyche was subordinated to the official ideology and thus nationalized." <sup>78</sup> This striking outlook starts to take on reality through an anecdote such as this. The song fueled a private desire, which in turn fueled a public act – "a re-forging that occurs through labor and acquisition of class-consciousness." <sup>79</sup>

Another example of Pakhmutova and Dobronravov's inspirational subject matter is the aptly named "Love, Komsomol, and Spring," which, due to its ideological leanings, won Song of the Year in 1978. <sup>80</sup> Nikolai Dobronravov outdid himself with this text, which lauds the trinity of Love, Komsomol, and Spring as "filling hearts with courage" and "remaining with us for eternity." Popular stories circulating at the time tell of the Central Party Committee reacting poorly to the term "Komsomol" being placed second in the song's titular list. Matters were, apparently, smoothed over once Brezhnev suggested that the word "Komsomol" in fact stood "at the song's center, with Love and Spring as its wings." Other versions of the story tell of trouble with censors because of the song's percussion, which included a drum set associated with

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<sup>77</sup> Ibid, 9.

<sup>78</sup> Groys, 80.

<sup>79</sup> Klimova 89.

<sup>80</sup> Song of the Year (Песня года) was a televised music festival first held in 1971; it has since continued as a Russian event after the dissolution of the Soviet Union. A video of Lev Leshchenko performing it at the festival can be seen here: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=rOx9h-Z1wZ0>.

Western rock groups. Regardless of such fact and/or fictions, the song became incredibly popular and still inspires great nostalgia today.<sup>81</sup>

As with “Until the Train Leaves,” the text makes a specific plea to Soviet youth, starting with the lines “May the bell of courage ring out! All the young are on their way.” Originally performed by Lev Leshchenko – widely considered the USSR’s “brightest champion of the civic song”<sup>82</sup> – it took on a slightly different tenor than any performance by a VIA with more connection to hip, youthful music. Rather, Leshchenko gives it a slightly outmoded, even parental tone, as if prescribing each of the three titular concepts for an ailing youth. The final verse presents another turn of phrase common to ideologically themed Soviet songs: the issue of responsibility for something passed down to younger generations. As Vladimir Isminov explains, both visual and auditory media of the Soviet 1970s frequently stressed “the theme of moral maturation of a young citizen of the Soviet Union, who, since early childhood, has been living in the world of grand achievements, true humanism, and the assurance that every person is personally responsible for everything happening in our country and on Earth.”<sup>83</sup> In this case, Dobronravov writes, “We are the rhythm of Time; you and I are entrusted with songs and sleepless nights...” implying young audiences will gladly shoulder any burdens of their youth, but will be supported in their endeavors by Love, Komsomol, and Spring.

These textual gestures are made manifest sonically in a number of different ways. Firstly, the song opens with a driving drum/bass combo, and for its duration the drums play eighth notes, emphasizing the never-ending forward progress of Socialist culture. Following the same youthful

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<sup>81</sup> The video clip in the previous footnote, for example, has gathered almost 100,000 views since its posting in 2009, and comments are overwhelmingly positive and nostalgic.

<sup>82</sup> MacFadyen, *Red Stars*, 48.

<sup>83</sup> V. Isminov, “Put’ k vospitaniuu dushi...,” *Isskustvo kino* (April 1977), 3.

theme, its soaring chorus is then picked up by a children's choir which goes on to continue backing vocals during Leshchenko's subsequent verses. The children's voices paint a soundscape of Young Pioneers marching toward a better and brighter future. In this vein, there are a number of archival YouTube videos pairing this song with industrial and nationalistic imagery.<sup>84</sup> Put differently, "Love, Komsomol, and Spring" is exactly the kind of song Pakhmutova was rewarded for producing, both by the Ministry of Culture and by an audience hungry for genuinely moving and personal creations.

Thanks to this interplay of big and small, civic and lyric, Pakhmutova's niche became themes of youth. As composer Dmitriy Kabalevskiy wrote in 1975, "Pakhmutova found her life's work and her creative theme at a young age, and remained faithful to it all her life. That theme is the image of Soviet youth. Pakhmutova knows that world with depth and nuance, for it is her own world."<sup>85</sup> At the very least, she helped shape it – and vice-versa. Even in the initial stages of her career, she was rewarded with a Komsomol Youth award designed for composers whose music – in the vein of Soviet Socialist Realism – displayed "optimism, sincere lyrical feeling, [and offered] an intense channel of emotions... [It also showed] a childlike fidelity to the Homeland, a living memory of the people's heroic past, responsibility for today, a desire for peace on earth, and hope for a better future for humanity."<sup>86</sup> Aleksandra Pakhmutova was able to be that figure in a remarkably nonchalant way; for instance, when asked why she spent so much time writing about Soviet laborers, she replied with the innocent quip, "Who is more worth

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<sup>84</sup> For examples, see <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=KwYnuFt7r0g>, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=fXrmW-BTaSg>, and [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=7E61b\\_X5F14](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=7E61b_X5F14).

<sup>85</sup> D. Kabalevskiy, "Glavnyi komsomol'skiy kompozitor," *Sovetskaia muzyka* 9 (1975).

<sup>86</sup> Petrushanskaia, 3.

writing about?”<sup>87</sup>

William Jay Risch addresses the formation of “youth” after World War Two in his introduction to *Youth and Rock in the Soviet Bloc*:

Young people soon became of crucial importance to the Cold War that emerged between the superpowers of the United States and the Soviet Union. World War II had reinvigorated Soviet myths about the October Revolution. Defeating Nazism had given the Soviet project a new sense of purpose, as it demonstrated socialism’s ability to counter the most aggressive forces of capitalism and imperialism. The youth were to be at the center of a new revolutionary struggle where building Communism had taken on a renewed global mission.<sup>88</sup>

Olga Klimova puts it thus: “Youth was not [initially] recognized as a separate social group with its own values and beliefs. Together with adults, young people were supposed to build communism and to promote the ideology of the Soviet state. Their personal maturation was related to the awakening of the socialist consciousness.”<sup>89</sup> In other words, youth was in some way synonymous with an immature grasp of Soviet ideology – and the process of maturation or growing up was seen through the lens of “socialist consciousness.” Christopher Williams puts it another way in his *Youth, Risk, and Russian Modernity*:

For many decades of Soviet history, the state targeted youth for the implementation of new regulations and policies in order to help build communism and to protect the new Soviet social order. State officials expected Soviet youth to participate actively in the social, political, and economic development of the country, and “youth transition, for instance, from school or university to the world of work was also determined by the dominant ideology of Marxism-Leninism and by the needs of the state.”<sup>90</sup>

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<sup>87</sup> Aleksandra Pakhmutova. “Svetit neznakomaia Zvezda” (1-yi kanal, 10 November 2014).  
<<http://www.1tv.ru/videoarchive/84093>>

<sup>88</sup> W.J. Risch, ed., *Youth and Rock in the Soviet Bloc: Youth Cultures, Music, and the State in Russia and Eastern Europe* (Lanham, Maryland: Lexington Books, 2015), 1.

<sup>89</sup> Klimova, 89.

<sup>90</sup> V.I. Chuprov and C. Williams, *Youth, Risk, and Russian Modernity* (Burlington: Ashgate, 2003), 136.

Pakhmutova's songs were able to act as a compelling, yet responsible, catalyst for young people's formation as ideologically conscious citizens. Youth was spoken of both as a separate experience and as a transitional stage, *en route* to political maturity. As Rimma Petrushanskaia points out: "With all their mass popularity, Pakhmutova's songs are individualized... that is, they belong to each person separately, and express the essence of an individual's spiritual yearnings – not *just* those of the masses."<sup>91</sup> It is this pervasive interpellation or "hailing" of its subjects – and therefore the construction of a particular subjectivity – that Louis Althusser labeled as the main purpose of ideology.<sup>92</sup> Music could perform that task in a way other, verbose forms of propaganda could not, using the *synergy* of poetic wording and ineffable melodies or harmonies to hail Soviet citizens.

Not only was Pakhmutova able to make the necessary texts "sing," but her biography and reputation were also beyond reproach. She was not only classically trained and ideologically solid – she was deemed to be *earnest*. Groys highlights sincerity as an expectation of Soviet artistic activity:

Here one discovers that the power of censorship everywhere is based on a social consensus according to which artists are supposed to pour out their hearts, express their individuality, and be passionate and sincere in their art... The artist was actually supposed to be sincere in the Soviet Union, as well [as in the West], and art was supposed to come directly from the soul. The evaluative criteria, however, were different. Only what was made in harmony with the soul of the people was regarded as genuinely sincere.<sup>93</sup>

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<sup>91</sup> Petrushanskaia, 16. Emphasis mine.

<sup>92</sup> L. Althusser, *Lenin and Philosophy and Other Essays*, Trans. Ben Brewster (New York: Monthly Review Press, 2001), 115-117.

<sup>93</sup> Groys, 66.

In this realm, Pakhmutova stands counter to unofficial artists, who “distance themselves from all personal responsibility for what they do as artists.”<sup>94</sup> Groys’s analysis places Soviet mass culture in direct opposition to these countercultural figures, who “have sincerely declared that they no longer want to be sincere.”<sup>95</sup> This declaration was what made them dangerous to the system – and dutiful artistic producers like Pakhmutova were the antithesis to such ideological failure.

Yet for all her fame as an author of enduring and inspiring classics, Pakhmutova’s connection to the state would cause problems after 1991. After the fall of the Soviet Union, both she and her husband were denounced by the press for pandering to the Soviet government and profiting as a result.<sup>96</sup> Many of these personal attacks employ the social stereotypes defined by Lev Gudkov: “A type of a mass person, formed in late-Soviet conditions, [according to] the formula of a ‘wily slave’, whose thoughts are directed toward survival under any conditions, including those in which nothing depends on him.”<sup>97</sup> In some senses, Pakhmutova and her husband did take the restrictions of Soviet society into account and pander to them. This was perhaps unavoidable in a realm where “phonograph records that... lacked the proper ideological stance” were deemed to be “of an anti-artistic nature.”<sup>98</sup> One of the potential repercussions for disregarding these understood regulations was exclusion from the artistic union in question (including its resources) – and Aleksandra Pakhmutova never styled herself as oppositional.

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<sup>94</sup> Ibid.

<sup>95</sup> Ibid.

<sup>96</sup> For a particularly vitriolic example, see V.A. Drozdov’s “Proryv kanalizatsyi” *Duel’* 257.11 (12 March 2002). *Duel’* is an infamously anti-Zionist, anti-fascist, and frequently anti-Semitic and chauvinistic publication run by Russian conspiracy theorist Yuriy Mukhin. Despite the radicalism of this publication, there have been other similarly themed essays appearing in more mainstream places.

<sup>97</sup> L. Gudkov, *Negativnaia identichnost’: stat’i 1997-2002 godov* (Moscow: New Literary Overlook, 2004), 494.

<sup>98</sup> V. Golovskoy, *Behind the Screen: The Motion-Picture Industry in the USSR, 1972-1982* (Ann Arbor: Ardis, 1986), 123.



Although it is undeniable that she was and remains one of the most popular Russian-speaking composers of all time – thanks in part to the Soviet state, who supported and enabled her widespread appeal – Pakhmutova was never a member of the Communist Party. In recent years, she has explained why: “In any ideology, there are always those who freeload within the system... the same was true in Communist ideology... People who were rather cynical about Communism were trying to get me to join the Party. I knew that once they got my consent, those same pseudo-Communists would get in their black Volga [an iconic car symbolizing the upper echelons of Soviet society] and drive away to their mansion in the country. Then I would have to work for them and suffer a whole host of new problems.”<sup>99</sup> And so neither husband nor wife ever joined a party whose ideology they blessed with “optimism, sincere lyrical feeling... and hope for a better future for humanity.”<sup>100</sup>

### **From Center to Periphery: *Estrada* in Latvia and Beyond**

So far, we have seen a sample of what popular music was like in the very heart and capital of the Soviet Union – Moscow. But there were fifteen Soviet Socialist Republics in all, and despite a strong centralized state, each republic had its own administrative hierarchy, its own cultural agenda, and its own flavor of *estrada*. Latvian composer Raimond Pauls was able to build a successful career in his home republic, while also becoming famous throughout the entire USSR. The Baltic nations always had a contradictory status within the Soviet Union. Occupied and annexed in 1940 following the Molotov-Ribbentrop Pact, Latvia, Lithuania, and Estonia

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<sup>99</sup> S. Grachev, “Aleksandra Pakhmutova. Portret v inter’ere...,” *AiF Dochki-Materi* 17 (4 September 2006), accessed 22 February 2015. <[http://gazeta.aif.ru/online/dochki/332/16\\_01](http://gazeta.aif.ru/online/dochki/332/16_01)>

<sup>100</sup> Petrushanskaia, 3.

were considered part of the Soviet “sphere of influence”; however, this was deemed illegal by Western Europe, the United States, and the Baltic states themselves. The same lands changed hands during Operation Barbarossa in June 1941 when Nazi Germany occupied the Baltics, but were then reclaimed by the Soviet government in 1944. Under Soviet rule for the next forty-five years, Latvia – like its fellow Baltic nations – experienced large-scale deportations to Siberia and other forms of “sovietization” that met with various kinds of resistance.<sup>101</sup> It was into such a cultural climate – and amid High Stalinism – that Raimond Pauls was born in 1939.

Much like Pakhmutova, the young Pauls began playing piano at the age of four and ultimately studied music at the Latvian State Conservatory.<sup>102</sup> Unlike the more traditionally educated Pakhmutova, however, Pauls spent much of his youth playing in jazz groups and improvising. The more liberal Baltic countries were historically linked to bolder forms of music-making than the rest of the USSR, and young Raimond did not face the same kinds of prejudices or surveillance practices that hounded *estrada* closer to the Russian capital. As Timothy Ryback noted, Soviet “discomania” (i.e. fascination with discotheques and dance clubs playing Western pop and rock) began in Latvia. This was a consequence both of proximity to the West and a local tourism industry, with hotels, casinos, and other Soviet vacation services. “The Latvian Republic Cultural Workers Trade Union and Latvian Komsomol organized the first Soviet (*mezhhrespublikanskiy*) Discotheque Festival and Competition in Riga as ‘the first national effort to assess the effectiveness of the discotheque as a means of ideological indoctrination.’”<sup>103</sup>

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<sup>101</sup> For more information on 20<sup>th</sup> century Latvian history, see Kevin O’Connor’s *The History of the Baltic States* (Westport: Greenwood Press, 2003).

<sup>102</sup> “The Creative Biography of Raimonds Pauls,” *Maestro Raimonds Pauls*, (2006), accessed 7 November 2015. <<http://www.raimondspauls.lv/en/biography/>>

<sup>103</sup> Zhuk, 217-9.

Contrary styles developed side by side. Upon hearing his senior recital featuring the music of Paganini, Rachmaninoff, and Chopin, the composer’s adviser once lamented, “Of course I would love it if Raimond played Bach and Beethoven. But he does such great work in *estrada* – how can I blame him?”<sup>104</sup>

***Figure 1.4, A young Raimond Pauls playing piano***



Shortly afterward, Pauls became the pianist of the Riga Estrada Orchestra (hereafter REO), and was eventually promoted to artistic director. The young Baltic musician quickly became Latvia’s pride, both as a composer and a virtuosic jazz pianist and improviser. The REO

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<sup>104</sup> Petrushanskaia, 229.

would perform his songs to the texts of Latvian poets; Pauls himself would go from village to village in search of folk songs to arrange and perform.<sup>105</sup> Thus his career was slowly established within a peripheral republic of the USSR, embracing and highlighting stylistic, generic, linguistic, and ethnic differences.

In 1971, Pauls moved from state-approved popular music orchestras to the world of Vocal-Instrumental Ensembles (VIAs). Through his own Latvian-language VIA called *Modo*, he continued penning the kind of popular music that remained his calling for most of the 1970s – progressive pop that straddled the line between a “classical” idiom and hipper instruments or gestures taken from Western popular genres.<sup>106</sup> Despite domestic success and renown, however, it was not until the end of the decade that Moscow took an interest. His ticket to fame in the Russian-speaking world would be collaborations with quickly growing *estrada* performers such as Alla Pugachova and Valeriy Leont’ev.<sup>107</sup> Ultimately, a working trio formed between composer Pauls, Moscow singer Pugachova (who would go on to become the most famous singer in the USSR), and Leningrad poet Ilya Reznik; it was the collaboration between these creative minds that catapulted all three figures into the collective Soviet consciousness – where they remain to this day.

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<sup>105</sup> Ibid, 230.

<sup>106</sup> *Modo*’s 1978 album *Night Birds* (Naktspuņi) can be heard here: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=mNSutH4s-CI>. It incorporates elements of standard *estrada*, art-rock, disco, sentimental folk ballads, and other genre influences.

<sup>107</sup> For in-depth treatment of that generation of Soviet performers, including Pugachova and Leont’ev specifically, see David MacFadyen’s *Red Stars: Personality and the Soviet Popular Song, 1955-1991* (Montreal & Kingston, London, Ithaca: McGill-Queen’s University Press, 2001).

## **Poetry and Popularity**

The Soviet popular songwriter's relationship to the poet or lyricist was a most important one. In a 1981 interview with the Russian-language newspaper *Trud* ("Labor"), Pauls was asked how he ranks the two "co-authors" of a song – i.e., the composer and poet. His response was unequivocal: "[The poet is in] first place. I write music to poetry that strikes me as authentic, genuine, and piercing."<sup>108</sup> Pakhmutova similarly prioritized text in her compositional choices, ultimately marrying her greatest contributor in that field. I believe this tendency to stem from two factors: firstly, the cultural prestige of poetry in Russia, which was able to simultaneously bring cultural cachet (as opposed to Western pop "banality"), and the ability of verse to harbor secondary meanings. It is this potential goldmine of semantic complexity that elevated poetry above prose when it came to potential allusions, nods, winks, and other forms of Aesopian reference.

The songwriter-poet relationship was also an important facet of the aforementioned pedagogical responsibility felt by Soviet creative professionals. Common rhetoric used by composers of this generation frequently references a "debt" to the public. An interview with Pauls from 1982 is published in an article subtitled "No Mere Passion, but a Duty," referring to the "Maestro" – as he was often called in the Russian press<sup>109</sup> – and his work with boy's choirs in Riga.<sup>110</sup> A 1984 article in *Sovetskaia kul'tura* ("Soviet Culture") asked readers whether *estrada* should be viewed as an art or a "service." Igor' Luchenko – a popular Belorussian composer – offered his own opinion, which was undoubtedly influenced by official sources: "I

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<sup>108</sup> I. Rumova, "Raimond Pauls," *Trud* (9 August 1981).

<sup>109</sup> The nickname "Maestro" comes from a song Pauls wrote for Alla Pugachova.

<sup>110</sup> I. Rumova, "Raimond Pauls: Ne uvlechenie, a dolg," *Trud* (18 August 1982).

think today's composers need to see writing in the genre of *estrada* as an important social commission. A Soviet composer must not be indifferent to what our youth is listening to and singing. We must be active warriors in the name of ideologically robust, optimistic art, and must therefore counter low-quality of Western 'mass culture.' We can do so with our Communist creations, warmed by an artist's heart."<sup>111</sup> Soviet composers – both during and right after the Stagnation period – often took it upon themselves to “educate” (i.e. promote proper Soviet values) as well as entertain the younger generation.

It is this socially and pedagogically responsible ethic, instilled in composers of this generation, that led Aleksandra Pakhmutova and Raimond Pauls to do staggering amounts of service throughout the span of their careers – Pakhmutova as the Soviet Union of Composers' Secretary of the Board for over twenty years, and Pauls as Latvia's Minister of Culture after the breakup of the USSR. Yet despite Pauls' devotion to domestic values, he was not opposed to the idea of borrowing from foreign themes and styles of music, as can be seen in his 1978 musical based on Theodore Dreiser's turn-of-the-century novel *Sister Carrie*. This groundbreaking creative act was a bold move for the Latvian composer. As online Russian encyclopedia *Musicals.ru* expounds:

In order to understand and value what “Sister Carrie” brought to Soviet music, it is necessary to remember the ideological framework within the USSR's creative intelligentsia. These people all worked in “a nation that had conquered socialism.” Opera was considered real art in those times. Operetta, however, was deemed light entertainment, and the musical as a genre was somehow deeply pro-Western. Consequently it was – at the very least – ideologically inappropriate, if not outright forbidden.<sup>112</sup>

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<sup>111</sup> I. Luchenok, “Estrada: isskustvo ili <<servis>>?” *Sovetskaia kul'tura* 89 (26 July 1984): 4.

<sup>112</sup> A. Miasnikov, “Sestra Kerri,” *Musicals.ru*, n.d, accessed 27 February 2015. <[http://musicals.ru/world/world\\_musicals/sestra\\_kerri?page=a](http://musicals.ru/world/world_musicals/sestra_kerri?page=a)>

Despite this somewhat dramatic rendering of the Soviet state of affairs, ideologues in many parts of the Soviet Union were indeed on the lookout for “the dangerous Westernization of students, and the Komsomol’s failure to fight capitalist cultural influences in the dormitories and on our dance floors.”<sup>113</sup> As the first secretary of the Dnepropetrovsk Regional Committee of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union stated in 1972:

It is impossible to stay indifferent to various perversions in student society about fashion, music, and arts. [On the dance floor] we see the following – an untidy appearance, extremely long hair among certain boys, and beards that look like they were borrowed from the pages of foreign magazines. None of this fits the image of the Soviet man... Remember that this sort of entertainment could lead young men to other, more dangerous, displays of [anti-Soviet] behavior, such as political indifference, skepticism, and neglect of a Soviet citizen’s duties...<sup>114</sup>

Yet Western-influenced musicals *did* exist in the Soviet Union – although they were (as we shall see in Chapter Four) called by different names and allied themselves with other genres in order to gain legitimacy. Raimond Pauls, however, was the only Soviet composer who dared to grant his first large-scale work the title of “musical.”

Before the formation of rock music’s genuine subcultures in the mid-1980s, which showed degrees of *unacceptable* passion, Soviet music from the preceding decade embodied a potential that had always been inherent within domestic culture. It managed to meet official requirements and yet be genuinely, nationally adored. Soviet popular music of the 1970s enjoyed a balance between state dictates and popular desires. The musical *Sister Carrie* I discuss here will show, as a product of the late 1970s, the inherent and unresolved complexity of cultural

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<sup>113</sup> Zhuk, 181.

<sup>114</sup> Ibid.

enterprise before rock's ascendance. Nothing represents the intricacy of Soviet culture better than a work existing between wholehearted endorsement and forbidden Western influences.

### **A Tragic and Charming Script: "Translating" *Sister Carrie* onto the Stage (1978)**

As we have seen, the textual component played a primary role in *estrada* composition. In this sense, Dreiser's novel was not selected by chance; the cruelty and cynicism of American life portrayed therein likely resonated both with songwriter and censors as "appropriate" material. Recognized as one of America's great novels today, *Sister Carrie* was not widely endorsed upon its publication in 1900. As Jack Salzman cites in his article on the work's reception, "The Toledo *Blade* (8 December 1900) conceded that...the novel 'is a faithful portraiture of the conditions it represents, showing how the tangle of human life is knotted thread by thread.' But, it was 'too realistic, too somber to be altogether pleasing.'"<sup>115</sup> It was only after *Sister Carrie* was published in England and other European countries that it returned to the US with considerable success.

The novel begins with eighteen-year old Carrie Meeber leaving her rural Wisconsin town and boarding a train for Chicago. Armed with only four dollars and her sister's address, she is determined to make it in the Big City. On the train, she meets salesman Charles Drouet, the first in a line of men to whom Carrie becomes mistress – before independently achieving fame and success as a starlet onstage. While living with Drouet, she begins an affair with his friend George Hurstwood. After Carrie's premiere as an actress, this love triangle collapses as Drouet discovers Carrie's infidelity, and she in turn discovers that her lover has been married all along. Eventually, Carrie and Hurstwood take new names and escape to Canada, where George hides

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<sup>115</sup> J. Salzman, "The Critical Recognition of 'Sister Carrie' 1900-1907," *Journal of American Studies*, 3.01 (1969): 123-33.



from the authorities after embezzling some money from his business – now run by the erstwhile Mrs. Hurstwood. Ultimately, as her lover runs out of money, Carrie finds yet another man to support her as she chases stardom. Despite the financial and artistic success she reaches on her own, she also finds that material gains do not bring her happiness. As for Hurstwood – now reduced to working as a strikebreaker, and then begging on the street – he commits suicide in a flophouse.

The themes of the novel are multifaceted. Despite the fact that Dreiser was often criticized for his naturalist writing style which was seen as clumsy and crass, the story addresses such complicated issues as women’s right to pursue fulfillment in unorthodox ways; urban versus rural existence; the contrast between grinding poverty and upper-middle-class comfort; the nature of good and evil; and – most importantly – the unattainability of human happiness. These same themes caught Pauls’ attention after Latvian singer Edgars Zveia brought him the libretto. Soon, he developed a desire to “write music which could reflect the fate of yesterday’s village girl, little Carrie, swept up in the broken rhythms of the big American city. I wanted the sounds to create a contemplative mood. It should touch upon the inevitable ups and downs experienced by any burgeoning talent. Money, for example, can cloud the brightest star and hush the heart.”<sup>116</sup> Judging by the sizeable initial print-run of the album (at least by Soviet standards, 75,000 was a considerable amount) and its popularity, Zveia succeeded in kickstarting a project of great social resonance and cultural relevance.<sup>117</sup>

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<sup>116</sup> R. Pauls, *Melodii v ritme zhizni* (Moscow: Molodaia gvardia, 1989), accessed 27 February 2015. <[http://ale07.ru/music/notes/song/songbook/pauls\\_mrj.htm](http://ale07.ru/music/notes/song/songbook/pauls_mrj.htm)>

<sup>117</sup> Miasnikov suggests this may also have been due to the impending 1980 Olympics in Moscow, and the Soviet government’s desire to “show the Olympic guests that democracy and pluralism reign in our Socialist country.” A fact in support of this theory is that the Riga batch of albums was packaged with a more quality, glossy material with an Olympic symbol and accompanying annotations in English. This sold for 3 rubles 10 kopeks rather than the standard pressing for 2.15.

Pauls' *Sister Carrie* was not only a theatrical production and album. Right after its stage debut in 1978, Riga director Ansis Bērziņš began turning the show into a short film called "The Story of Carrie's Sad Fate." Although it uses the original soundtrack, Bērziņš' film was cast with fresher, younger faces. Ultimately, only small selections of the music found their way into the resulting thirty-six-minute "cinematic composition" – or, in Andrei Miasnikov's view, a protracted music video.<sup>118</sup> Whatever the artistic decisions made by Bērziņš, the film won a number of awards in the year of its release, including the "Golden Antenna" at Gdank's Intersvision Musical Film Festival, and the "Big Christopher" prize for Best Televised Film in Latvia.

**Figure 1.5, "Detectives' Song" from Raimond Pauls' Sister Carrie<sup>119</sup>**

Улица в Нью-Йорке.

№ 16. ДЕТЕКТИВЫ

Moderato

The image displays a musical score for a piece titled "Улица в Нью-Йорке." (Street in New York) and "№ 16. ДЕТЕКТИВЫ" (No. 16. Detectives). The tempo is marked "Moderato" and the dynamics start with a piano (*p*) marking. The score is written for piano, with a bass line in the left hand and a melody in the right hand. The first system shows the beginning of the piece, and the second system shows a continuation of the melody with some rests in the right hand.

<sup>118</sup> Miasnikov.

<sup>119</sup> All musical examples from R. Pauls, *Sestra Kerri* (Leningrad: Sovetskiy Kompozitor, 1990).

Sisterie Carrie is where Pauls draws upon his background in jazz piano and other Western forms of music-making. Since the musical portrays life in early twentieth-century America, many of the songs have boogie-woogie basslines, polyrhythms, swung notes, and syncopations associated with important musical genres of the time. The above example is from the so-called “Detectives’ Song,” which introduces the two private eyes hired by Mrs. Hurstwood to follow her husband as he runs off with Carrie. Because the detectives are not central characters, and the audience needs little insight into their emotional state, the music accompanying and portraying reflects “a [typical] street in New York.” American life is front and center. In another number, Pauls creates a similar boogie-woogie feel with a jazzy Alberti bass. This unmistakably Western gesture pervades Carrie’s song as she rehearses for her new role in a theatrical revue:

**Figure 1.6, “Carrie’s Song by the Piano” from Raimond Pauls’ Sister Carrie**



In this context, an oft-maligned form of music in the USSR gained ideological validity because it was being used to portray life in a cruel, capitalistic society. In previous years, jazz was frequently viewed as the soundtrack to greedy American “café culture,” yet equally often discussed as the heritage of oppressed Black workers.<sup>120</sup> This earlier fate of jazz and related

<sup>120</sup> For more information on jazz in the Soviet Union, see S.F. Starr’s *Red & Hot: The Fate of Jazz in the Soviet Union* (New York: Oxford University Press, Inc., 1983) and A. Batashev’s *Sovetskiy dhaz: istoricheskiy ocherk* (Moscow: Muzyka, 1972).

musics in Socialist society was now giving way to looser boundaries in the late 1970s. Pauls' musical still, however, showcased "an imaginary that was based on the forms of knowledge and aesthetics associated with the 'West,' but does not necessarily refer to any 'real' West... It also contributed to 'deterritorializing' the world of everyday socialism from within."<sup>121</sup> Take, for example, "The Beggar's Song" in the same musical: "One road into heaven is given to us all – get ready, gentlemen! ...and may there be a world without hunger, may there be enough bread for all. May there be no cold shelters, and may there be no beggars at all!" Such lines present Soviet listeners with a harsh imagined reality of capitalism and suggest a superior state of affairs at home – while the cherished sounds of jazz blossom in the background.

Just as Pauls was a happy supporter of Vocal-Instrumental Ensembles and their Western fashions, so his musical seems to offer "evidence of state authorities' relative tolerance of unofficial cultural forms. This remained true as long as any messages included in that culture was ultimately controlled and [if needs be] censored by the Party."<sup>122</sup> Another problem for Komsomol ideologists, shaping youth culture from coast to coast was "how to distinguish good (and progressive, from an ideological point of view) Western music from bad (and dangerous) Western music."<sup>123</sup> Of course, this was an illusion complicated further by the fact that context inevitably changed content:

We know what kind of temptation the socialist East could be for Western intellectuals, while Soviet citizens imagined the West as, above all, the empire of sexual freedom, of luxury, of seduction, and of sweet degeneracy. In this realm of unconscious political and erotic symbolism, shifts in signification occurred constantly. For example, an object

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<sup>121</sup> Yurchak, *Everything Was Forever Until It Was No More*, 34-35, 161-62.

<sup>122</sup> Klimova, 227. A similar phenomenon can be seen in Chapter Four, where we see rock music occupying a very specific narrative function in early Soviet rock operas.

<sup>123</sup> Zhuk, 249.

whose significance in Western culture was completely neutral could take on, in the East, the significance of a political and sexual fetish.<sup>124</sup>

Ultimately, *Sister Carrie* – like many other artistic products of the Soviet 1970s – had to illustrate an acceptable, contextualized (and therefore managed) usage of Western music.

Part of the very warm reception Soviet listeners gave this musical can be attributed to its creator's Baltic roots. As Sergei Zhuk explicates, “According to a hierarchy of typical Soviet cultural consumption in the 1970s, the Baltics represented the ‘authentic’ West in its Soviet socialist form. If a Western cultural form such as the disco was presented [to Moscow] by ‘Westernized’ Soviet people such as Latvians, then it enjoyed immediate authenticity...”<sup>125</sup> Luckily for Pauls and his audience, the same American forms could also be considered more ideologically *reliable* – and therefore safer – because they came from the Westernized Soviet region, and not from the capitalist West itself. Latvia was simultaneously both “here” and “there.”

## **Conclusion**

Brezhnev introduced “Soviet consumerism” into the official discourse of the 1970s as a path toward “mature” or “developed” socialism. This official emphasis only served to drive consumers to the black market with its wider range of alluring products and services – including, of course, Western music. In the following chapter, we will analyze in more detail how this music filtered through Soviet society and affected domestic cultural producers. As John Storey writes, “It is important to include cultural consumption in a discussion of identities because

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<sup>124</sup> Groys, 62-3.

<sup>125</sup> Zhuk, 225.

human identities are formed out of people's everyday actions and interaction in different forms of consumption."<sup>126</sup> Taking this one step further, we can see how cultural consumption of foreign products influenced cultural *production* at home. That consumption was being filtered through Soviet mindsets and circumstances, made into something new, and subsequently recirculated widely. Production was handled by state-run organizations, whose decisions could have massive consequences for consumers – all the way from the Baltics to the Sea of Japan.

The case of Raimond Pauls illustrates how this process of Western influence circulation was possible on an imperial periphery, and eventually, in the center of Soviet society. Aleksandra Pakhmutova, although less swayed by foreign influences, is another vital link in the formation and development of popular Soviet songwriting in the 1970s. One might say that Pauls' primary influence was generic; Pakhmutova's was thematic. Ultimately, these two musical figures constructed individual approaches to surviving and creating within the Soviet system. Pakhmutova acted as a willing and vocal advocate of youth culture, lauding and shaping young Soviet citizens with songs that simultaneously reflected and deviated from officialdom; Pauls, although quieter in his expression of Soviet "correctness," appealed to young listeners by channeling the American and English musical influences they increasingly longed to hear.

The careers of these two hugely popular composers show that the most important – and longest loved – works of Socialist culture contained a richness or complexity of meaning that lurked beneath the surface of evident politics. These same recordings have outlasted everything that once challenged them. For all the accusations of a musical "stagnation," it would seem that still waters ran surprisingly deep in the 1970s. Brief acquiescence to state dictates allowed for hushed, witty, and personal narratives – simultaneously. Many of those "secondary" narratives

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<sup>126</sup> J. Storey, *Cultural Consumption and Everyday Life* (London: Arnold, 1999), 135-6.

were not overt, operating instead on the more obscure levels of intertextual reference or musical genre, say. Within the experiences of composers under Brezhnev, we find some lessons for today's musicians working within – and beyond – Moscow's increasingly restrictive state-run media. With these issues in mind, Chapter Two will explore how themes of privacy and identity formation in *estrada* evolved within Vocal-Instrumental Ensembles (VIA) and their relationship to Western culture.

## CHAPTER 2

### SOVIET PROG AND “VOCAL-INSTRUMENTAL ENSEMBLES”:

#### IN-BETWEEN POLICY & PRIVACY

One August afternoon in 2012, Artemy Troitsky and I sat in the living room of his Moscow apartment, drinking tea and discussing Soviet popular music. Now in his early sixties, Troitsky remains one of Russia’s most prominent music journalists and critics – with over four decades of involvement in its popular music scene, both from behind the Iron Curtain and after its dissolution. Our debate centered on musical style and genre, two concepts that have engendered confusion for centuries. Musicians and audiences alike have used both of these terms to refer to aesthetic, historical, commercial, and other facets of artistic production. More specifically, I was trying to unpack the Russian term *estrada*, used to refer to any type of “light entertainment.”<sup>127</sup> A catch-all term, it seemed to contain no nuance – no room for distinguishing between such wildly different art forms as puppetry, magic, and circus, not to mention different types of music. Troitsky could not explain why this umbrella term was deemed sufficient to refer to virtually any kind of popular music, but he was unshakably certain about one thing: despite the fact that aesthetically speaking, much of what was produced under the label of *estrada* aligned itself with multiple genres worldwide (including different types of Anglophone rock) – *estrada* and rock were, in actual fact, mutually exclusive.

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<sup>127</sup> Taken from the French, the term literally means “small stage.” Refers to cabaret, circus, popular music, and other small-scale forms of art intended to be performed on stage. For a comprehensive survey of the genre’s history and its performers throughout the 20<sup>th</sup> century and beyond, see David MacFadyen’s 2001-2001 trilogy of books on the subject.



This is a commonly held view among musicians and listeners who were actively engaged in popular Soviet music of the Stagnation era under Brezhnev and subsequent leaders (1964-1986). There seems to be no distinction made between musical genre and style in the minds of those who lived through it. This occurred as a matter of course for those working within the USSR, drawing comment only from those who had peered beyond the Soviet system (and often, only in retrospect). Thus, popular composer Aleksandr Zatsepin – who left the USSR for France in the early 1980s, returning a few years later – offers a retrospective comparison between Soviet and French *estrada*:

The domestic [Soviet] mishmash annoys me. [Well-known *estrada* singer] Nadezhda Babkina, for instance, can perform a normal Russian song – and then her guitarist plays a blues solo. In France, there is a clear gradation: this is pop music, this is rock, and this is blues. Each genre has its own audience. And that’s not just in France. My song “Goodbye, Summer” entered a contest in Los Angeles under the category “easy listening.” It even won some sort of prize.<sup>128</sup>

Such generic differentiations familiar from Western pop music did not exist in the Soviet Union. Yet if one were to perform an experiment with listeners unaware of social and political context, much of the music discussed in this chapter would undoubtedly be sorted into the category of “rock” and perhaps even mistaken for the Western music it so frequently references. So how was music categorized in the USSR? What were the social, political, aesthetic, cultural, and musical factors that went into Troitsky’s certain denial of *estrada* as “real” rock? As Eric Drott elaborates in his study of cultural politics in France around the same period: “Different kinds of music, performed or conceptualized in different social contexts, engage politics in different ways. The uses and meanings ascribed to a chanson are distinct from those ascribed to a piece of avant-

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<sup>128</sup> “Aleksandr Zatsepin: Moia glavnaia muzyka napisana...” *Muzikal'naya zhizn'* 12 (December 2001), 22.

garde classical music, which are distinct from those assigned to a jazz improvisation.”<sup>129</sup> In a centrally planned society, how did style and genre form – and what did they mean?

This chapter will examine the historical, sociological, sonic, and poetic contexts of music produced in the USSR of the 1970s in order to demonstrate that Soviet *estrada* functioned as neither a style nor a genre, but as a hybrid containing elements of both. In certain senses, this catchall phrase could not encompass the myriad forms of artistic activity for which it served as an umbrella. And yet it did, strangely, act as an enabling force for artists within this state-determined framework to produce songs and albums clearly inspired by phenomena this same system critiqued. A fundamental ambivalence in tagging and labeling was characteristic of much Soviet existence, as outlined by anthropologist and social theorist Alexei Yurchak. I will draw upon and extend his concept of *vnye* – a Russian preposition meaning “outside of” or “external to,” here denoting the possibility of simultaneously existing within and externally of a given construction.<sup>130</sup> This will enable me to theorize the production of a subset of *estrada* that I call “progressive rock with a Russian accent.”

I will first contextualize popular music-making in the Soviet 1970s, which split off into different branches along the lines of the individual (professional composers) and the collective (initially amateur Vocal-Instrumental Ensembles). A close sonic reading of a “rock” re-working of an ancient Russian folk song by nationally popular group Ariel’ will clarify how this music was created, approved, embodied, and heard. Following this, an exploration of a 1975 album produced by composer David Tukhmanov will bring us closer to understanding the difference

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<sup>129</sup> E. Drott, *Music and the Elusive Revolution: Cultural Politics and Political Culture in France, 1968-1981* (Berkeley, University of California Press, 2011), 4.

<sup>130</sup> For a comprehensive explanation of the concept, see “Living ‘Vnye’: Deteritorialized Milieus” in A. Yurchak, *Everything Was Forever Until It Was No More: The Last Soviet Generation* (Princeton and Oxford: Princeton University Press, 2006), 126-157.

between *estrada* and rock; between mainstream and underground; and between domestic and foreign influences. It will, therefore, also allow us to shed light on the specifics of living and working *vnye*. These examples will ultimately help to demonstrate the seeming paradox of flourishing creativity in restrictive conditions. Put simply, the norms of popular Soviet music-making cannot be reduced to official and unofficial, pop (*estrada*) and rock. The restrictions on self-expression engendered nuanced forms of artistic practice, within officially recognized genres. By playing with musical – rather than lyrical – reference points, Tukhmanov and others like him were able to exist at the *edges* of the state system. Composers and performers both wrote and read “between the lines,” with a rich system of subtle borrowings.

### **Cultural Context: Songwriting between the Academy and Disconcerting Novelty**

Western art, books, and music were often forbidden behind the Iron Curtain for fear of their corrupting ideological influence – but the idea of a complete separation between the USSR and the rest of the world was impossible to enforce in a country that was otherwise extremely developed and urbanized. Using the example of popular music, just how feasible was it to police every border, physical and ideological, of the enormous Soviet territory? As writers like Troitsky have documented, the Soviet Union had an active musical black market.<sup>131</sup> First and second-hand witnesses in the 1970s describe the circulation of records by artists such as the Beatles, Queen, Yes, Led Zeppelin, and Pink Floyd – all notably British – and even the doubly dangerous

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<sup>131</sup> A. Troitsky, *Back in the USSR: The True Story of Rock in Russia* (Boston and London: Faber and Faber, Inc., 1987).

religiously informed rock opera *Jesus Christ Superstar*.<sup>132</sup> A representative example of Soviet fascination with these works can be seen in the diary of Andrei Vadimov, a fifteen-year old high school student from Dnepropetrovsk who took a trip with his class to the West Ukrainian (and more foreigner-friendly) city of L'viv in May 1974:

The best result of our trip was the visit our entire class made (secretly) to L'viv's black market, where seven members of our tourist group, myself included, and our Komsomol ideologist Natasha, bought new British records of the rock opera *Jesus Christ Superstar* from Polish tourists. It was great because Ian Gillan, our favorite vocalist from the hard-rock band Deep Purple, sings in this rock opera. The Polish tourists also recommended that we buy crosses because we were Gillan's fans and Gillan sang the part of Christ in the opera.<sup>133</sup>

As Soviet historian Sergei Zhuk explains, this exposure to rock *and* religion made young people curious about both; the boy from whose diary this excerpt was taken went on to find an old Russian Bible and eventually attend the worship meetings of a local Baptist group – for which he and his friends were eventually arrested.<sup>134</sup> This was just one of the many dangerous roads down which exposure to Anglo-American rock music and culture could lead.

The Soviet government's concession to these Western fashions and passions was the creation of an artificial musical entity called Vocal-Instrumental Ensembles (hereafter VIA, as in the Russian).<sup>135</sup> A novel practice in a society where “musical group” had heretofore referred to

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<sup>132</sup> A detailed account of *JCSS* circulating in composers' circles can be found in P. Schmelz, “From Scriabin to Pink Floyd: The ANS Synthesizer and the Politics of Soviet Music between Thaw and Stagnation,” *Sound Commitments: Avant-Garde Music and the Sixties*, ed. R. Adlington (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009): 254-276.

<sup>133</sup> Quoted in S.I. Zhuk, *Rock and Roll in the Rocket City: The West, Identity, and Ideology in Soviet Dnepropetrovsk, 1960-1985* (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 2010), 1.

<sup>134</sup> *Ibid.*, 2.

<sup>135</sup> For history and descriptions of various VIAs, see V. Shchëlkin and S. Frolov's *Legendary VIA* (Moscow: Grifon, 2007); B.P. Sokolovskiy's collected volume, *Samodeyatel'nye VIA i diskoteki* (Moscow: Profizdat, 1987); and V.K. Yashkin's *Vokal'no-instrumental'nye ansambli* (Moscow: Znanie, 1980).

orchestras or folk ensembles, the VIA attempted to duplicate the organically grown phenomenon of the Western rock band – with music that avoided the threatening realms of 1970s metal or punk. VIA songs were often dedicated to positive aspects of life in the Soviet Union, nature (as a metaphor for civic harmony), or other pleasantly apolitical topics. As Valeriy Shchelkin sums up in the preface to his 2007 study of these ensembles:

It is important to note that VIA became the *de facto* and *de jure* form of expressing an enormous energetic build-up of musical and poetic creativity of the Soviet youth. And therefore, what was published about it in the press was, of course, penned under the stern gaze of the cultural editors...<sup>136</sup>

In order to keep potential trouble with stern officials at bay, many VIAs turned to folk music as a legitimizing strategy; as we shall see, ancient Slavic folk texts and melodies were refashioned in a progressive style by groups such as Pesniary (Songsters) and Ariel'. As musicologist Mitchell Morris points out in his 2000 article "Kansas and the Prophetic Tone," such a turn toward folk music was common of Western progressive rock as well:

Less prominently mentioned in accounts of the genre, but equally important to its stylistic range, was the tendency of 'prog' bands to incorporate identifying marks of (mostly British) folk music alongside their classical tropes. Folk music, in fact, offered a special flexibility since it could be taken as raw material both from less audibly mediated versions in popular performances and folksong arrangements and from the 'classicized' versions encountered in the work of composers such as Vaughan-Williams and Holst.<sup>137</sup>

Although the musicians discussed here never went so far as to incorporate "classicized" versions of Russian folk music into their scene, folk music "from less audibly mediated versions in popular performances and folksong arrangements" was a huge influence, acting as a legitimizing agent. Several state-sponsored Vocal-Instrumental Ensembles (VIA) made a career out of

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<sup>136</sup> V. Shchëlkin & S. Frolov, *Legendy VIA* (Moscow: Grifon, 2007), 14.

<sup>137</sup> M. Morris, "Kansas and the Prophetic Tone," *American Music* 18.1 (2000), 2.

“updating” Russian folk tunes and texts in this way. Folk songs fit easily into approved notions of national, working-class, or peasant performance – yet they also spoke to a pre-urban/pre-Soviet, self-sustaining, and Christian society. And so we turn to a “peasant” register from a town of heavy industry.

**Figure 2.1: One of the ways Ariel’ remained in good standing with Soviet authorities was by closely allying themselves with a valorized folk tradition**



Formed in the late ‘60s in Chelyabinsk, Ariel’ was originally a six-member VIA containing three classically trained musicians. Rostislav Gepp contributed keyboard and flute skills; Boris Kaplun played percussion and the violin; and Lev Gurov played classical and

electric guitar. All three sang.<sup>138</sup> They began by playing covers of The Beatles, The Monkees, The Tremeloes, and The Turtles with Russian lyrics of their own making. The band's current biography (since they perform to this day) lists the basis of their repertoire and style as "Russian musical folklore." Nonetheless, the same text also acknowledges that "at different times, Ariel' worked in different genres. Yet the generic basis of the ensemble has always been a Russian variant of folk-rock, comprised of arrangements or stylizations of popular Russian folk songs."<sup>139</sup>

These "stylizations" more often than not contained characteristics of progressive rock. In his book *The Progressive Rock Files*, radio broadcaster and music historian Jerry Lucky proposes the most comprehensive definition of the genre to date. He defines progressive rock as "music that incorporates:

- Songs predominantly on the longish side, but structured, rarely improvised.
- A mixture of loud passages, soft passages, and musical crescendos to add to the dynamics of the arrangements.
- The use of a Mellotron or string synth to simulate an orchestra backing.
- The possible inclusion of a live symphony orchestra backing.
- Extended instrumental solos, perhaps involving some improvisation.
- The inclusion of musical styles from other than a rock format.
- A blending of acoustic, electric and electronic instruments where each plays a vital role in translating the emotion of compositions which typically contain more than one mood.
- Multi-movement compositions that may or may not return to a musical theme. In some cases the end section may bear little resemblance to the first part of the song.
- Compositions created from unrelated parts...<sup>140</sup>

In addition to folk music, this list makes clear the influence of classical music on progressive rock in multiple realms – all the way from instrumentation to form. These same influences, also found in Ariel's music, do not necessarily tend to manifest themselves in particularly coherent ways. As Kevin Holm-Hudson writes in his introduction to *Progressive Rock Reconsidered*, "In

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<sup>138</sup> "Istoriya gruppy 'Ariel'," *VIA Ariel*, accessed 28 December 2014. <<http://www.via-ariel.ru/index1.html>>

<sup>139</sup> Ibid.

<sup>140</sup> J. Lucky, *The Progressive Rock Files* (Burlington, ON: Collector's Guide Publishing, 1998), 120-21.

general, it may be more accurate to describe progressive rock as an attempt to merge rock's beat with certain aspects of art music's style, in terms of harmony, metric complexity, or extended form (a 'classical influence' in all three of these areas need not be present)."<sup>141</sup> Again we see a genre emerging from composite stylistic characteristics. Groups like Ariel' were able to dip into established genres such as prog from their safe vantage point of official *estrada*.

Thanks to their self-declared "folk" affiliation – and despite the fact that they were making music inspired by forbidden muses – Ariel' was not only a frequent participant and victor of many Soviet music contests, but one of the few Soviet VIAs allowed to tour far from home.<sup>142</sup> The band was allowed to travel to Western Europe and the United States, beyond the safer realms of Eastern Europe and the GDR. See Figure 1.1 for a photograph of Ariel' performing at a Soviet state-sponsored event, wearing folk costumes. Such was the standard clothing for a rock band that invoked a peasant tradition. These retrospective gestures to "memory" or pre-modern culture enabled a vibrant reinvention of history in the present. While implying that superior values could be found by looking backward, such strategies allowed popular musicians like Ariel' to create their own reality in a space *between* yesterday and today. Ultimately, this creation of the Ministry of Culture enabled unprecedented types of musical production in the USSR. A genre was created, tentatively, on the edge of Western rock's stylistic practice.

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<sup>141</sup> K. Holm-Hudson, *Progressive Rock Reconsidered* (New York & London: Routledge, 2002), 11.

<sup>142</sup> For an autobiographical history of the group (as well as admissions of being inspired by Western bands), see frontman Valeriy Yarushin's *Sud'ba po imeni "Ariel'"* (Moscow: Russkaia Nov', 2005).



## Autographic Analyses: The Building Blocks of a Peripheral Register

Progressive rock (and by extension, prog-influenced *estrada*) challenges established methods of musical analysis. This is partly due to its multi-generic affiliations, but more specifically to its ties with both “high” and “low” culture. This multi-dimensionality makes prog and its offshoots difficult objects of analysis. Holm-Hudson continues: “The presence of classical elements in this style has until now invited more traditional theoretical analysis, particularly of harmony and form.”<sup>143</sup> An excellent example of this approach can be found in the work of John Covach, who – in his work on Yes, for instance – concludes that “there are a number of features in the structure of ‘Close to the Edge’ [1972] that correspond to structural features in Western art music: the piece unfolds a large-scale formal design reinforced by tonal, thematic, and rhythmic return and development.”<sup>144</sup> This perspective brings us one step closer to understanding why bands like Yes may have been popular in the Soviet Union; highlighting parameters shared with art music would have undoubtedly appealed to classically trained musicians and aficionados.

Yet these emphases, valuable as they are, were designed to address a musical style in which form and pitch values take precedence over most other parameters. Changing the musical object at stake from score to record, however, can imply a drastic change in analytical approach. As Theodore Gracyk points out in *Rhythm and Noise*, “no specific *sound* belongs to the *Goldberg Variations*, since the timbre of the harpsichord is not essential to it.”<sup>145</sup> This music is

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<sup>143</sup> Holm-Hudson, 11.

<sup>144</sup> J. Covach, “Progressive Rock, ‘Close to the Edge,’ and the Boundaries of Style,” *Understanding Rock: Essays in Musical Analysis* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1997), 22.

<sup>145</sup> T. Gracyk, *Rhythm and Noise: An Aesthetics of Rock* (Durham & London: Duke University Press, 1996), 19. Emphasis in the original.

ontologically thin – requires relatively few signposts in order to establish its identity – since it can be grasped through performances on a variety of different instruments.<sup>146</sup> The “essence” of this piece of music is a sound-structure that can be conveyed in a number of different ways. On the other hand, music that is captured on a record, distributed chiefly in one version, and known by audiences for its specific sonic properties is ontologically thick. As theorized by philosopher Nelson Goodman, such works – works that have specific aesthetic properties and meanings adhering to their sound structures – are also called “autographic,” in contrast to ontologically thin, “allographic” works such as the *Goldberg Variations*.<sup>147</sup>

What characteristics of autographic music are most salient for listeners, if not large-scale forms? One key area of sonic quality, more than relevant here, yet often overlooked by Western analysis is timbre. Albin Zak addresses this matter in *The Poetics of Rock*: “The rhetorical aspects of timbre involve the conventional associations the sounds have, which allow them to stand as symbols suggesting dialogues and resonances beyond the boundaries of the track.”<sup>148</sup> This is particularly relevant to an inherently polystylistic genre like progressive rock, where pastiche is frequently used as a compositional technique and a particular instrumental or vocal sound can operate as an intertextual reference for the savvy listener. The same holds true for

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<sup>146</sup> For a discussion of ontological substance in music, see Stephen Davies, *Musical Works and Performances: A Philosophical Exploration* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2001).

<sup>147</sup> For more information about the autographic/allographic distinction as it pertains to music, see Gracyk, 31.

<sup>148</sup> A. Zak, *The Poetics of Rock: Cutting Tracks, Making Records* (Berkeley, Los Angeles, & London: University of California Press, 2001), 62.

*estrada*, where for instance, the use of a flute over frantic drums (as in the Ariel' track discussed below) instantly recalls the woodwind capers of Jethro Tull's Ian Anderson.<sup>149</sup>

Apart from talking about sonic qualities such as timbre, another analytical approach of use in discussing Soviet *estrada*'s love affair with prog may be to investigate musical aspects commonly referred to as "motion/movement/gesture" – i.e., with any type of spatial metaphor. In "Moving Beyond Motion: Metaphors for Changing Sound," Robert Adlington explores what it really means to understand music metaphorically:

Musical sound does not literally move, become tense, possess height or grow in fullness, warmth or pressure. To attribute such things to musical sound is to hear it metaphorically... Contrary to the traditional understanding of metaphor as an essentially poetic or figurative linguistic device, [George Lakoff, Mark Johnson and Mark Turner] have stressed the centrality of metaphor to cognition and experience. Metaphor, in other words, rather than being subjective and indeterminately connected to its object, is often necessary and unavoidable... As George Lakoff puts it, 'The locus of metaphor is not in language at all, but in the way we conceptualize one mental domain in terms of another...' Metaphor is fundamentally conceptual, not linguistic in nature.<sup>150</sup>

This non-linguistic cognitive connection fits well with Philip Tagg's treatment of music as an alogogenic symbolic system. Throughout his 2012 magnum opus, *Music's Meanings: A Modern Musicology for Non-Musos*, he insists that verbal description is an inadequate approach to a form of art that is non-verbal and non-visual by nature. Instead, he suggests studying the semiotic functions of musical signifiers by using techniques such as interobjectivity and intersubjectivity (comparing different pieces and different listeners' reactions to the same piece), paying attention

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<sup>149</sup> See Anderson's solo in Jethro Tull, "Locomotive Breath," *Aqualung* (Reprise Records, 1971) for an example. It can be heard at 2:45 in the album version: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=yJkmHQ2q--I>.

<sup>150</sup> R. Adlington, "Moving Beyond Motion: Metaphors for Changing Sound," *Journal of the Royal Musical Association* 128.2 (2003), 301-302.

to musical features such as time, space, timbre, loudness and tonality, and the difference between diataxis/syncrisis (long-term structure v. “now” music).<sup>151</sup>

These are all exciting and productive ways through which to “read” progressive rock music as reemployed in Eastern Europe. However, not all rock music is created equal – unlike its Anglophone counterparts, Soviet *estrada* or light entertainment surfaced in an environment not necessarily geared toward free creative expression. As Gracyk reminds us:

Rock has characteristic approaches to articulating rhythm and timbre. Still, we must not forget that genres involve cultural conventions and transpersonal rules. Ever evolving, they do not exist apart from the histories of production and use of specific artifacts. Here, we do well to remember rock’s specifically American roots, as well as its close relationship to a capitalist entertainment industry.<sup>152</sup>

In what follows, I would like to distill the particular sound of prog-influenced Soviet *estrada* through an examination of sonic space, playing/singing techniques, and recording style. The observations made in this section will illuminate how popular musicians in the USSR created soundscapes that went on resonating between genres and styles.

### **Carving Out Sonic Space: Reworking Soviet Notions of Folk Performance**

Ariel’s 1978 album, *Русские картинки (Russian Pictures)* contains a track called “По блюду, блюду серебряному” (“On a Silver Platter”), which bases its melody and lyrics on a Russian folk song traditionally sung at a wedding – to the parents of the groom.<sup>153</sup> We can analyze this song with the aforementioned tools of sonic analysis, while also bringing in Lelio

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<sup>151</sup> For further elaboration on any of these topics, see Philip Tagg’s *Music’s Meanings: A Modern Musicology for Non-Musos* (New York & Huddersfield: The Mass Media Music Scholars’ Press, 2012).

<sup>152</sup> Gracyk, xiv.

<sup>153</sup> See Appendix C for the text of the song and an English translation.

Camilleri's concept of sound and space as "not only...used to transmit the traditional parameters, but...organizational in their own right."<sup>154</sup> He defines sonic space as "a three-dimensional space divided into: localized space; spectral space; morphological space."<sup>155</sup> Localized space refers to where sounds are placed both in terms of stereo and mono windows, and is reflected primarily through a discussion of depth, position, and motion. Spectral space refers to qualities like the timbre of the sound, as well as the spectral content and organization of a particular piece. Morphological space is a time-oriented analytical tool, closely related to Robert Adlington's aforementioned arguments. Each of these facets of sonic space has a particular role to play in this Ariel' track.

"On a Silver Platter" starts out with just the drums panned centrally, the seemingly chaotic use of each part of the drum set making it difficult to hear an established meter.<sup>156</sup> The drum and hi-hat sounds reveal a fairly dry sonic space, with every frequency equally high in the mix. After a few measures of solo percussion, an organ in the left stereo channel joins the drums, stabilizing the music into a triple meter feel. At 0:16, this instrumental introduction is fleshed out by a flute (panned left) and electric guitar (panned right) playing the main theme of the folk song in unison. The introductory section ends in an echoing phrase played first by the flute from the left, repeated by the synthesizer, and echoed last by the electric guitar from the right.

After the introduction, a masculine voice enters singing in a chest-voice baritone range; however, despite the fact that he is singing one line, there is a form of doubling going on –

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<sup>154</sup> L. Camilleri, "Shaping sounds, shaping spaces," *Popular Music* 29.02 (2010), 200.

<sup>155</sup> *Ibid.*, 202.

<sup>156</sup> Ariel'. "Po bliudu, bliudu serebrianomu." *Russkie kartinki*. Melodiya, 1977. The album version of the track can be heard here: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=2SDFD9gbcAc#t=673>.

almost an ADT sound.<sup>157</sup> As is characteristic with ADT, the sound is *almost* in unison, but slightly offset. However, that effect soon reveals itself to be nothing more than standard overdubbing as the voice splits apart into harmony, with the lower part taking the left stereo channel and the higher taking the right. This division of right and left adopts a pattern, with high-pitched, more piercing sounds tending to come from the right, more mellow, lower-pitched sounds on the left, with the percussion in the middle tying it all together. Throughout the verse, the electric bass maintains an intense and rhythmic lick which starts with a multi-note upbeat, going on to emphasize the downbeat and the second beat, lending a ONE-TWO-three, ONE-TWO-three accent pattern to the overall groove. The bass appears directly plugged in to the recording console, giving it a crisp, round, and well-articulated sound; again, this contributes to the feeling that everything is more or less equally high in the mix.

The first verse is followed by a section starting at 1:06 in which a slightly muted electric bass and the flute play a highly syncopated duet, accompanied by a high-pitched whine from the synthesizer, adding both to the general tension and stretching the spectral space. The voice and subdued percussion enter, at which point the bass is turned way up and loses its muted quality. At the end of each phrase, the percussion is dramatically foregrounded and provides an unmetered fill. After one such fill, the vocal enters again, this time panned to the left with a chorus of high-pitched male back-up singers on the right – continuing the trend of a localized space divided into a mellow left and a more strident right. After this section of heightened tension, there is a triumphant return to the original sonic space of the verse. This is repeated, then followed by a short instrumental outro where the flute and guitar team up again to play the main

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<sup>157</sup> For a more detailed discussion of Artificial Double Tracking and its invention, see “Abbey Road and the Beatles” in Mark Cunningham’s *Good Vibrations: A History of Record Production*, (London: Sanctuary Publishing, Ltd., 1988).

theme in their respective parts of the localized space. This time, however, instead of passing the ending tag from instrument to instrument, the recording ends with all three forces (flute, synthesizer, and guitar) repeating it together thrice. The track ends with a brief hi-hat resonance; that brevity helps to illustrate the aesthetic preference for a dry recording environment.

Ultimately, the sonic realm created by Ariel' in "On a Silver Platter" consists of a right-left segregated, fairly compressed sound that may well be a reflection of the spectral space of their American and British progressive influences. It might equally mirror the poor quality of bootlegged, black market recordings the musicians encountered (especially in a provincial or far-flung industrial location). A consideration of this uniquely "socialist" soundscape allows us to delve deeper into the Soviet cultural aesthetic; it also enables us to look at a form of musical self-expression from the outside in. It is this same kind of "outsideness" that allows us now to look back and discern the stylistic DNA of progressive rock in the Soviet Union. Simultaneously, we can use that cultural sphere as a case study for how genre formation operates in a centrally planned society. Artists living and working in 1970s' Moscow were not in a position to define their oeuvre. Most saw themselves, unavoidably, as composers and performers making state-sponsored music, *estrada*, even though a global worldwide progressive rock community may have inspired them. Self-definition was hard work – a balancing act between styles, languages, locations, and prior generations.

### **On the Wave of My Memory: An Album Grounded in Themes of Recollection**

In addition to – and sometimes in tandem with – the music of VIAs, there were also individual composers working to create rock or avant-garde popular music, and thus further confuse stylistic and generic labels under the official aegis of *estrada*. More conservative

songwriters such as Aleksandra Pakhmutova and Raimond Pauls (discussed in Chapter One) contributed works to the VIA canon. Slowly these partnerships moved away from prudishness. Indeed, the very first ensemble to be created this way in 1966 – Poyushchie Gitary (The Singing Guitars) – ended up collaborating with professional composer Aleksandr Zhurbin to perform the first Soviet rock opera, *Orpheus and Eurydice* almost a decade later.<sup>158</sup> In short, there were highly-trained composers who devoted their time and energy to writing restrained and respectful *estrada* music, whether in direct and regular collaboration with specific ensembles, or just working with performers who were more generally involved in the VIA scene. The lines between classical, mainstream, and rock would become blurred.

One such figure straddling these realms is David Tukhmanov, who – now in his sixth decade of actively composing – occupied a unique position in the USSR. Both an “insider” and an “outsider,” Tukhmanov belonged to the official Union of Composers, which granted him privileges most rock musicians could not dream of under the Soviet regime. Yet as we shall see, his interests frequently lay outside the realm of the government sponsored agenda. Born in Moscow, 1940, to an engineer and music teacher, Tukhmanov was educated in the capital’s most prestigious music school in the years immediately after Stalin’s death. He was, in other words, very much a child of the “Thaw” – Khrushchev’s fondly remembered liberalism. After Khrushchev’s “secret speech” in February 1956, Soviet music and literature breathed a collective sigh of relief. The gross failings of Stalinism were admitted in public; storytelling, filmmaking, and music turned *away* from dogma and reconsidered socialist culture all over again. Tales of “social” enterprise were taken away from army battalions, factory crews, and other loud

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<sup>158</sup> The creation of this opera and bringing *estrada* to the stage is addressed in Chapter Four.



collectives. Culture was filled instead with stories of private romance, childhood, and families. Social existence was to be remade from the ground up.

Graduating from the Gnesin Institute of Music in 1963, Tukhmanov's final thesis portfolio included an oratorio set to the poetry of Aleksandr Tvardovskiy (a key writer and literary editor of the time), as well as a cycle of ballads and romances setting Russian poets' translations of Heinrich Heine, whose lyric poetry was so frequently set to lieder by composers such as Schubert and Schumann.<sup>159</sup> Nonetheless, for all that dedication to lofty verse, he penned a nationally popular hit song just after his military service (where, incidentally, he served as band leader). Using the lyrics of Mikhail Nozhkin, it is very much in the spirit of the time. Called "The Last Train," (Posledniaia Elektrichka), it tells of a young man so enamored of his girlfriend that he – yet again – has missed the train home:

*There's silence all around, not a soul in sight;  
Only the railway lines sigh with fatigue.  
There's only the moon, running behind me [on the way home],  
The moon is my sleepless comrade.*

The language painting this intimate scene is minor, sentimental, and – as it turns out – hugely popular. Although Tukhmanov wrote the song in 1961 at the age of twenty-one, it was absurdly lambasted by radio censors for "promoting unsafe behavior" (walking on train tracks!), and was only performed on television five years later.<sup>160</sup> All of a sudden, the young composer had to consider a bigger audience – and larger issues of "proper" craftsmanship – as the aesthetic and political benchmarks were both lifted.

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<sup>159</sup>"Biografia," *D. Tukhmanov: Neizvestnoe ob izvestnom...* (2006). <<http://www.tuxmanov.ru/biograf.html>>

<sup>160</sup> *DOstoyanie REpubliki*. 1-yi kanal, 6 October 2013. <[http://www.1tv.ru/sprojects\\_edition/si5765/fi25949](http://www.1tv.ru/sprojects_edition/si5765/fi25949)>. This 2013 broadcast of the television show "DOstoyanie REpubliki" ([Pride of the republic], where the initial letters DO and RE are meant to reference solfege) was dedicated to celebrating the life and art of David Tukhmanov.

The 1970s indeed saw a corrective shift, toward all things civic. In 1972, he wrote one of his most consequential songs, “My Address is ‘The Soviet Union,’” performed by the VIA Samotsvety (The Gemstones). It relates the sensation of a “yearning heart,” that of a hardworking, travelling citizen whose “phone numbers are scattered across cities.” The lyrical tone of the ‘60s persists, but the chorus now resounds: “My address is neither a home, nor a street. My address is ‘The Soviet Union.’” A sentimental spirit finds home both somewhere and everywhere; its limits are quite literally mapped. These efforts garnered him acceptance in the official Union of Composers, an affiliation that would enable his future career.

In the same year, Tukhmanov published the influential LP *How Lovely is this World*, arguably a proto-concept album that linked a range of poetic and musical compositions as a thematic whole. The sleeve notes contained some telling observations from colleague-composer Yan Frenkel’ (1920-1989): “Having begun with predominantly lyrical texts, [Tukhmanov] then develops his imagery in order to broaden it. He creates songs in which a civic spirit dovetails with private themes; he interweaves humor with lyricism, everyday topics with fantasy.”<sup>161</sup> The distance to progressive rock was slowly lessening. This process came hand in hand with his exposure to music from Western Europe and America. In an interview with Arkadiy Petrov, musicologist and one of the very first proponents of jazz in the USSR, Tukhmanov reminisces about some of those influences: “I was raised on the traditions of nineteenth century Russian classical music, Tchaikovsky, Rachmaninoff, and Scriabin; jazz unexpectedly captivated me. I found records and cassette tapes, listened to jazz programs on the radio, and tried to play jazz on

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<sup>161</sup> Y. Frenkel’, liner notes, *Kak prekrasen etot mir*, D. Tukhmanov (Melodiya, 1972).

the piano.”<sup>162</sup> Any movement toward popular registers would always be “dignified” by profoundly cultured connections to the canon, classical traditions, and/or state institutions.

Jazz was not the only form of Western music captivating Tukhmanov (together with the rest of the USSR). Beginning in the mid-1960s, beat music – epitomized, of course, by the Beatles – became an enormous cultural phenomenon in the Soviet Union. As Artemy Troitsky writes in *Back in the USSR*, “The Beatles’ role in the genesis of Soviet rock is impossible to overestimate... The Beatles’ happy, harmonious vocal choir proved to be just the voice for which our confused generation was waiting, but was unable to create for itself.”<sup>163</sup> As black market discs trickled into the USSR, the state recording industry was under increasing pressure to offer its younger citizens *some* formal equivalent. Tukhmanov himself acknowledges the influence of this British invasion on his music – but more importantly, on his musical thinking:

This ensemble opened up a new dimension of songwriting... first, the principle of ensemble singing. This was the territory of chamber music, the principle of the madrigal, where, let’s say, several voices all sing as if from the first person point of view. This musical eventuality was almost completely excluded earlier: if people wanted to sing chorally, the text had to come from the collective... And finally, it was the Beatles who created the predominant principle of “suite” thinking...”<sup>164</sup>

It was this notion of “suite thinking,” or “concept album” – at this point also gaining popularity in British prog – that proved to be most important for Tukhmanov in the 1970s. Progressive rock would allow for an academic, dignified approach to popular songwriting that blended “high” and “low” culture in a workable *mélange*. In this context, one can see the aforementioned *How Lovely is this World* LP as a precursor to the more fully fleshed-out concept

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<sup>162</sup> A. Petrov, “Tukhmanov David Fedorovich,” *Sovetskoe retro* (1999), accessed 27 December 2014.  
<[http://ussrmusic.narod.ru/articles/autobiog/Tuhmanov\\_auto.html](http://ussrmusic.narod.ru/articles/autobiog/Tuhmanov_auto.html)>

<sup>163</sup> Troitsky, 23-24.

<sup>164</sup> Petrov.

of *On the Wave of My Memory*. In stark contrast to his officially sanctioned output, that nationally famous album embodies a unique aesthetic shaped by constant quotations and permutations of Western musical influences. Verbatim quotations of hooks from Beatles' songs and other (chiefly British) Western popular groups are peppered throughout the album. Nonetheless, despite the striking musical allegiances heard virtually non-stop throughout Tikhmanov's magnum opus, it was not only extremely well received by Soviet audiences, but approved by authorities as well. An examination of this album will explore the ways in which room for this aesthetic could exist within Soviet state-approved music, and shed light on the contrary forces that drove musical production and promotion within the USSR.

A 1991 encyclopedia of Soviet rock concludes its entry on progressive rock with the following statement: "In our country, this term does not have a specific application, although certain features of the 'progressive' worldview were characteristic of many groups of the 1970s."<sup>165</sup> *On the Wave of My Memory* (hereafter OWMM), although the product of one composer rather than a popular group, espouses several of these features. With its penchant for folklore, fantasy, and the kind of structural wizardry accessible only to the finest musicians, progressive rock was a potentially appealing – and sufficiently apolitical – mode for Soviet culture to assimilate. Tikhmanov's album showcases the possibilities of living *vnye*, simultaneously within and on the edge of state approval, and allows us to ruminate on how "genre" and "style" existed and interacted within *estrada* of the 1970s. On this album, *estrada* and rock music intertwine.

At this point, it is helpful to invoke Allan Moore's distinction of "style" as describing *how* a musician makes his/her choices as a creative act, and "genre" as describing *what* that

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<sup>165</sup> A. Burlaka, *Kto est' kto v sovetskom roke*. (Moscow: Ostankino, 1991), 278.

music is doing (the preexisting or institutional “means through which this is to be achieved”).<sup>166</sup> To quote Moore directly: “Genre is largely chosen for the musician by virtue of the social circumstances in which s/he finds him/herself, style is chosen by the musician.”<sup>167</sup> The former is social, institutional, and a given; the latter is more private, idiosyncratic, and open to change. This distinction between private, audience-directed intention and public expectation/evaluation can also be mapped onto different forms of listening. The subjective link between artist and audience operates according to stylistic considerations. The relationship between artist and state, however, is handled according to generic issues, such as “proper” or “improper” genres. In the world of Soviet Socialist Realism and other system-wide dictates, the gulf between style and genre can be wide indeed. In the case of Tukhmanov we see somebody operating with apparent fidelity to a genre, yet managing – through clever cross-cultural references – to find stylistic freedoms.

Native theorists structure the style/genre discussion somewhat differently, albeit arriving at similar conclusions. M.K. Mikhailov’s 1981 study, *Style in Music*, is representative of Soviet musicology prioritizing style over genre. In works such as these – which necessarily “rely on Marxist-Leninist aesthetics and the scientific methodology of dialectical materialism” – genre and style are understood as heavily interrelated.<sup>168</sup> However, despite the nuances and interdependencies Mikhailov uncovers in his discussion, style is ultimately once more relegated toward the camp of the aesthetic while genre acts as a functional determinant – whether that

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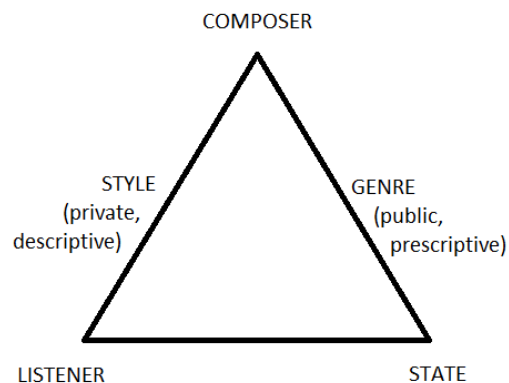
<sup>166</sup> A.F. Moore, “Categorical Conventions in Music Discourse: Style and Genre,” *Music & Letters* 82.3 (2001): 432-442.

<sup>167</sup> A.F. Moore, “Style and Genre as a Mode of Aesthetics,” *Musurgia* 24.3 (2007), accessed 7 November 2015 at <http://www.allanfmoore.org.uk/styleaesth.pdf>.

<sup>168</sup> M.K. Mikhailov, *Stil’ v muzike* (Music: Moscow, 1981), 4.

function is to sell music to the right audience (as in Zatsepin’s earlier mention of France), or simply to discuss it more effectively. This distinction between prescriptive and descriptive forms of labeling permeates both Soviet and Western analytical models.

**Figure 2.2, The composer-listener-state triangle**



The triangular distinction I espouse here will allow me to make the argument that aesthetically and stylistically, rock – in the guise of state-sponsored *estrada* – was alive and well in the Soviet Union even before the advent of underground organizations such as the Leningrad Rock Club in the early 1980s. Tukhmanov jumped through the state’s hoops in terms of genre requirements (such as a pre-recording screening with record label officials), but the finished product played to knowing, individual listeners.

Scholars such as Fabian Holt and Franco Fabbri define genre as “a set of musical events...whose course is governed by a definite set of socially accepted rules.”<sup>169</sup> Andrew Weintraub puts it differently in his study of Indonesian popular music: “Music genres represent

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<sup>169</sup> F. Fabbri, “A Theory of Musical Genres: Two Applications,” *Popular Music Perspectives*, eds. D. Horn & P. Tagg (Göteborg and Exeter: International Association for the Study of Popular Music, 1981), accessed 26 December 2014 at <http://www.tagg.org/others/ffabbri81a.html>.

historical continuity and stability, and mark common training, aesthetics, techniques, skills, and performance practices. Genres play a major role in authorizing canons, cultural hierarchies, and decisions about censorship and government support.”<sup>170</sup> In other words, genre distinctions have social effects. By delving into the more politically and socially motivated aspects of genre, we will discover how Tukhmanov’s album and so much other Soviet *estrada* of this decade has been significantly excluded from being “rock” of any kind by specific musical subcultures formed in the Soviet Union (and persisting today). Rigid notions of genre – from both the state *and* intolerant rock subcultures in the USSR – refused to allow for stylistic similarities between them. The state preferred to use *estrada* to keep tepid, ideologically predictable songwriting at arm’s length from rock. At the same time, champions of an underground rock scene refused to admit that publications officially tagged or distributed as *estrada* could possibly contribute anything to the validity of domestic rock. So how does Tukhmanov manage to move deftly between them, satisfying the former camp while actually aiding the latter?

*OWMM* is a concept album both musically and lyrically. Let us begin with the music, which in form and substance contains multiple clever references to Western models. The album is unified sonically through its *Abbey Road* medley-style concept where each song transitions into the next without a perceptible break. And indeed, the British LP – just as Soviet *estrada* – has its roots in music hall and vaudeville traditions. Yet the similarities do not end here; multiple facets of the Beatles’ polystylistic, structurally innovative sound from the late 1960s can be heard in Tukhmanov’s music, both in terms of content and sonic arrangement. Even in the opening bars of the very first track (“I Mentally Enter Your Study”) we hear an allusion to the tremulous, echoic Moog arpeggios of “Because,” and shortly thereafter, the song lapses into a

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<sup>170</sup> A. Weintraub, *Dangdut Stories: A Social and Musical History of Indonesia’s Most Popular Music* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010), 12.

soft-shoe groove reminiscent of a hybrid between “Sun King” and the swing section of “You Never Give Me Your Money.”<sup>171</sup> Associations with specific songs are called up through not-quite-verbatim quotations, as well as allusions to particular instrumentation and signature rhythmic grooves. Kevin Holm-Hudson calls these types of stylistic references the subtlest form of sonic historiography – in this case, subtle enough to be disseminated into the public (many of whom were surely in on the joke).<sup>172</sup> With these and related games, as we will see, Tukhmanov maintains generic fidelity, yet discovers stylistic liberties.

A snowballing series of non-verbal, Anglophile references does not stop after the first track, and is in fact fundamental to the album as a whole. The aforementioned Beatles fixation comes as no surprise – and Troitsky once again offers a few theories. Why choose Liverpool, so to speak, over Memphis?

It seems to me that Elvis and rock’n’roll were nice, but too exotic for our public. The rough Black rhythm, the fast tempo, the shouted vocals or hypersexual intonations were all magnificent and ideal for new dances, but how could we identify with them? They were as remote as America. The Beatles were closer, not just geographically but also spiritually. The Beatles had melodies, and for the Russian ear this is mandatory. Good rhythm and a strong, full sound are always welcome, but without beautiful, melodic lines the chances of success here are minimal. That’s why The Rolling Stones were never rivals to the Beatles here, and The Who generated less interest than The Hollies or even The Tremeloes...<sup>173</sup>

This account of Soviet Russia’s attachment to the Beatles, despite its sentimental essentialism, is quite representative of popular opinion among Russian speakers. Whether or not the “Russian

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<sup>171</sup> D. Tukhmanov, “Ya myslenno vkhozhu v vash cabinet,” *Po volne moei pamyati* (Melodiya, 1976). The album version of this track can be heard at [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=eP\\_gt-JVP4Y](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=eP_gt-JVP4Y). The breakdown I refer to – and the spot where this long, bipartite track is sometimes split into two – occurs at 2:18.

<sup>172</sup> K. Holm-Hudson, “The Future is Now... and Then: Sonic Historiography in Post-1960s Rock,” *Genre* 34.3-4 (2001): 243-64.

<sup>173</sup> Troitsky, 23-4.



ear” really demanded a particular style of music, Soviet listeners certainly welcomed the Fab Four’s exuberance, and their hybrid of classical yet youthful sounds hit a sweet spot in the Soviet cultural consciousness in a way the unfamiliar rhythms, tempos, and “hypersexual intonations” of R&B and blues (and Elvis’ hips, much maligned even on American television!) could not.

Upon first listen, it might seem evident that British albums were more accessible to Tikhmanov and his peers than American 45s, say. However, when one takes stock of the entire album, there are widespread references to American artists: a touch of Frank Zappa’s *Apostrophe*-era percussion antics here, a hint of Billy Joel’s “Piano Man”-style luxuriating there – not to mention an entire song setting Goethe to a James Brown-style funk groove. These references, however, are used in a much less foundational way than what he takes from the British artists – or they are otherwise subverted (as explained below). So perhaps, as Troitsky suggests, the style of British music exemplified by the Beatles was simply more familiar or acceptable to the Soviet ear – and the more “exotic,” sexualized, and therefore subversive American sounds were used as filigree. As Sergei Zhuk writes about his experience growing up in a small town of Central Ukraine:

All my [...] classmates began listening to the music of the Beatles and Rolling Stones as early as 1965 and 1966, and they grew up listening to various styles of rock music, ranging from Eric Clapton and Jimi Hendrix to Led Zeppelin and Deep Purple. Later, when we entered our colleges, we began listening to the more serious music of the 1970s, including Pink Floyd, Yes, Genesis, and Jethro Tull. Paradoxically, we discovered the American roots of our music through our consumption of British rock.<sup>174</sup>

Those stylistic divergences were sufficiently contained so that Tikhmanov could safely stay between acceptance *and* adventure, without threatening the album’s generic identity.

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<sup>174</sup> Zhuk, xiv.

Of course, the Beatles aren't the only British band to have made an impression on Soviet songwriters. The entire second half of "I Mentally Enter Your Study"—the breakdown, so to speak, of the aforementioned first track—is sonically quite different. The driving rhythms, alternating time signatures, harsh percussion, and wild soaring guitar sounds create a fierce theatrical pastiche bordering on the operatic. Its jackhammering yet melodic aesthetic could easily be found on the albums of artists such as those Zhuk cites above. These varying references, however, are not just discrete chunks of musical material that do not interact. Rather, they melt into one another and create a complex, synchronous whole, which at any given moment can be quoting melodic material from a Beatles song, using a typical Brian May guitar sound, and referencing a rhythm straight from a Zappa album. This song exemplifies Tukhmanov's relationship to his influences—a piecemeal approach which takes varied components from different sounds and weaves them together in a fast-moving (and clearly Western-influenced) semiotic pandemonium. Informed audiences would notice these stylistic changes and see them as an exciting alternative to state-approved *genres*. The fact that official channels published Tukhmanov's album suggests that the layers of bureaucracy to which he was subject were more of a sieve than an iron curtain.

All this was happening at a time when the risk of legal trouble threatened those who were noticed buying forbidden Western records.<sup>175</sup> As Timothy Ryback expounds,

While rock music [in the USSR] had at first established itself in the 1950s without great difficulty, the authorities sought to proscribe its further spread amongst youth through antagonistic media coverage, the erratic banning of public performances, occasional arrests and other forms of police harassment.<sup>176</sup>

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<sup>175</sup> A narrative depiction of the social and legal tensions inherent in the fraught act of acquiring Western records during the 1970s can be seen in Karen Shakhnazarov's 2008 film *Ischeznuvshaya imperiya*.

<sup>176</sup>T. Ryback, *Rock Around the Bloc: A History of Rock Music in Eastern Europe and the Soviet Union* (New York & Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1990), 25-26.

Of course, Soviet citizens were able to acquire certain recordings on the terribly expensive black market, which is not in itself surprising – wherever there are prohibitions, fans will find ways of circumventing them. The real question is, if songs by the same composer were being suppressed for having a slight hint of foxtrot, how did an album like *OWMM* get released on a state-run record label?<sup>177</sup> In a 2002 interview, Tukhmanov himself admitted that:

By all rights and according to the practices of that [prior] life, this record should never have been released. Let's begin with the fact that I should never have started writing it, understanding beforehand that: first of all, no one needed it; and – second of all – no one would have allowed it. My approach was unfamiliar, non-traditional, and did not fit into the framework of existing standards. For me it was [merely] an experiment I allowed myself.<sup>178</sup>

In order to explain how this kind of artistic activity could exist in the USSR, I would like to return to Yurchak's concept of *vnye*. In my formulation, I extend Yurchak's idea of "contexts that were in a peculiar relationship to the authoritative discursive regime – they were 'suspended' simultaneously inside and outside of it, occupying the border zones between here and elsewhere."<sup>179</sup> Rather than confining the notion of *vnye* to a physically or ideologically peripheral location, I believe it also functioned as a mindset allowing for those same "peculiar relationships" while participating *within* the authoritative discursive regime. In other words, although Tukhmanov was clearly affiliated with official organs (i.e., with the state-run record

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<sup>177</sup> "Istoriya pesni 'Den' pobedy,'" *D. Tukhmanov: Neizvestnoe ob izvestnom*, (3 May 2007).

<[http://www.tuxmanov.ru/index.php?subaction=showfull&id=1178217722&archive=&start\\_from=&ucat=&](http://www.tuxmanov.ru/index.php?subaction=showfull&id=1178217722&archive=&start_from=&ucat=&)>

Despite its patriotic title and the fact that it was set to the words of respected poet and war veteran V.G. Kharitonov, Tukhmanov's song "Victory Day" sounded a little too much like a tango or a foxtrot for the liking of the censors. As a consequence, it was widely suppressed and ignored until its performance at a public concert in 1975 by famous singer Lev Leshchenko.

<sup>178</sup> S. Cheliaev, "David Tukhmanov. Po volne moei pamyati," *Populiarnaia sovetskaia pesnia ot XX do XXVIII syezda KPSS* (October 2002), accessed 27 December 2014. <<http://popsa.info/bio/006/006b-1.html>>

<sup>179</sup> Yurchak, *Everything Was Forever Until It Was No More: The Last Soviet Generation*, 127.

company Melodiya), the generic determination and stylistic breadth of *estrada* created a space for him to pursue interests counter to those organs. Indeed, many composers and VIAs inhabited such a paradoxical space within Soviet society, between state norms and potential deviance. *OWMM* was able to exist because of the complex, contradictory workings of Soviet musical creation and dissemination. In between them was space for someone like Tukhmanov.

But how exactly does one become *vnye* in a professional setting? What are the processes whereby an artistic agent can exist “simultaneously inside and outside of some [approved] context”?<sup>180</sup> First of all, there were elements of active deception. When asked whether he had ever feared censorship with *OWMM*, Tukhmanov admitted:

I was able to bamboozle the artistic council. I said that my LP would capture a classical performance – and played things classically [at the studio screening for the censors]. Then the rhythm would be changed... We didn't advertise the album at all; it came out quietly, almost underground, and began its own independent life.<sup>181</sup>

In another interview, Tukhmanov elaborates, “At the Melodiya studio, I played the songs in a chamber music fashion, minimizing the role of the drums and other rock'n'roll attributes.”<sup>182</sup>

This telling reference to some dangerous markers of “rock” brings us back to the discussion of private style and public genre. As Gracyk eloquently points out:

We generally know [rock] music by playing tapes, albums, or compact discs. When rock music is discussed, the relevant musical work is not simply the song being performed. To employ terminology currently in vogue, we can say that recordings are the “primary texts” of this music.<sup>183</sup>

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<sup>180</sup> Ibid., 132.

<sup>181</sup> Cheliev.

<sup>182</sup> V. Nuzov, “David Tukhmanov: V Moskve ya obrel vtoroe dykhanie...” *Russkiy bazar* 378.30 (17 July 2003), accessed 27 December 2014. <<http://www.russian-bazaar.com/Article.aspx?ArticleID=3068>>

<sup>183</sup> Gracyk, 21.

In other words, any recourse to rock percussion in the studio would have recalled concrete artifacts from the black market. Drums (and particular ways of playing them) would have evoked objects of illegal desire, not to mention the presumed generic implications thereof. And so Tukhmanov avoided any suggestions of illicit inanimate objects – in order to make one himself.

If we consider the finished, bound disc as the *sine qua non* of rock music, then Tukhmanov's music certainly became a form of rock. Given its aesthetic or "classical" allegiances, as Tukhmanov himself says, I would argue it is aligned with progressive rock specifically. The crux of the matter here is that the Soviet artistic council – so far from commercial practice – had not yet caught on to the fact that unlike in classical music, the "score" guaranteed or meant nothing. Recordings, in other words *texts*, were the primary objects to be examined and potentially censored. As seen in our earlier discussion of autographic art forms, listening to a composer play through a future *estrada* album on piano gave no information about key notions such as instrumentation or timbre – even as it revealed such gestures as Tukhmanov's verbatim usage of the 6/8 hook from "Here Comes the Sun." The convoluted system of Soviet arts bureaucracy actually opened up all kinds of possibilities for such unexpected artistic production.

Any ability to "mask" a rock aesthetic on piano aside, *OWMM*'s fairly unproblematic release can also be attributed to its aforementioned kinship with Anglophone prog.<sup>184</sup> This classically oriented genre allowed Tukhmanov to dally with lyrical content that sat between learnedness and subversion. In the West, even during its heyday, progressive rock showed a

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<sup>184</sup> A quick side note on contemporaneous genre labels – when released, Tukhmanov's album was merely called *estrada* by Melodiya. It is still classified this way in the catalogue: <http://melody.su/catalog/esetrad/312>. These days, most online sources and listeners (with the exception of the community of musicians represented by Troitsky in the beginning of this chapter) refer to it as "art-rock" or simply "rock." The term "prog rock" was not in use in the Soviet Union during the 1970s to describe anything that was happening domestically. It is only recently that listeners have begun to label even Tukhmanov's album by the name they readily give its influences.

lasting fidelity to complex, even byzantine lyrics that spoke of distant lands and alternative existences. Audiences were expected to be well read; even the Soviet censors would concur with those lofty benchmarks. And so, given that we are dealing with *songs*, how did the lyrical content of this album manage to straddle the distance(s) between tradition and innovation?

**Figure 2.3, Track listing of OWMM**

<b>Track</b>	<b>Title</b>	<b>Poet</b>
1	“I Mentally Enter Your Study” (1913)	Maximilian Voloshin
2	“From Sappho” (6 <sup>th</sup> century B.C)	Sappho
3	“From Galliardic Verse” (12 <sup>th</sup> century)	Galliardic Verse
4	“L’Invitation au Voyage” (1857)	Baudelaire
5	“Good Night” (1822)	Percy Byshe Shelley
6	“Sailing the Waves of My Memory” (20 <sup>th</sup> century)	Nicolas Guillen
7	“A Sentimental Stroll” (1866)	Verlaine
8	“Herz, Mein Herz” (1775)	Goethe
9	“Confusion” (1913)	Anna Akhmatova
10	“Dedication in an Album” (19 <sup>th</sup> century)	Adam Mickiewicz

Tukhmanov’s album undoubtedly set the stage for a poetically aware audience with instruments that would normally be considered more “classically oriented.” Most of the songs contain parts arranged for flute and strings; more than one track features a prominent harpsichord part. This is not uncommon, stemming from a particular “high art” aesthetic favored by progressive rock in general.<sup>185</sup> The lyrics perform a similar function. Tukhmanov established an

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<sup>185</sup> For further discussion of prog rock and its aesthetic values, see Edward Macan’s *Rocking the Classics: English Progressive Rock and the Counterculture* (Oxford University Press, 1997).

impressive list of poets, representing a global classical canon; the Soviet classroom; and – most importantly – a few heroes of the intelligentsia. Figure 2.3 shows the track listing of *OWMM* in terms of lyricists, along with text publication dates.

Just as *Abbey Road* is formally a suite, so these texts form a poetic cycle, mirroring each other. They are the core concept of the album, making a unified whole from unrelated texts. This entity, however, does not have a narrative as such. Rather, the main theme here is one of introspection and romanticism, portraying various internal states ranging from uncertainty and doubt about the future (“From Galliardic Verse”) to incredible turmoil and excitation caused by the gains and losses of love (“Confusion”). The LP portrays different facets of something that does not change or develop – throughout the entire experience. A thread of stubborn lyricism runs through the album, exposing subjectivity in times and places that had not previously been explored in Soviet *estrada*. Simultaneously, Tukhmanov’s magnum opus binds self-realization to complexity, as if actuality is depressingly restrictive. These issues, taken together, imply that self-expression is better effected in realms of retro- and intro-spection, often by way of a flourishing, increasingly baroque aesthetic. Within the landscape of Soviet Stagnation, where everything was seen in terms of goal-driven, unidirectional planning, the idea of expression for its own sake was simultaneously provocative to the authorities, and hugely appealing to audiences – much like the private, interior relationships explored in *The Irony of Fate* in Chapter Three, or the increasingly personalized *estrada* we saw in Chapter One.

Within the Romantic leanings of this album, it is useful to distinguish as Maxim Gorky does, between active and passive romanticism:

Passive romanticism endeavors to reconcile man with his life by embellishing that life, or to distract him from the things around him by means of a barren introspection into his inner world, into thoughts of life’s insoluble problems, such as love, death and other

imponderables ... Active romanticism strives to strengthen man's will to live and raise him up against the life around him, against any yoke it would impose.<sup>186</sup>

Or, as David MacFadyen clarifies in his work on Soviet popular song, "Active romanticism desires to alter the world, to employ the lonely rigours of individual effort for future, general good. Passive romanticism is more immobile in social spaces, tending as it does towards reverie or a yearning for the past."<sup>187</sup> Most of Tukhmanov's selections fall squarely within the category of passive romanticism; the poems paint a picture of the microsocial rather than the macrosocial, with decidedly un-Soviet emphases such as ineffable sentiment ("Confusion"), the pleasure of solitude ("A Sentimental Stroll"), or melancholy reverie ("Sailing the Waves of my Memory"). Another everpresent theme evokes both memory and time beyond human control, as with the Guillen track lamenting "Time ran by, losing track of the years/It ran by, throwing me everywhere, here and there." In other words, despite the epic soundscape accompanying its texts, the lyrical scale of Tukhmanov's album is both modest and persistently intimate – providing a fascinating foil of doubt, confusion, and ambiguity to his frequently aggressive musical gestures.

Some of the poets referenced here certainly had a complicated relationship with the Soviet regime; for instance, Maximilian Voloshin's entry in the Great Soviet Encyclopedia labels his poetry as "burdened by feelings of decadence."<sup>188</sup> Others were lauded for their compatibility with socialist thinking – the poet Nicolas Guillen was a member of the Cuban Communist party, and even an Englishman like Shelley produced a treatise on atheism, which may have lent an air

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<sup>186</sup> M. Gorky, et al., *The Art and Craft of Writing*. trans. Alex Miller (Honolulu: University Press of the Pacific, 2000), 10.

<sup>187</sup> D. MacFadyen, *Red Stars: Personality and the Soviet Popular Song, 1955-1991* (Montreal & Kingston, London, Ithaca: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2001), 43.

<sup>188</sup> V. Briusov, I. Erenburg, A. Danchich, V.L. Orlov, N. Shults, and N. Tsvetaeva., "Voloshin Maximilian Aleksandrovich." *Great Soviet Encyclopedia Online*. <http://bse.sci-lib.com/article006405.html>, accessed 09 February 2015.



of legitimacy to the composer's choice (even though the text in question is a personal and intimate one lamenting the dangers of separation from a lover). Still other poetic candidates – like the Chinese poet Du Fu – never made it onto the album at all, as Tukhmanov explains, precisely due to political considerations.<sup>189</sup> Ultimately, even the inclusion of Anna Akhmatova, modernist poetess of the Silver Age and one of the most acclaimed writers in the Russian canon, came not too long after her work was finally able to be published in the USSR without major censorship.

The poetic tradition – like classical music – was extremely valorized in the Soviet Union, and a popular song's alleged worth was frequently judged by its lyrical content, i.e., whether or not its lyrics could be considered “poetry.” Tukhmanov took this challenge one step further and set his music to pre-existing and often canonical poetry, always chosen strategically. Here, as elsewhere, he toes the line in terms of what is conventional, what is merely allowed, and whatever is a potential or current challenge to the status quo. Put simply, he again locates himself between policy and privacy – and the concept of an album unified by lyrical themes from well-known poets maps the realm in which this tug-of-war takes place.

Tukhmanov's conceptual decisions are almost a caricature of prog rock's usual aspirations to high art. A listener knowing little about music or unfamiliar with the composer's specific reference points might notice instead a catalog of lofty verse and instruments associated with a symphonic orchestra. Even the record cover (Figure 2.4) attempts to present itself as classical in tone, using drawings of musicians playing an upright bass or a piano, together with a Greek statue. In this regard, prog rock was really the optimal Western genre to flourish in the USSR, in spirit rather than in name – and Tukhmanov successfully matched its values of

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<sup>189</sup> Cheliaev.

technical virtuosity, keyboard-centrism, classical references, and academicism to the values propagated by 1970s Soviet society. In *OWMM*, he obscured potentially objectionable content and helped it to slip through the growing cracks of Soviet bureaucracy.

**Figure 2.4, Front and back cover of OWMM**



### **Concept Album with a Russian Accent**

Of course, the choice to set classical poetry to popular music creates some interesting tension between text and sound. Let us briefly discuss one of the tracks on the album: a setting of Goethe's 1775 poem "Neue Liebe, neues Leben" to music that can only be classified as funk. This early Goethe work was set by Ludwig van Beethoven as part of an 1809 song cycle (6 *Gesänge*, op. 75), so Tukhmanov's choice of text carries with it not only the literary associations of Goethe's heady lyricism, but also a nod to *the* canonical Romantic composer. Thematically in keeping with the rest of the album, this poem paints a vivid picture of the narrator's internal state

– in this case, a perturbed lover pleading with his own heart to release him from all-consuming passion. The song begins with a clean, percussive rhythm guitar part, which after a few bars is followed by a bass line strongly emphasizing the downbeat and complementary percussion.<sup>190</sup> Aside from slight idiosyncrasies in the mix, the first twenty seconds of the song broadcast several American funk signifiers loud and clear.<sup>191</sup>

Once the voice enters, however, things change. Despite the fact that Aleksandr Lerman – former front-man of VIA Vesëlye Rebyata (“The Jolly Fellows”) – is singing in Russian, a savvy listener would still recognize a pastiche. For one, his voice is evidently classically trained; he is not attempting to imitate the percussive, stylized singing manner found in American funk. As the song continues, a similar issue permeates the background music as well. The punctuating brass and wailing back-up singers, although frequently found in “authentic” funk music, sound too polished and premeditated. These tiny inaccuracies or oddities render the song a witty translation rather than any direct or crude imitation of funk – one that may, perhaps, have already aped another Soviet group such as the jazz-rock ensemble Arsenal.<sup>192</sup> In terms of text, although themes of tortured love and romantic braggadocio are almost de rigeur in US funk, Tukhmanov leaves the refrain in its original German. He then inserts a baroque interlude complete with

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<sup>190</sup> D. Tukhmanov, “Herz mein Herz,” *Po volne moei pamyati* (Melodiya, 1976). The album version of the track can be heard here: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=h6kD9EJiuxw>. The highly compressed sound quality of this YouTube video is not a feature of the track as it is found on the LP.

<sup>191</sup> Funk – similar to progressive rock – had an interesting liminal existence in the USSR. Closely tied with jazz and also film music, it flourished in the peripheral republics such as Armenia, Georgia, and Azerbaijan, as well as the historically more liberal Baltic nations of Lithuania, Latvia, and Estonia. There is currently no scholarship done on funk in the USSR; however, more and more journalistic/blog writing is starting to appear addressing the issue: <http://www.redbullmusicacademy.com/magazine/funk-archaeology-russia>.

<sup>192</sup> For autobiographical information and retrospective analysis, see the personal website of Arsenal founder Aleksei Kozlov: <http://alexeykozlov.com/>. Kozlov is author of *Jazzist* (2011), *Rok glazami dhazmena* [Rock through the Eyes of a Jazz Musician], (2008), and other books documenting his experience in Arsenal.

Penny Lane-style trumpet solo (beginning at 2:03 in the album version). Tukhmanov is free and easy with his musical quotations; he plays even looser with general sonic references. Rarely does he seem interested in pairing the music with an “appropriate” text.

These observations invite a number of additional questions about reception. What does it mean for so many musical signifiers to challenge a listener so rapidly, all detached from their original contexts? As David Metzger points out:

When a musician borrows from a piece, he or she draws upon not only a melody but also the cultural associations of that piece. Just as with a melody, a musician can work and transform those associations. Those manipulations provide a means to comment on cultural topics and to reconfigure fundamental cultural relationships.<sup>193</sup>

Tukhmanov’s hyperactive borrowing results in a barrage of cultural associations. How much of this music, though, was geared toward (or received by) knowing listeners, and how much of it was meant for the naïve Soviet ear? As Metzger argues, “Once the borrowing is evoked, the exchange between the original and new work central to cultural agency begins. *That exchange, of course, can start only if the listener can recognize the quotation.*”<sup>194</sup> Although we cannot know for sure how high listener competence was across the USSR, it is almost certain that recognition ran the gamut from virtually naïve to fully comprehending.<sup>195</sup>

Our chosen theory of living and working *vnye* – in the liminal spaces found between the cracks of officialdom – is reflected here in a number of ways. As we have seen, David Tukhmanov and his contemporaries borrow constantly from Western pop and rock. Yet his

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<sup>193</sup> D. Metzger, *Quotation and Cultural Meaning in Twentieth-Century Music (New Perspectives in Music History and Criticism)* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2003), 2.

<sup>194</sup> *Ibid.*, 8. Emphasis mine.

<sup>195</sup> For more on the notion of listener competence, see Kofi Agawu’s *Playing With Signs: A Semiotic Interpretation of Classic Music* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1991).

creative output – perhaps by necessity – is less dictated by those foreign influences than that of the amateur bands (“*bit gruppy*”/“beat groups”) of the 1960s and the underground rock scene of the 1980s. Tukhmanov also draws upon established canonical poetry from Western Europe or further afield, yet prefers retrospective, lyrical narratives. This Soviet take on the genres of both European rock and poetry clearly displays a Russian accent – for reception in a profoundly Russian setting. By way of these intricate, local, and perhaps paradoxical tactics, *OWMM* remains a strong example of personal expression in a realm where such desires were complicated (although clearly not made impossible) by approved values and social structures.

Ultimately, the album’s radical exploration of Western texts and genres struck a chord with audiences. The album remains popular today; in fact, it was remastered and reissued on CD in 2005. One example of this enduring importance comes from Petrozavodsk native Viktor Shubin. He informed me of his experience working in a music store there in the early 2000s: “There was an unflagging demand for this disc, even though it cost about 1.5 times as much as a standard issue. [Before it was republished], people still remembered this album, ordered it, and tried to keep it in their collections as much as possible... Then it was reissued and everyone bought that version.”<sup>196</sup> Many young listeners have expressed a positive reaction to the album as well; contemporary Russian electronic musician Kornei Kapus has told me that upon discovering this album in today’s Moscow, a number of his DJ friends “gleefully picked this work of art to pieces” for their work as beatmakers.<sup>197</sup> Reception among Western listeners, however, remains mixed – a 2009 post on the music blog *Mutant Sounds* describes the album as a “cavalcade...of Rocky Horror Picture Show camp, blaring big band themes, cop show orchestral funk, weepy

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<sup>196</sup> Personal communication with the author via e-mail, 20 October 2011.

<sup>197</sup> *Ibid.*

baladeering, whizzing synths and varying shades of strident power folk.” The blog then recommends, “If your good taste in bad taste has reached an advanced stage, look no further...”<sup>198</sup> Tukhmanov’s desire to escape a state register sometimes appears frantic to Western ears.

It may be tempting for Western listeners to see the appropriation of prog as an act of resistance against an oppressive regime. In a 2003 interview with the NY-based newspaper *Russian Bazaar*, Tukhmanov saw matters in a humbler fashion: “There was nothing dissident about the album, the record just didn’t fit into the [official] standards of the time.”<sup>199</sup> This ambivalence is extremely characteristic of both the problems and *possibilities* created by living in an authoritarian state. After all, as Russian music studies scholar Peter Schmelz writes, “no music in the Soviet Union was allowed to be just music.”<sup>200</sup> Additionally, as Susan McClary and Rob Walser once reminded us in the late 1980s as the Soviet Union was starting to unravel: “Rock is a discourse that has frequently been at its most effective politically when its producers and consumers are least aware of any political or intellectual dimensions.”<sup>201</sup>

Because of Tukhmanov’s complex relationship with the regime, operating between subservience and subversion, his music is rarely included in serious or scholarly discourses of Russian rock. These tend to focus instead on more “underground” musicians who were openly opposed to authority. For that community, “the Soviet state was seen as an enemy, and Soviet

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<sup>198</sup> “David Tukhmanov-Po volne moei pamiati (On the Wave of My Memory), LP, 1975, Russia,” *Mutant Sounds* (29 July 2009), accessed 28 December 2014. <<http://mutant-sounds.blogspot.com/2009/07/david-tukhmanov-on-wave-of-my-memory-lp.html>>

<sup>199</sup> Nuzov.

<sup>200</sup> P. Schmelz, *Such Freedom, If Only Musical: Unofficial Soviet Music During the Thaw* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2009), 134.

<sup>201</sup> S. McClary & R. Walser, “Start Making Sense:’ Musicology Wrestles with Rock,” *On Record: Rock, Pop and the Written Word*, ed. Simon Frith and Andrew Goodwin (London: Routledge, 1970), 277-92.

mass culture was seen as an alien culture.”<sup>202</sup> As we saw amid the observations of Artemy Troitsky, this nationally famous critic remains horrified at the idea of calling anything David Tukhmanov ever produced “rock.” His views are both Moscow-centric and as elitist or exclusive as the state genres he once opposed. Ironically, as Groys points out, “Such an unreflective, oppositional stance was, incidentally, easily integrated into the Manichean worldview of the official Soviet ideology, which reserved a special place for its enemies, but not for an outside spectator.”<sup>203</sup> As I have demonstrated, there are certainly ways in which this music aligns with other music considered “rock” both in Russia and elsewhere. So – harkening back to Allan Moore – if we were to ask *how* David Tukhmanov created this music, one reasonable answer might be “in a progressive rock style, with a Russian accent.” The answer to the other question – *what* is the music doing, and *why* – seems infinitely more complicated.

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<sup>202</sup> B. Groys, “The Other Gaze: Russian Unofficial Art’s View of the Soviet World,” *Postmodernism and the Postsocialist Condition: Politicized Art under Late Socialism*, ed. A. Ervajec (Berkeley & Los Angeles: University of California Press, 2003), 57.

<sup>203</sup> *Ibid.*

### **CHAPTER 3**

## **PEOPLE SING WHEN THEY'RE HAPPY: POPULAR MUSIC ON THE SOVIET SCREEN**

### **Introduction**

Visual media such as film and television in the Soviet Union – like other state-supported forms of artistic expression and communication – needed to be accessible to a young demographic while simultaneously running parallel with state ideology. As we have seen in Chapter One, songwriters of *estrada* (Soviet popular music) had their own tactics for ensuring continuous official patronage while keeping the youth engaged and entertained. A similar balance took place in the cinematic world, where directors worked with carefully chosen composers to inject much-needed popular song – and hence, a more appealing youthful affect – into on-screen narratives. In this chapter, we will examine how *estrada* functioned in two of the most popular Soviet films of the 1970s (and arguably, of all time): *The Twelve Chairs* (*Двенадцать стульев*, 1971, dir. Leonid Gaidai) and *The Irony of Fate, or Enjoy Your Bath!* (*Ирония судьбы, или с легким паром!*, 1975, dir. El'dar Riazanov). The inclusion of popular music served to make Soviet films an appealing alternative to coveted Western movies, but also to personalize cinematic experience in an era where the intimate began to overtake the grand. Through an exploration of *estrada* composers, performers, and the directors who worked with them, I aim to shed light on the role of popular music in both comedic and tragicomic Soviet films of the 1970s.

Due to their wantonly public nature, popular music and cinema often stand apart from other, more private, forms of creative expression. Whereas literary figures of the USSR could self-publish and distribute controversial works with relative ease through the grassroots practice



of *samizdat*, those relying upon more technologically nuanced means of production – say, vinyl or celluloid – were obligated to collaborate with the state. They needed access to production equipment and other distribution resources. As Olga Klimova writes in her dissertation on Brezhnev-era youth films:

Literature under Brezhnev did not entirely suffocate from censorship, because it had other outlets besides official, state-approved publishing resources. Writers and poets had an opportunity to publish their unorthodox works either through *samizdat*, represented in the underground literary journal *Metropol'* and other unofficial publications, or *tamizdat* (publication and distribution of literary works abroad). Unlike their literary counterparts, however, filmmakers had to depend on the state system's financial support and resources.<sup>204</sup>

This meant that – much like state-sponsored *estrada* – Soviet films had to appear acceptable to official organs while also managing to appeal to the average citizen. Yet as we shall see, despite this necessary reliance on the state, filmmakers in the 1970s were able to foster genuine connections with young viewers, illustrate officially desired ways of dealing with trauma, and carve out space for intimacy even on the big screen.

For many years in Soviet cinematography, “freedoms” were relative, a matter of “wiggle room” rather than complete creative license. In fact, socialist cinema was frequently subject to a double process of censorship since filmmakers had to comply with the requirements and resolutions of both the State Committee for Cinematography (Goskino) and the official censorship organ (Glavlit).<sup>205</sup> Thus, restrictions in filmmaking had a more centralized and unforgiving structure or stricture than other cultural sectors, with “a furcated network of

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<sup>204</sup> O. Klimova, “Soviet Youth Films Under Brezhnev: Watching Between the Lines,” (PhD diss., University of Pittsburgh, 2013), 89.

<sup>205</sup> This organization's full name was the General Directorate for the Protection of State Secrets in the Press, and it was responsible for preventing publication of information that could compromise state secrets in printed matter as well as in television and film broadcasting.

inspectors... which perform[ed] control over a film's demonstration and [the] expunging of prohibited films."<sup>206</sup> Knowing of these problems in advance, filmmakers sometimes tended toward self-censorship during the production process. As Klimova explains with regard to post-Thaw developments:

One of the main characteristics of Soviet censorship during the last two decades of Soviet power [1971-1991] included its tendency to rely on thorough editorial corrections, which also partially functioned as ideological cleansing methods. Film censorship during the Brezhnev period can be divided into external methods (coming from the official censoring organs) and internal methods, initiated by editors or film directors themselves in order to have their films released and widely distributed in the Soviet Union. Recommendations coming from such authoritative organs as the Committee of State Security (the KGB) or the Ministry of Internal Affairs (the MVD) also affected this internal self-censorship, though the participation of these two organizations was concealed: most of the suggestions, recommendations, and requests for banning films were often made over the telephone or in private meetings.<sup>207</sup>

This existence of a dynamic, multi-tiered censorship system necessarily affected the way in which films were conceived, produced, and distributed – whether for popular figures such as Gaidai and Riazanov, or cinematographers making more peripheral and cerebral films, such as Andrei Tarkovskiy.<sup>208</sup> As we shall see in the latter part of this chapter, poetry served as an important locus of meaning for both camps, but it was the well-known, comedic filmmakers for whom *estrada* played an important role – both in creative expression and connection with nationwide audiences. The movies discussed in this chapter demonstrate how music could fit into a complex and multi-faceted relationship between creative liberty, genuine popularity, and the

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<sup>206</sup> V.S. Golovskoy, *Behind the Screen: The Motion-Picture Industry in the USSR, 1972-1982* (Ann Arbor: Ardis, 1986), 158.

<sup>207</sup> Klimova, 59-60.

<sup>208</sup> For an account of how music composition and technology figured into Tarkovskiy's films, see D. Beer's "Solaris and the ANS Synthesizer: On the Relations Between Tarkovsky, Artemiev and Music Technology," *Through the Mirror. Reflections on the films of Andrei Tarkovsky* (Newcastle: Cambridge Scholars Press, 2006).

watchful eye of the state. In both of our chosen films, we will see how – and for what purposes – *estrada* was used both diegetically and non-diegetically. I will specifically highlight and examine the role of the composer, represented here by Aleksandr Zatsepin and Mikail Tariverdiev in the Gaidai and Riazanov movies, respectively. We will then explore some of the cinematic and musical tactics that emerged in the complicated nexus between composer, director, and text (between sound, vision, and speech). These brief readings of two incredibly popular Soviet pictures will allow us to glimpse the kinds of expressive possibilities filmmakers were able to carve out in a sphere where they still relied on the government for most, if not all, of their resources.

First, however, I'd like to introduce the importance of reception – in other words, the matter of what these films meant for their intended audiences. Cinema, as elsewhere around the globe, was an important influence in the socialization and communicative development of young people during the 1970s. As Sergei Zhuk reports:

According to the All-Union survey of *Sovetskii ekran*'s [Soviet Cinema] readers younger than fourteen years old, Soviet middle and high school students were the most active consumers of movies. In the year 1972-73, almost half these readers watched ten to thirty films monthly. Almost 30 percent of the young filmgoers watched two films per day on television, and a half of these visited a movie theater once or twice a week.<sup>209</sup>

As in the *estrada* music scene, so Soviet fans of cinema enjoyed this art form in order to imagine an idealized and fetishized West. In 1973 alone, Soveksportsfilm – the federal agency in charge of acquiring and distributing foreign films – bought more than 150 feature films from seventy countries. Some, like the wildly popular Czech movie *Lemonade Joe*, came from closer to home. Yet the most sought-after films were American, British, or West German (*My Darling*

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<sup>209</sup> S. Zhuk, *Rock and Roll in the Rocket City: The West, Identity, and Ideology in Soviet Dniepropetrovsk, 1960-1985* (Washington, D.C., Woodrow Wilson Center Press, 2010), 125.

*Clementine* [1946], *Mackenna's Gold* [1969], and *The Sons of Great Mother Bear* [1966] were popular around this time).<sup>210</sup> Although this foreign influence worried Soviet ideologists – KGB operatives “constantly complained about the negative role of ‘films from the West’ that ‘transformed a spiritual world’ of the Soviet youth and ‘polluted the pure soul of the Soviet child with alien ideas and dangerous expectations’”<sup>211</sup> – younger audiences were enthused. Movie theaters and cinematic culture as a whole, involving both foreign and homegrown features, attracted an enormously wide and cross generational demographic. Cinema attendance under Brezhnev was universally high.

On the home front, the best-received movies tended to be adventurous and lighthearted.<sup>212</sup> The eccentric comedies of Leonid Gaidai and El'dar Riazanov – the two directors of this chapter – became enormously popular. In his study of the latter filmmaker, David MacFadyen provides a comprehensive and sensitive analysis of how and why El'dar Riazanov's films appealed to such a tremendous audience Union-wide:

Sometimes film and dogma overlap, sometimes they diverge. The common ground they have is...one of sentiment and affect... Riazanov's films attempt to create a smaller, better version of social relations, some of which they see in society already, some of which they do not.<sup>213</sup>

The import of these works can still be felt today: Gaidai's 1969 comedic film *The Diamond Arm*, which sold over 76 million tickets, would go on to become the third most popular Soviet film

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<sup>210</sup> These numbers are taken from ticket sales as reported by Sergei Zhuk.

<sup>211</sup> Zhuk, 126.

<sup>212</sup> See E.A. Pichugin, *Kinoprokat v Rossii*, (St. Petersburg: Tabula Rasa), 8. PDF accessed at [http://www.pichugin.com/files/53\\_Эдуард\\_Пичугин\\_Кинопрокат\\_в\\_России.pdf](http://www.pichugin.com/files/53_Эдуард_Пичугин_Кинопрокат_в_России.pdf).

<sup>213</sup> D. MacFadyen, *The Sad Comedy of El'dar Riazanov: An Introduction to Russia's Most Popular Filmmaker*, (Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2003), 236.

ever.<sup>214</sup> These wildly successful homegrown comedies were able to hold their own in a domain where anything foreign was potentially more interesting to Soviet citizens. In practice, these disparate demands led to an odd situation where audiences could watch a German film about Native Americans, a U.S. Western, and a Soviet comedy on the same day – sometimes in the same theater. So how did our chosen musical comedies manage both to get state approval *and* hold Hollywood at bay?

### **Soviet Laughter, Soviet Tears**

As we saw with *estrada* – and even canonical Soviet Socialist Realism discussed in Chapter One – narratives meant different things in different periods of Soviet life. Soviet literature always deemed itself “socialist” and “realist,” yet the meanings and manner of storytelling changed enormously over the years. In the movie world, “proper” comedy would shift between Khrushchev and Brezhnev from an introspective, verbally dexterous mode into more physical, knockabout forms. That same shift colors the mid-career films of Leonid Gaidai (1923-1993) such as *Operation Y and Shurik’s Other Adventures* (1965), *Kidnapping Caucasian Style* (1966), and the aforementioned *The Diamond Arm* (1969).

In addition to – and perhaps in spite of – this move toward a more physical style of comedy, many pictures in Soviet cinema (including the ones listed above) relied on subtler Aesopian strategies culled from literature.<sup>215</sup> These came in different flavors: allegory, parody, periphrasis, ellipsis, quotation, shift, *reductio ad absurdum* and *non sequitur*. Film, of course,

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<sup>214</sup> Zhuk, 125.

<sup>215</sup> L. Loseff, *On the Beneficence of Censorship: Aesopian Language in Modern Russian Literature* (Munich: Otto Sagner, 1984), 61.

reimagined these techniques as part and parcel of its own signifying system; an allegory could be communicated through montage, camera angles, intertitles, choice of actors – and, of course, diegetic and non-diegetic music and sounds. But before we consider the soundscapes of Gaidai's feature *The Twelve Chairs*, we should consider the basic relationship between its screenplay and visual comedy of the period.

By the early 1970s, Il'f and Petrov's 1928 novel *The Twelve Chairs* had already been adapted multiple times for the screen by directors worldwide, starting with a 1933 Czech adaptation, followed by two Anglophone versions, a 1954 production from Sweden, a Cuban film from 1962, and others. Even American director Mel Brooks, famous for film farces and comedic parodies, adapted the Odessan authors' classic satire in 1970.<sup>216</sup> Published at the tail end of NEP (Lenin's briefly capitalist New Economic Policy), the book and its sequel, *The Golden Calf*, "were an instant and nearly universal hit" with Soviet audiences and beyond.<sup>217</sup> Even though the novel's narrative relies heavily on its politically unique setting – post-revolutionary Russia of the late 1920s – a core theme of human greed easily transcended nationality and cultural specificity, making it easy to adapt to multiple marketplaces.

The story itself can be sketched as follows. A hunt for pre-revolutionary treasure hidden from the Bolsheviks in the upholstery of some furniture, *The Twelve Chairs* is framed by the relationship of its two central characters. Entrepreneurial and street-smart Ostap Bender is referred to as "the great operator." He cunningly partners with former nobleman Ippolit "Kisa" Vorobianinov in search of the treasure, originally concealed in the chairs by Vorobianinov's

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<sup>216</sup> *The Twelve Chairs*, dir. Mel Brooks (Universal Marion Corporation, 1970).

<sup>217</sup> M. Vinokour, "Books of Laughter and Forgetting: Satire and Trauma in the Novels of Il'f and Petrov," *Slavic Review* 74.2 (2015), 334. The reach of this literary occurrence can be measured even today: a 1997 *Dictionary of Modern Quotations* contains "171 phrases from the two novels" and ranks "Il'f and Petrov second only to Mayakovsky in their influence on the language of twentieth-century Russia."

mother-in-law. Simultaneously, a priest who had heard her deathbed confession also begins searching for the jewels, becoming the duo's main rival in a screwball comedy pursuit of riches.

**Figure 3.1, Sergei Filippov and Archil Gomiashvili in Gaidai's The Twelve Chairs**



At first glance, the novel can easily be read as subversive, satirizing Soviet institutions through a parodic portrayal of their flaws and contradictions. The main characters – a smooth conman, a hapless former nobleman, and a corrupt priest – are all unsavory, ‘anti-Soviet’ people in their own dark ways. Yet the reader is invited to commiserate with each of the heroes as they meet their grim fates, one by one. Insanity awaits the avaricious Father Fyodor; poverty and ignominy will face the once-illustrious Vorobianinov; and the trickster Ostap is brutally murdered at the end of the tale. As Maya Vinokour points out: “[A] former nobleman with a

seedy prerevolutionary history, Ippolit Matveevich Vorobianinov is a particularly inappropriate object of compassion.”<sup>218</sup>

Most of the secondary protagonists we meet, like the “bashful thief” Al’khen who cannot control his kleptomania, are disrespectful of the Soviet state they simultaneously pervert and uphold. A minor figure in *The Golden Calf* – a sane man who feigns lunacy in order to escape that very system – demonstrates this irreverence: “In Soviet Russia, the only place where a normal person can live is an insane asylum.”<sup>219</sup> With related statements such as this, Il’f and Petrov’s creations “not only failed to attract widespread accolades but actually endured significant critique – from a negative review in a 1928 issue of *Evening Moscow* to official censure in 1948.”<sup>220</sup>

An initially lukewarm critical reception notwithstanding, the novels were widely read and frequently republished, ultimately achieving canonical status in the annals of Russian literature. Despite first appearances, a deeper analysis of *The Twelve Chairs* and its sequel reveals potential pro-regime readings of the work. In 1957, for instance, the authors were lauded for their tireless efforts to unmask the “enemies of socialism” using “unifying” laughter as a “weapon of war.”<sup>221</sup> In the same way that unsavory elements of Gaidai’s *The Diamond Arm* (bourgeois foreign ideologies, corrupt Soviet criminals) were tolerated because of a positive denouement, Il’f and Petrov made sure that – despite any sympathetic characters – their masterpiece concluded in an

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<sup>218</sup> Vinokour, 338.

<sup>219</sup> I. Il’f and E. Petrov, *The Golden Calf*, trans. H. Anderson and K. Gurevich (Rochester, N.Y.: Open Letter), 157.

<sup>220</sup> Vinokour, 334.

<sup>221</sup> L. Gurovich, “Il’f i Petrov, satiriki,” *Voprosy literatury* 4 (1957): 110-39.



ideologically satisfying way. The tale ended with something critics could understand, most citizens didn't mind, and dissidents could overlook. According to Vinokour's recent analysis:

[Il'f and Petrov] owe their position in the Soviet canon to the nature of their humor, which refers to, but discourages dwelling on, the trauma Soviet citizens suffered during and after the revolution. By encouraging readers to laugh in this way – not *through* tears but, as it were, *in their stead* – Il'f and Petrov helped create a specifically Soviet type of laughter, one that used trauma in the service of social discipline. Thus, Soviet laughter can be understood as an integral tool in the management of a specifically Soviet collective trauma.<sup>222</sup>

The authors' contribution to Stalinist laughter *instead* of tears helped shape a distinct comedic style, not to mention a specifically Soviet discourse of distress (and a path toward healing).<sup>223</sup> One facet of this so-called “sad comedy” can be seen in Il'f and Petrov's treatment of time, which Vinokour explicitly argues “enacts the folding of trauma into laughter.”<sup>224</sup> The plot develops at breakneck speed, which “inhibits the reader's ability to dwell on any single traumatic moment or episode for long. Instead, the references are immersed in a kinetic narrative that will not stop until its antiheroes are destroyed, or at least harshly chastised.”<sup>225</sup> Official Soviet literature was built upon “progressive” structures in which time passed from the hero's ignorance to enlightenment. Time's movement was deliberate and constructive – with no surprises. Il'f and Petrov's rapid, dizzying vision of accelerated and unpredictable time stands counter to that

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<sup>222</sup> Vinokour, 336.

<sup>223</sup> Like Vinokour and Kevin M. F. Platt, I believe one needs to go beyond traditional trauma theory and its psychoanalytic approaches in order to fully understand Soviet collective trauma. This functionalist approach to trauma allows it instead to be constructed as a social object in public discourse. In this way, the Soviet government tended to portray collective trauma as a test of the self or the group, which then acted as a founding trauma, forming the basis for an individual and/or collective identity. For more information on this approach, see K.M.F. Platt, *Terror and Greatness: Ivan and Peter as Russian Myths* (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 2011).

<sup>224</sup> Vinokour, 350.

<sup>225</sup> *Ibid.*

framework. Brought to life by director Leonid Gaidai, Il’f and Petrov’s onscreen tale relied on popular composer Aleksandr Zatsepin to create a meticulously constructed soundscape that reflected this notion of laughing “not *through* tears but, as it were, *in their stead*.”<sup>226</sup>

### **Filmmaker Meets Composer**

Unlike many of the other film adaptations, Gaidai’s 1971 *The Twelve Chairs* is relatively faithful to the original text. A feature in two parts, it paired a beloved story with a comedic director who was quickly coming to prominence and winning the admiration of the Soviet public. The pairing was a good fit; the novel – a treasure trove of winks and nods, designed for a shrewd audience.<sup>227</sup> Gaidai many times admitted this was his favorite movie, and that to dramatize this story was “the dream of his entire life” – which he fulfilled after Georgian director Georgiy Danelia backed out in the development stage.<sup>228</sup>

Born in the USSR’s far eastern region of Amur Oblast in 1923, Leonid Gaidai remains one of the best-loved and fondly remembered Soviet filmmakers. After sustaining a serious landmine injury during World War II, Gaidai attended the Moscow Institute of Cinematography.<sup>229</sup> A few years after graduation, he became famous through inclusion of his short film “Barbos the Dog and an Unusual Cross-Country Race” (Пес Барбос и необычный кросс) in a 1961 anthology. In this collection, titled *Absolutely Serious* (Совершенно серьезно),

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<sup>226</sup> Ibid., 336.

<sup>227</sup> For instance, there is an entire Russian-language dissertation on real and satirical brands in Il’f and Petrov’s novels. See A.A. Murenkova, “Brendy istinnye i khudozhestvennye v romanakh I. Il’fa i E. Petrova” (PhD diss., Voronezh State University, 2005).

<sup>228</sup> F. Razzakov, *Chtoby liudi pomnili* (Moscow: Eksmo, 2004). Kindle version.

<sup>229</sup> Ibid.

he shared the bill with El'dar Riazanov and other up-and-coming screenwriters and directors. His contribution to this collection starred a celebrated trio of crooks called Coward (Трус, played by Georgiy Vitsyn), Bonehead (Балбес, played by Yuriy Nikulin), and Experienced (Бывалый, played by Evgeniy Morgunov). The members of this comical troika eventually became legendary antiheroes in Gaidai's other films. In this same decade, Gaidai collaborated primarily with comic actors from his own group, including his wife, Nina Grebeshkova. The early 1970s then saw him both enhance his physically comic style, and help an adaptation of Il'f and Petrov's novel take shape.

**Figure 3.2, A young Leonid Gaidai**



Getting the project off the ground was not easy; Gaidai auditioned twenty-two actors for the role of Ostap Bender, before settling on Georgian actor Archil Gomiashvili only after two others attempted the role unsuccessfully. Actress Liubov' Tishchenko recounts that Sergei Filippov, originally cast as Kisa, was fighting brain cancer at the beginning of filming; there was much confusion about who would ultimately play the part. He was adamant about continuing with the project, however, so his double tactfully bowed out, instead taking on the voice of the off-screen narrator.<sup>230</sup> Planning, preparing, and filming such a big venture was no easy task – hence, Gaidai stuck with familiar composer Aleksandr Zatsepin in a formula that had previously worked wonders in his other commercially successful films such as *The Diamond Arm*.

**Figure 3.3, A young Aleksandr Zatsepin**



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<sup>230</sup> S. Ivanitskiy, “Aktrisa Liubov’ Tishchenko: <<Kogda Sergei Filippov umer...>>” *Fakty i kommentarii* (24 April 2010).

Aleksandr Zatsepin (b. 1926), active as a film composer from the late 1950s to the early 1990s, provided the soundtracks to over thirty Soviet films. Among these are all of the Gaidai comedies mentioned earlier, including *The Twelve Chairs*. This enduring and productive partnership began when Gaidai's previous collaboration with composer Nikita Bogoslovskiy (*Bootleggers* [Самогонщики], 1961) suffered irreconcilable differences.<sup>231</sup> This comedic short featured the aforementioned trio of Coward, Bonehead, and Experienced that would go on to even greater fame in later Gaidai films; the heroes endured, but a professional relationship did not. For his next film, *Operation Y and Shurik's Other Adventures* (1965), the director – with reported skepticism – chose Aleksandr Zatsepin. After its box office success, the two men worked together on every one of Gaidai's comedies up until the director's death in 1993.<sup>232</sup>

Zatsepin was eager to embrace technology in his craft, having fashioned his own cassette player while at conservatory in Alma-Ata in the mid-1950s. At the time cassette players were only available professionally. He ultimately constructed the only non-governmental recording studio in the USSR, where such famous pop and jazz singers as Alla Pugachova and Larisa Dolina would get their start. While working on his first collaboration with Gaidai, Zatsepin constructed a two-track stereo recorder, specifically for working in film.<sup>233</sup> When asked why he – as an “official” composer with access to state resources – still preferred to do everything himself and at his own home studio, his answer was as follows:

[The authorities] would only give us a few hours for the entire recording. There was no time to do serious, complicated work – only a few takes with the orchestra, and that's all!

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<sup>231</sup> “Aleksandr Zatsepin: Moia glavnaia muzyka napisana...” *Muzykal'naiia zhizn'* 12 (December 2001): 22.

<sup>232</sup> For more information about Zatsepin's personal and professional life, see his autobiography, *Est' tol'ko mig* (Moscow: Olma-Press, 2003).

<sup>233</sup> A. Vaitsenfeld, “Zvukorezhissura – moia vtoraiia professia” *Zvukorezhissër* 2 (2003).

... In those days, there wasn't anything [in terms of instruments or useful technology] in the government studios. And the manner of recording was antediluvian! Only one microphone for a symphony orchestra! You couldn't even hear the drummer at all – it's as if he wasn't being recorded!<sup>234</sup>

Other projects included building a Mellotron, and even a Theremin due to the lack of electronic instruments in the Soviet Union. Zatsepin recalled a characteristically inventive trick used in *Operation Y* in a 2003 interview for the Russian journal *Audio Engineer*. He remembers recording a tiny bell, and then slowing the tape down eightfold to produce the sound of a funeral knell. “It would have been quite difficult to find a place to record an actual [life-size] bell – we would need to write a load of bureaucratic explanations as to why shooting a comedic film might require the ringing of a church bell.”<sup>235</sup> In short, there were few supplies available for even “authorized” composers and filmmakers. If such tools or trickery were obtainable, a mountain of red tape surrounded them. A DIY attitude could be very valuable; state limitations inspired innovations.

The successful partnership of these two men was reflected in box office takings. Although Zatsepin was an *estrada* composer, his contributions to cinema became well-liked in their own right. Combining popular instruments and dance forms with expressive, romantic leitmotifs, Zatsepin's music helped make movies of this era accessible for a young demographic – while bearing optimistic, ideologically sound messages to its audience. Music such as this served a dual function in Soviet comedic films of the 1970s. First and foremost, it set a sonic backdrop for the action, providing an appropriate ambiance for whatever narrative was to unfold.

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<sup>234</sup> Ibid.

<sup>235</sup> Ibid.

This, too, involved a partnership – and sometimes a compromise – between the composer and director:

Gaidai would mark up the script with comments for the composer: a gallop, a waltz, or a brass band march. My manifestation of these things was different though. Instead of a gallop, I'd use contemporary *estrada* recorded at a sped-up tempo – that would be in the spirit of the film's more playful episodes.<sup>236</sup>

Secondly, original songs written for the film garnered double audiences – both in movie theaters and on transistor radios. Zatsepin was a declared master in both spheres, as we will soon see in our examination of *The Twelve Chairs*.<sup>237</sup> The composer himself confided in 2003:

In one Gaidai feature, I had to do even the titles in a special way. First we did regular ones [for *Operation Y*], but then we had to add rhythm, in order to synchronize them with the music, and then handle special transitions. I recorded a harp in different tonalities, and put a harp glissando at the frame where the titles ended – but in the same key as the music had been. You can't trust a sound effect artist with that. You need to know the music; you need to know the harmony, too.<sup>238</sup>

This illustrates just how involved Aleksandr Zatsepin was in the soundscape of Gaidai's films from the outset. Leonid Gaidai was known as master of the unexpected physical gesture or carnivalesque quip, and Zatsepin was clearly capable of matching the director's eccentricities, frame for frame.

The opening titles of *The Twelve Chairs* (1971) – their fourth film together over six years – were just as intricately planned. The first thing we hear as the famous Mosfilm Studios opening credits begin rolling is a pathetic-sounding trumpet, clearly with a mute, announcing the main theme of the feature. This comic “wah-wah” effect forms a stark contrast to the epic seriousness

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<sup>236</sup> G. Frolov, “Aleksandr Zatsepin: V poiskakh pesni,” *Sovetskiy ekran* (8 October 1981).

<sup>237</sup> *Dvenadtsat' stol'ev*. Dir. L. Gaidai. Mosfil'm, 1971. Part One of the two-series film can be viewed here: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ZNZkUt0ePas>. Part Two can be viewed here: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=GyfgsOO20jU>.

<sup>238</sup> Vaitsenfeld.

of the Socialist Realist sculpture *Worker and Kolkhoz Woman* (Рабочий и колхозница), always used as the Mosfilm logo. We then launch into the slapdash, upbeat opening motif, which I will refer to as the “chase theme.”

Before we hear even a few measures, however, it is abruptly interrupted and we perceive some off-screen chatter and instruments tuning. This gives the very opening of the film an amateurish feeling, well suited to the homespun anti-heroism of Ostap Bender’s saga. These “found sounds” continue for a while, somewhat reminiscent of the Beatles’ “Revolution 9,” with certain sentences such as “Где-то я слышал эту музыку!” (“I have heard this music somewhere before!”) rising above the fray and then looping. Finally, after a successful launch into the chase theme – complete with syllabic singing á la Eduard Khil<sup>239</sup> – the credits finish with a disembodied hand slicing open a chair and exposing its empty innards, springs and all. This image is accompanied by a clearly electronic, “springy” sound – most likely Zatsepin’s own creation – which continues to resonate during the opening shot of Part One, titled “Things Are Moving” (Лед тронулся: literally “The Ice Has Broken”).

The chase theme returns multiple times throughout the film, usually during comic montages, for example when Ostap accidentally dyes Kisa’s thinning hair and moustache in rainbow hues, or when Kisa and Father Fyodor have a fast-motion slapstick punch-up over the first chair.<sup>240</sup> I argue that this theme mirrors the authors’ aforementioned playing with time, encouraging the viewer to laugh *instead* rather than *through* whatever sadness or trauma is

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<sup>239</sup> A popular *estrada* vocalise written by Arkadiy Ostrovskiy in 1966 and notably performed by Eduard Khil in 1976, “I am Glad, Because I’m Finally Coming Back Home” gained worldwide notoriety for its eccentric mouth noises and evident lippsyching when it surfaced in the online community Reddit in 2010. This vocalise, popularly referred to as “Mr. Trololo” and variations thereof, can be viewed here: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=i1EG-MKy4so>.

<sup>240</sup> Its first incidence is from 1:11-2:08 of Part One: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ZNZkUt0ePas>.



reflected on the screen – be it the decrepit body of the aging aristocrat, or a gang of homeless children who serve as Ostap’s assistants. The theme takes the place of “Il’f and Petrov’s benevolent, if autocratic, narrator” who “speeds readers past a series of grotesques meant to evoke, but not unpack, traumatic events.”<sup>241</sup>

This leitmotif begins with a mid-1970s, proto-disco strings sound, and continues in an orchestral or cinematic pop style, highlighting the kinetic and comic narrative. An air of optimistic physicality becomes the sonic essence of Il’f and Petrov’s universe, where trauma “should remain buried beneath a sunny exterior, and the path of history, though it may pass through swamps, leads ultimately toward the light.”<sup>242</sup> Other appearances of the same theme occur in at least three other places: (1) as Ostap is collecting money at the widow’s home for a fictional “Alliance of the Sword and Plowshare”; (2) during a montage on the cruise ship where our heroes have pretended to be artists in order to follow the remaining chairs; and (3) an actual chase scene after Ostap gets kicked out of the Vasiuki Chess Club. All of these uses make light of some grotesque or pathetic situation, employing *estrada* elements as a means of transporting viewers beyond such scenes and making them appear comical, despite the real tragedies upon which they draw.

Another use of *estrada* music appears within the frame, diegetically. The most prominent examples emerge throughout Ostap’s relationship with the wealthy and single Madam Gritsatsuyeva – he performs for her in courting.<sup>243</sup> The tango tells of a love-stricken pirate who commits an act of murder-suicide in a jealous rage. This is meant to pluck at Gritsatsuyeva’s

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<sup>241</sup> Vinokour, 352.

<sup>242</sup> Ibid.

<sup>243</sup> 33:32 in Part One: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ZNZkUt0ePas>.

heartstrings. Some of Zatsepin's film songs became nationwide hits – such as his “Bear Song” [“Песенка о медведях,” 1967] from *Kidnapping Caucasian Style* – but the sheet music for Ostap's tango was never published. Zatsepin assumes “the song probably had some kind of capitalistic flavor...”<sup>244</sup> His comment, accurate or not, demonstrates the composer's constant frustration with external constraints.

In another diegetic use of an *estrada* tradition, Zatsepin has the bride, groom, and guests all dancing the twist at Ostap and Gritsatsuyeva's wedding.<sup>245</sup> He remembers being told that using such music was tantamount to “worshipping the West!”<sup>246</sup> [преклонение перед Западом]. In the same memoir, the composer tells us that he could not call his group a “jazz-orchestra,” even though it played *bona fide* jazz. The group had to be designated as an *estrada* orchestra. In the generic hierarchy of the USSR, jazz had an even more complicated status than homegrown “light” entertainment.<sup>247</sup> Despite the fact that elements of jazz and other Western genres were being incorporated into art music and popular music alike, the term still apparently caused a stir. The irony is, of course, that all this music was of Western provenance – but calling it *estrada* still made it palatable to officials.

I'lf and Petrov satirized social institutions including marriage, theatrical culture, upper economic classes, and ultimately the entire system that tried to curb human greed and selfishness, instead exacerbating it to unthinkable heights of murderous evil. In the 1970s (as for most of the Soviet Union's existence), however, whether a subject or character was perceived as

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<sup>244</sup> Zatsepin, 13.

<sup>245</sup> 42:22 in Part One: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ZNZkUt0ePas>.

<sup>246</sup> Zatespin, 12.

<sup>247</sup> In addition to F. Starr's aforementioned volume, see A. Batashev's *Sovetskiy dhaz: istoricheski ocherk* (Moscow: Muzyka, 1972) for more information on jazz appropriation and reception in the USSR.

taboo – and therefore unsuitable for literary treatment – greatly depended on contextual factors. Those same factors could be mercurial at best and entirely unpredictable at worst. As Gregory Carleton writes: “The value of a given referent (the philistine, criminal activity, daily mishaps, etc.)” remained “substantively neutral before its perception in a literary structure.”<sup>248</sup> Characters and sounds meant little until they were used in a given time and place. Including popular music or morally suspect heroes in a state-sponsored picture was always a balancing act.

Zatsepin spends much time in his recent autobiography talking about frustrating, discouraging censorship and the creative processes.

My musical life constantly had incompetent people squeezing into it, like bulls in a china shop. In Soviet times, this was standard practice. The Composers’ Union, the Writers’ Union, Komsomol, the Party, and other respondent [отзывчивые] organizations all needed to have a say in my work. They wanted to see the music, the arrangement, the poetry, how it is being sung, who is doing the singing...<sup>249</sup>

Ultimately, even *The Twelve Chairs* suffered a related fate – censors cut Ostap’s song “Полосатая жизнь” [“Striped Life”], ostensibly for its ambivalent outlook on life (“our life is like a coin toss / laughter and tears are mixed together / and sometimes it’s baffling / why we love this motley existence [striped life]”).<sup>250</sup> Yet Aleksandr Zatsepin believed that “song in a film should always help the dramaturgy, naturally integrate into the plot, and also emphasize the psychological mood of the action.”<sup>251</sup> Despite his distaste for the Party’s meddling, the composer understood the Soviet principle of laughing *instead* of tears, and he provided appropriately

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<sup>248</sup> G. Carleton, *The Politics of Reception: Critical Constructions of Mikhail Zoshchenko* (Evanston, Illinois: Northwestern University Press), 34.

<sup>249</sup> Zatsepin, 12.

<sup>250</sup> “Aleksandr Zatsepin: Moia glavnaia muzyka napisana...”, 22. The song’s melody still ends up as an instrumental theme in the movie.

<sup>251</sup> Frolov, 8.

lighthearted music. In Vinokour's parlance, cinematic *estrada* acted to normalize tragedy, delight the viewer, and "sublimate mourning into more 'productive' pursuits."<sup>252</sup> Any ambivalence toward – or acknowledgment of – tragedy – was not allowed to exist.

Even "approved" or endorsed composers and filmmakers had trouble negotiating networks of restraint, which were both both created and upheld by the state. Ultimately, however, *estrada*'s role in visualizing Ilf and Petrov aligned with Soviet political orthodoxy by providing a distraction from the genuinely gruesome realities being portrayed. It acted as an entertaining sonic backdrop with just a hint of spoof. Boris Groys underscores that "average Soviet citizens in the post-Stalinist period wanted to live out their lives peacefully and 'as if it all had never happened'... this wish has shaped the face of official and unofficial Soviet art since the last half of the 1950s." The same impulse drives Zatsepin's and Gaidai's pairing of comical *estrada* with both tragicomic and pathetic scenes in *The Twelve Chairs*. The same choice allows viewers the option to live "as if it all had never happened."

### **The Irony of Fate**

Elsewhere, the tragicomic was being handled in different ways. Born in the Southeastern Russian city of Samara, at the time called Kuibyshev, El'dar Riazanov (1927-2015) was – in many ways – the most popular Soviet filmmaker of all time.<sup>253</sup> After suffering a somewhat fragmented family life in his childhood, Riazanov attended the All-Union State Institute of

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<sup>252</sup> Vinokour, 353.

<sup>253</sup> In long-running journal *Sovetskiy Ekran*'s annual popular votes, taking place from 1957-1991, Riazanov's films won "Best Film of the Year" more than any other director's for a total of five times (the film under discussion here taking the first of those in 1976), and a Riazanov comedy (*Sluzhebnyi Roman*, 1978) was the only picture to receive all three of the journal's awards at once: Best Film of the Year, Best Actor, and Best Actress.

Cinematography (now the Gerasimov Institute of Cinematography, or VGIK), where he came under the influence of figures such as Sergei Eisenstein.

**Figure 3.4, El 'dar Riazanov (R), in a signature cameo from Irony of Fate (1975)**



His first feature film, *Carnival Night* (*Карнавальная ночь*, 1955), was a celebration of the “complexities of contemporary life.”<sup>254</sup> It is often called the first comedy of the Thaw. From the outset, popular music was a large part of the director’s *modus operandi*, helping create “the necessary (safe) bridge between comedy and the Party elite, between government and disrespectful giggles.”<sup>255</sup> This story of students producing a New Year’s Ball, replete with songs and skits of various genres, openly referenced the Western musical or variety show and – like *The Twelve Chairs* – gained great approval from audiences and critics alike despite its potential air of subversion. Soon thereafter, Riazanov made what remains in some ways the most beloved

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<sup>254</sup> MacFadyen, 55.

<sup>255</sup> Ibid.

Soviet movie of all time, the responses to which “helped to institutionalize the film like no other Soviet comedy in the twentieth century.”<sup>256</sup>

This particular Soviet feature took place in a world where Khrushchev’s decree, “On Architectural Excess,” had already brought into being industrialized construction in place of grand Stalinist architecture. *The Irony of Fate, or Enjoy Your Bath!* (1975) stars a Woody Allen-like anti-hero in a love story unlikely to occur outside of the standardized building projects of those post-Stalin years. Although *The Irony of Fate* is a romantic comedy, it is also “a story of ugly architecture, of the Thaw’s box-like concrete apartments, not Stalin’s palatial edifices.”<sup>257</sup> In this haphazard tale, a drunken night at a Moscow bathhouse sends a timid doctor to the wrong city for New Year’s Eve, causing the breakup of two romances and engendering an unlikely new one.

The main premise of the movie is that Moscow and Leningrad – like so many other Soviet metropolises – contained not only similarly named streets and addresses, but also identically planned and constructed buildings and entire city blocks.<sup>258</sup> Everywhere looked the same. After overindulging in vodka while celebrating his new engagement, instead of sending him back home to ring in the New Year with his fiancée, Zhenya Lukashin’s friends confuse him with another compatriot and escort the slumbering doctor onto a plane to Leningrad. He awakes in the Leningrad airport, thinking he is still in Moscow, and takes a taxi to Third Builders’ Ave, House 25, Apartment 12. All Soviet cities, goes the joke, contain a street with that name – and so

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<sup>256</sup> Ibid., 218.

<sup>257</sup> Ibid., 226.

<sup>258</sup> For a recent piece of historical journalism about these *mikrorayony* (micro-regions), see O. Hatherley’s “Moscow’s Suburbs May Look Monolithic, but the Stories They Tell Are Not,” *The Guardian* (12 June 2015). <[http://www.theguardian.com/cities/2015/jun/12/moscows-suburbs-may-look-monolithic-but-the-stories-they-tell-are-not?CMP=tw\\_t\\_gu](http://www.theguardian.com/cities/2015/jun/12/moscows-suburbs-may-look-monolithic-but-the-stories-they-tell-are-not?CMP=tw_t_gu)>

the driver sets off. In fact, not only is the building completely identical, Lukashin's Moscow key also opens this Leningrad apartment. A confrontation ensues between the still-drunk Zhenya and the legitimate owner of the flat, Nadia, who is awaiting the arrival of *her* fiancé. Ultimately, this uncomfortable yet humorous situation serves to illuminate the problems of Nadia and Zhenya's respective relationships and – through a rollercoaster of emotion – drives the main characters into each other's arms. Failure becomes fun and, eventually, the start of new potential.

The film's immense popularity was belied by early reviews: "Some criticized the speed and whimsy of its central romance as problematic, even verging on immorality; before being filmed, the screenplay was performed in 110 Soviet dramatic theatres, but did not then play in Moscow for these same reasons."<sup>259</sup> Critics also didn't know what to make of the movie's genre: "The film muddled its emphases and intentions, being both a 'document of social psychology' and 'a comedy with a slightly sad smile, a kind, gentle sense of humor.'"<sup>260</sup> In addition, the picture – although not a musical – incorporated many diegetic songs, while flip-flopping between farcical silliness and genuine trauma.

Initially a chamber play, the screenplay continued that theatrical atmosphere of small spaces and intimate conversations, with multiple camera angles to capture the subtleties therein. This tragicomedy bears an interesting relationship to our above discussion of Il'f and Petrov's handling of trauma through time. *The Irony of Fate* provides a different *kind* of speed and whimsy – essentially slower and quieter, more cyclical in structure, and with a strong musical component. As a retrospective article mused:

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<sup>259</sup> MacFadyen, 219.

<sup>260</sup> Ibid.

It all came together because on top of these various layers there was TRUTH, an uncompromising, unspoken truth that knew no language in which it might be uttered. The truth that in a cheerless Soviet world you could still find cheer; you could be warm within the cold walls of new housing projects; in the midst of our awful Russian booze-ups, during our miserable New Year's celebrations, things could *still* be good.<sup>261</sup>

Despite such lasting popularity, the director's point of view was somewhat different; Riazanov reported being "crushed, defeated, and flabbergasted by the gigantic, mighty flood of viewers' responses to the film."<sup>262</sup> Yet audience appreciation kept coming. There are a number of possible reasons as to why *The Irony of Fate* in particular gained such incredible popularity. MacFadyen articulates one important aspect: "The film punctuates each holiday in a way that Riazanov's other films punctuate the biographies and memories of millions of viewers, each of whom watches a Riazanov comedy, 'sighs nostalgically, and then recalls his private experiences.'"<sup>263</sup> It is this same personalizing force that – as we saw in Chapter One – made Aleksandra Pakhmutova's songs incredibly popular despite their civic subject matter. Putting it another way: "The contact is not that of film/state, or director/doctrine, but film/viewer and (better still) character/viewer."<sup>264</sup>

One of the ways that character/viewer contact is made here is through music – specifically through songs for guitar and voice, which use carefully chosen and curated poems.

In El'dar Riazanov's *The Irony of Fate or "Enjoy Your Bath" (Ironiia sud'by ili S legkim parom!*, 1975), many song lyrics heard in the film are based on poems by Boris Pasternak, Marina Tsvetaeva, Bella Akhmadulina, and Evgenii Evtushenko. Even though most of the lyrics in *The Irony of Fate* are dedicated to the themes of love, loneliness, and

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<sup>261</sup> B. Minaev, "Kazhdyi raz pod Novyi god my otpravliaemsia v banii..." *Ogonëk* 1 (January 1996): 66-7. Translation by D. MacFadyen, as quoted in *The Sad Comedy of El'dar Riazanov*, 6.

<sup>262</sup> E. Riazanov, *Nepodvedënnnye itogi* (Moscow: Vagrius, 1995), 218.

<sup>263</sup> MacFadyen, 218.

<sup>264</sup> *Ibid*, 222.



friendship, an educated spectator would immediately recognize the ambivalent political and cultural status of the poets whose words are incorporated into the soundtrack.<sup>265</sup>

The director made these choices in tandem with composer Mikael Tariverdiev (1931-1996), whose settings and interpretations of these texts in *estrada* form lent a powerful feeling of private “outsiderness” and dignity to the film. In addition to using texts that would have been well known to the intelligentsia, Tariverdiev and Riazanov partnered with famous *estrada* performers (e.g., Alla Pugachova, Sergei and Tatiana Nikitiny), whose voices would have immediately been recognized by the average Soviet listener. This sense of *svoi* – “a particular common sociality of young Soviet people” – undoubtedly contributed to the film’s wide appeal and lasting esteem: a strategic choice on the parts of both director and composer.<sup>266</sup>

Mikael Tariverdiev was born in the Republic of Georgia in 1931. After completing music school in Tbilisi, he came to Moscow and entered the prestigious Gnessin Institute, where he studied under famous Armenian composer Avram Khachaturian.<sup>267</sup> In 1958, Tariverdiev became a member of the Composers’ Union, and two years later, the Cinematographers’ Union. Like many of the composers in this dissertation, in addition to his work with popular music, he would also author operas, ballets, vocal cycles, and music for film as well as television.<sup>268</sup> Despite being best known for televisual and cinematic songs, he never considered himself a film composer. Khachaturian could see that young Tariverdiev was particularly gifted in the realm of chamber music, and so encouraged his student to work within that genre. Ultimately, experts saw

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<sup>265</sup> Klimova, 41.

<sup>266</sup> For further discussion of *svoi* and the kind of sociality it entails, see A. Yurchak’s *Everything Was Forever Until It Was No More: The Last Soviet Generation*. (Princeton and Oxford: Princeton University Press, 2006), 103-125.

<sup>267</sup> For more biographical information, see R.I. Petrushanskaia, *Sovetskie kompozitory-laureaty premii Leninskogo Komsomola* (Moscow: Sovetskii Kompozitor, 1989).

<sup>268</sup> Petrushanskaia, 113.

Tariverdiev's vocal cycles as the peak of his craft, and he was recognized for particularly effective ways of setting poetry to music.<sup>269</sup>

**Figure 3.5, Georgian composer Mikael Tariverdiev**



In *The Irony of Fate*, Tariverdiev's contribution became, in a sense, the kind of "chamber-vocal cycle" A. Tsuker refers to in his writings about the composer.<sup>270</sup> Although the only instrument used diegetically was a guitar, these songs reflect an "unusual relationship between vocals and accompaniment; recitative, even singspiel; prelude-like accompaniment; and 'Bachisms'" that were hallmarks of the composer's sound.<sup>271</sup> When Riazanov and fellow

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<sup>269</sup> Ibid.

<sup>270</sup> A. Tsuker, "Sintetichnost' khudozhestvennykh iskaniy. Muzyka fil'ma i vokal'nyi tsikl v tvorchestve M. Tariverdieva." *Edinyi mir muzyki*. Ed. A. Tsuker (Rostov on Don: Rostovskaia gosudarstvennaia konservatoriya imeni S.V. Rakhmaninova, 2003).

<sup>271</sup> Petrushanskaia, 118.

screenwriter Emil Braginskiy pitched the screenplay to the Soviet Ministry of Culture, they were met with resistance to the film's proposed soundscape. In a 2015 interview right after El'dar Riazanov's death, Russian film critic and historian Yuriy Bogomolov recalled: "The Film Ministry said: why so much lyricism? Why so many songs? Why so much music?"<sup>272</sup> After this meeting, Riazanov called Sergei Lapin – chairman of the USSR State Committee for Television and Radio, who was able to push this multifaceted and nuanced film into production.

Indeed, it was difficult to classify not only the genre of the film itself, but also the music within it. Composer Andrei Petrov (1930-2006) summed it up thus: "The most important thing in Tariverdiev's music is his romanticism, or rather, his poeticism – a quality sadly lacking from most twentieth-century music. Poetry with a capital 'P' permeates his entire craft."<sup>273</sup> This was a characteristic Tariverdiev shared with the genre of *avtorskaia pesnia*, or bard song – and indeed, many of the numbers written for this feature contain echoes of that style. In fact, the entire soundtrack functions as a meeting place for popular, state-sponsored performers such as Alla Pugachova (who provided the singing voice of the female lead, Nadia) and the poetic, acoustic soundscape of bards such as Vladimir Vysotskiy and Aleksandr Rozenbaum.<sup>274</sup> According to Rimma Petrushanskaia's analysis, this studied, yet ultimately compelling hybrid – orchestrated by Tariverdiev – "changed the character of Riazanov's and Braginskiy's screenplay," turning it from "buffoonery into a highly poetic, and even fairy-tale romance."<sup>275</sup>

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<sup>272</sup> E. Rykovtseva, "Pochemu Riazanov ne boialsia?" *Litsom k sobytiyu*, Radio Svoboda (30 November 2015), radio transcript.

<sup>273</sup> A. Tsuker, *Mikael Tariverdiev*. (Moscow: Soviet Composer, 1985), 13.

<sup>274</sup> For more information about Russian bards and *avtorskaia pesnia*, see J.M. Daughtry, "The Intonation of Intimacy: Ethics, Emotion, Metaphor, and Dialog Among Contemporary Russian Bards," (Ph.D. diss., Los Angeles: UCLA, 2006).

<sup>275</sup> Petrushanskaia, 120.

## **“People Sing When They’re Happy...”**

It is these bardic songs that will be my focus, as they not only play a significant role in narrative and character development, but also speak to audience members in a way other types of *estrada* could not. Tariverdiev helped Riazanov select the texts, which we know were ambiguous:

As a rule, I start not from the poetry itself, but from the problem the poetry addresses. I’ll admit that I don’t try to interpret the meaning of a poem (perhaps that’s bad!), but instead I use the poetry as my building material. There are two types of imagery – the musical, and the poetic. Put together, these images must create an absolutely new quality, one present in neither the poetry nor the music.<sup>276</sup>

The songs in *The Irony of Fate* aim to do just that – creating and enabling character development, reflecting laughter and pain, and serving as an affective bond between the main characters – as well as between character and viewer.

The first song commences immediately after the opening animation, which – as suggested – uses the first three minutes of the comedy to poke gentle fun at the homogenization of housing construction Union-wide.<sup>277</sup> As credits fade in over a backdrop of snowy Moscow buildings, we hear the voice of famous composer, singer, and guitarist Sergei Nikitin singing Evgeniy Evtushenko’s text «Со мною вот что происходит» (“Here is the Story of My Grievance,” 1957). Although this would have been a familiar voice to most viewers, the

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<sup>276</sup> “Interv’iu Mikaela Tariverdieva,” *Muzykal’naia zhizn’* 18 (1978): 18-19.

<sup>277</sup> *Ironiya sud’by, ili S legkim parom*, dir. E. Riazanov (Mosfil’m, 1975). Part I of the film can be seen in its entirety here (with English subtitles): <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=1VpmZnRIMKs&list=PLg1KyToSa5bCnKYxNPS84GUA8L98mE1eT>.

audience doesn't yet know that Nikitin also provides the singing voice of Zhenya, the male lead. In 2015, Nikitin mused upon why the late Riazanov might have selected such a well-known singer: "It all turned out to be very simple. I was [a good fit for] the doctor, Lukashin, who has the voice of an average Joe" ("тот самый доктор Лукашин с обыкновенным человеческим голосом").<sup>278</sup> Later in the movie, we will hear this voice again in what *appears* to be a non-diegetic context, yet at the end of the scene discovering it was Zhenya singing all along. Here, however, we as yet have no familiarity with the vocal soundscape of the film and assume non-diegesis. Without being connected to a character, the voice acts as a musical *acousmètre* – a sonic character deriving power from being heard, yet not seen.<sup>279</sup> This becomes clear either as the film goes on, or through the numerous repeat views that each Soviet citizen would have enjoyed.<sup>280</sup> The poem sets a melancholy tone, foreshadowing the separation of long-time lovers:

*O, someone,  
come,  
disrupt  
the union of strangers  
and the separation  
of close souls!*<sup>281</sup>

There are a few lyrical changes in the text. For example, in the third line, the phrase "petty bustle" (мелкая суета) becomes the somewhat paradoxical "idle bustle" (праздная суета). The overall emotional intention of the poem, however, remains intact; in stark contrast to the

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<sup>278</sup> Rykovtseva.

<sup>279</sup> For more on the concept of *acousmètre*, see M. Chion, *Audio-Vision: Sound on Screen*, trans. C. Gorbman (New York City: Columbia University Press, 1994).

<sup>280</sup> It became a national tradition to air *The Irony of Fate* on television each New Year's Eve.

<sup>281</sup> Translation mine. Full Russian texts of the poem and song lyrics can be found in Appendix B.

preceding and darkly ironic animation, the opening credits overall suggest an emotive depth to come amid the silly, repetitious backdrop of 1960s architecture.

From then on, there is a satisfying symmetry in the way songs appear throughout the film, as male and female leads alternate. Initially, both Zhenya and Nadia sing to their original lovers as a form of character development. Zhenya is goaded into a performance by his fiancée, who insists that “people sing when they’re happy” («люди поют – когда они счастливы»). He therefore dutifully picks up his guitar and begins Tariverdiev’s setting of Boris Pasternak’s «Никого не будет в доме» (“Nobody Will Be Home,” 1931). With this text, he proves himself to be a sensitive, romantic personality, albeit with a few doubts about his present situation:

*Frost will once again draw patterns,  
And I’ll once again be spun around  
By last year’s gloom  
And the concerns of yet another winter.*<sup>282</sup>

It is here that the viewer may realize the voice of Sergei Nikitin was not only part of the soundtrack, but actually joins the action of the film as Zhenya’s own singing voice.

Nadia’s serenade is similarly requested by her lover, who also enjoys hearing her sing. Another surprise awaits the audience, though, as her singing voice is provided by well-known *estrada* performer Alla Pugachova, who was just reaching the height of her popularity in the mid-1970s.<sup>283</sup> In a 2015 interview, Sergei Nikitin recalls working Pugachova’s role in the film: “Afterward, I discovered there were big problems with Alla. Both the director and the composer wanted to somehow illuminate her *estrada* nature... They wanted some sort of authenticity [in

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<sup>282</sup> Translation mine. Full Russian texts of the poem and song lyrics can be found in Appendix B.

<sup>283</sup> For an in-depth discussion of Pugachova and her construction of *estrada* spectacular identity, see David MacFadyen’s “Alla Pugacheva: Redefining Personality” in *Red Stars: Personality and the Soviet Popular Song, 1955-1991* (Montreal & Kingston, London, Ithaca: McGill-Queen’s University Press, 2001), 244-267 and Olga Partan’s “Alla: The Jester-Queen of Russian Pop Culture,” *Russian Review* 66.3 (July 2007): 483-500.

her voice]. There were forty-three takes of ‘I Like That You Are Not Smitten With Me.’<sup>284</sup> The vocal muddle only continues, as Nadia is actually played by three different people: her singing voice is that of Pugachova; her speaking voice that of Valentina Talyzina (who also plays one of Nadia’s friends later in the film); and her physical self is embodied by Polish actress Barbara Brylska. This additive identity helps to amplify the character’s scattered subjectivity, she moves hesitantly through the film, slowly acknowledging her unsuccessful romantic past. She is equally uncertain of her present and future.

Nadia’s first song, much like Zhenya’s, is just as ambivalent in tone – Tariverdiev and Riazanov chose Bella Akhmadulina’s poem «По улице моей который год» (“Along My Street for Many Years”, 1959):

*Oh loneliness, how abrupt is your character!  
Shining with an iron compass,  
How coldly you close the circle,  
Ignoring the useless convincement.*<sup>285</sup>

Thus we hear and see each of the main characters express a deeper, layered subjectivity; within each song we sense that – despite their respective relationships (or perhaps because of them) – neither is completely happy.

The mood lightens swiftly when Nadia sings next, spurred on by her girlfriends who mistakenly believe Zhenya to be her fiancé, Ippolit. As they thrust a guitar upon Nadia, she offers another lyrical number: «На Тихорецкую» (“To Tikhoretskaia Station,” 1962). Originally written by Tariverdiev over a decade earlier for the play *Childhood Friend* (Друг детства, 1962)

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<sup>284</sup> Rykovtseva.

<sup>285</sup> Translation by Dietrich Frey. Full Russian texts of the poem and song lyrics can be found in Appendix B.

by Mikhail L'vovskiy, Pugachova's performance of the song gained great popularity both during and long after the release of *Irony of Fate*.

The composition is simultaneously upbeat and lighthearted, despite any "white handkerchiefs and sad eyes" of those parting as "the wagon rolls on, and a platform is left behind." It features one of the faster tempi of the entire soundtrack, plus multiple modulations that mimic a sense of locomotive movement. A feeling of bittersweet motion is echoed by Nadia's friends, singing along in an awkwardly inept, yet heartfelt way. Riazanov recalls inviting Tariverdiev to work with him on the film's music (after learning Andrei Petrov was unavailable) because he loved this particular number.<sup>286</sup> Its unique genesis is paired with a shift in mood as, for the first time, Nadia begins to flirt with Zhenya. His protestations of mistaken identity die down as he listens to her. Thanks to song, it becomes clear he is finally – even if only temporarily – beginning to see the woman in front of him a little more clearly.

After she finishes and her friends leave "the newly engaged" couple, tension between the two subsides as Zhenya snacks on some leftover New Year's food and asks Nadia questions about her career as a schoolteacher. The mood improves, and he puts on a record; they start to dance while reminiscing about their distressing encounter only a couple of hours ago. The first bonds of affection are seen developing – but then the doorbell rings. Ostensibly, it is Ippolit come to reclaim his lover. The first half of the feature ends on this ambiguous note. The narrative arc is uncertain – and is more convincing as a result.

When the film resumes, Nadia kicks both of the men out of her apartment following a brief skirmish. After spending some time in the freezing cold of Leningrad's windy streets, Zhenya eventually comes back for his briefcase, and the burgeoning romance resumes. He

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<sup>286</sup> Riazanov, 74.



decides to show off his talents, playing «Если у вас нету тети» (“If You Do Not Have an Auntie”). Tariverdiev’s setting of Aleksandr Aronov’s 1963 poem «Песня о собаке» (“Song About a Dog”) continues the trend of more upbeat, lighthearted – yet touching – reflections:

*If you do not have a house,  
It will never burn down,  
And your wife will never leave you,  
If you do not have a wife.<sup>287</sup>*

They are each impressed with one another, and a mutual admiration unfolds – both enabled and aided by the music they have performed for one another. A private romance blossoms through sharing intimate sound. A chart of these diegetic (on-screen) songs in the film can be seen in Figure 2.6. Ultimately, Riazanov’s choice to make such a deeply personal and apolitical film was rebellious in itself. There are no overt ideological resonances – only an opening, subtle poking of fun at Soviet standardization, but that is ultimately what brings the two characters together. Tariverdiev’s music and selection of poetry then make this chance encounter a small-scale drama private lyricism within a loudly civic setting.

***Figure 3.6, Diegetic songs performed by characters in Irony of Fate***

<b>Singer</b>	<b>Listener</b>	<b>Title</b>	<b>Poet</b>
Zhenya	Galia	“There’ll be No One in the House”	Boris Pasternak
Nadia	Ippolit	“Along My Street for Many Years”	Bella Akhmadulina
Nadia	Zhenya + friends	“To Tikhoretskaia Station”	Mikhail L’vovskiy
Zhenya	Nadia	“If You Do Not Have an Auntie”	Aleksandr Aronov
Nadia	Zhenya	“I Like That You Are Not Smitten With Me”	Marina Tsvetaeva
Zhenya	Nadia	“I Asked the Ash Tree”	Vladimir Kirshon
Nadia	Zhenya	“I Want to Find Out from a Mirror”	Marina Tsvetaeva

<sup>287</sup> Translation mine. Full Russian texts of the poem and song lyrics can be found in Appendix B.

The ambivalent longing expressed in all the texts, plus the very famous performers chosen to express them, connect the audience – many of whom would have known the significance of these particular lyrical choices – to both the film and characters in a deeply personal way. As mentioned earlier, these are poems loved by the intelligentsia; stories of love *despite* civic realities.

The film's soundtrack was yet another facet of Riazanov's celebration of complexity and ambiguity. As David MacFadyen writes: "It is the songs that more than anything convey a rarely seen, yet ideal mixture of sadness, doubt, and elusive happiness. By doing so, sung poetry added a 'significant semantic load' over and above a mere punctuation of the plot with moments of relief or wistfulness."<sup>288</sup> In this case, popular songs are chosen for their function as a carrier of unorthodox texts, and an Aesopian language in themselves – a way of appearing *svoi* to viewers.

The cyclical nature of *The Irony of Fate* – repeated separations and reunions all around – has a deeper resonance that the music serves to enable and enhance:

The film's *raison d'être* came not just from the conditions in which it was made, but from the effort needed by characters to overcome the obstacles and objects that peopled their Soviet lives... This tendency to hand the linear progression of the plot over to emotional dilemmas increases the importance of song mentioned earlier in this chapter; the linear is handed over to the folded, repetitious, and cyclical.<sup>289</sup>

The idea of cycles is an important one for comedic art in an ideologically centered state: "Ideology is dependent upon repetition; comedies here are being accused of repetition and Riazanov himself, as late as 1996 (if not later), has happily said that his themes are very

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<sup>288</sup> MacFadyen, 221.

<sup>289</sup> *Ibid.*

repetitious or banal.”<sup>290</sup> This banality carries particular significance on-screen within the aforementioned shift from grandiose to intimate.<sup>291</sup> The personal ambiguities explored in *The Irony of Fate* could not help but interact with larger, more pompous themes and organs within Soviet society.

The past is folded, over and over again, into the present, curtailing the movement of all excessively rapid trajectories, be they communist or corporate... Even though light entertainment and its equally sentimental sister, comedic cinema, rarely resort to dissension, are they nonetheless in some form of undeniable opposition to Soviet ideology? Or does ideology, in a way that pleases all parties concerned, both apolitical performers and dogmatic politicians, actually covet and contain elements of what apolitical *estrada* and Riazanov represent?<sup>292</sup>

It seems the latter statement contained at least some truth, for both apolitical popular music and the cinematic efforts of directors like Gaidai and Riazanov were ultimately supported by the state. That support endured even though their themes were often grounded in forms of mild social critique.

## **Conclusion**

The films discussed in this chapter give rise to many meanings. They satisfied both politicians and the movie-going public; they were a product of Soviet culture, yet still cherished today. Amid those contradictions and paradoxes, one thing has remained clear – they were genuinely popular.

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<sup>290</sup> Ibid., 235.

<sup>291</sup> L. Zaitseva, *Evoliutsia obraznoi sistemy sovetskogo fil'ma 60-80-kh godov* (Moscow: VGIK, 1991).

<sup>292</sup> MacFadyen, 9.

The more than twenty movies that constitute Riazanov's oeuvre are the most popular motion pictures in the world's biggest country, but they have been utterly ignored by scholarship in the West... if we take a readers' poll from a national Soviet publication at the very end of [the late Soviet period], Tarkovskii is bumped unceremoniously into second place. Riazanov walks away with almost three times as many votes, crowned as the Union's All-Time Favorite Director.<sup>293</sup>

It is this same mass popularity that requires any successful artist in a state-sponsored industry to be a political navigator or tightrope walker. In the same way Aleksandra Pakhmutova and Raimond Pauls avoided major issues of censorship, so Leonid Gaidai and El'dar Riazanov played the game of cultural production within a controlled and regulated society. As this chapter has demonstrated, both sentiment and affect, particularly as expressed through gestures of popular music, are part of this attempt to "refashion the understanding of social existence...in a way that sidesteps the volume of political fustian."<sup>294</sup>

Just as *estrada* and popular song have often been overlooked as vehicles for this political "refashioning," so the role of the composer in their production also needs to be reassessed. Working at "the point where mass and elite art combine," songwriters wielded genuine appeal and popular power.<sup>295</sup> In our second case study, easily recognizable performers (Nikitiny and Alla Pugachova) played a similar role, bringing a slice of Soviet privacy out into the public – then returning it to homes for private consumption again. This feedback loop accounts for much of the films' incredibly long-lived popularity. In 2007, director Timur Bekmambetov undertook the production of a sequel to *The Irony of Fate*: the most lucrative film in Russia in 2008 did not,

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<sup>293</sup> Ibid, 6.

<sup>294</sup> Ibid, 236.

<sup>295</sup> N. Lebedev, "Fenomen 'grustnoi' komedii v otechestvennom kino," *Kinovedcheskie zapiski* 22 (1994): 133-51.

however, garner good reviews.<sup>296</sup> The soundtrack attempts to ride the coattails of its predecessor, using a number of Tariverdiev's songs from the original. Music that sounded so timely in *Irony of Fate* fell flat in its sequel; newly written songs (even one for Pugachova and her daughter, Kristina Orbakaite) didn't fare much better, coming off as overly dramatic and proving ultimately forgettable. Yet the sequel's artistic failure – despite its commercial success – did nothing to diminish the impact of its predecessor's classic status of a “sad comedy”:

Irrespective of (or despite) the socioeconomic or political climate, however, these films have retarded relentlessly progressive ideas, at least for ninety minutes, and celebrated the human element within the inclemency of human politics. They are forgiving, accepting documents of the human condition... Politics, through which we stubbornly view [Russia], is merely the imposition of a minority philosophy; comedies in the Soviet Union by their most popular director show us the truer, bittersweet story of how the majority created their own world view. It is time we took that philosophy seriously, because it still matters today.<sup>297</sup>

In this chapter, I hope to have shed some light on *estrada*'s role in how the Soviet populace created that same philosophy with their affection and approval. With these issues in mind, Chapter Four will explore how *estrada* also interwove with rock music on the Soviet stage – specifically as rock operas.

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<sup>296</sup> N. Bobrova, “‘Ironiya sud’by -2’ – spravedlivaia kritika.” *Vechernaia Moskva* (25 December 2007).

<sup>297</sup> MacFadyen, 240.

## **CHAPTER 4**

### **THE THIRD DIRECTION: ROCK OPERA IN THE U.S.S.R.**

#### **Introduction**

Soviet rock opera was an anomaly for at least two reasons. First, it clearly borrowed from “bourgeois” Western sources – even more so than regular VIA music.<sup>298</sup> While the latter ranged in ideological conformity from the pro-Soviet civic songs of Aleksandra Pakhmutova to the apolitical and progressively tinged concept albums of David Tukhmanov, rock opera owed its very existence to such Western models as *Jesus Christ Superstar*.<sup>299</sup> But that was not the only bold characteristic of this genre. Another – and potentially even more significant – process was an unprecedented mixing of academic music and *estrada* in what the Composers’ Union retrospectively called the “Third Direction.” In 2005, Ukrainian scholars I. Stetsiuk and M. Abakumov described the Third Direction as having roots in “several tendencies in academic Eastern European music of the 1950s to the 1980s, including cinematic and electronic music.”<sup>300</sup>

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<sup>298</sup> See Chapter Two for a detailed discussion of Vocal-Instrumental Ensemble (VIA) music and its Western inspirations.

<sup>299</sup> A detailed account of *JCSS* circulating in composers’ circles can be found in P. Schmelz, “From Scriabin to Pink Floyd: The ANS Synthesizer and the Politics of Soviet Music between Thaw and Stagnation,” *Sound Commitments: Avant-Garde Music and the Sixties*, ed. R. Adlington (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009): 254-276.

<sup>300</sup> I.O. Stetsiuk & M.A. Abakumov. “*Tret’e napravlenie*” i kinomuzyka Eduarda Artem’eva (Kiev: Ukraine National Musical Academy, 2005), 8.

This chapter will argue that Soviet rock opera was allowed to exist and evolve in part because it was another prime example of this “optimization between serious and light music.”<sup>301</sup>

Although *estrada* also engaged with classical forms (see David Tukhmanov’s 1975 *On the Wave of My Memory* for sonic, textual, and visual examples), the union of opera and rock music had previously neither been recognized nor lauded in any official capacity. With rock opera, just as with film or other collaborative art that relies heavily on institutionalized support, nationally funded theaters and artists needed the backing of government organs in order to produce any large-scale spectacle. The fact that such backing, however conditional or fraught, transpired in the Soviet 1970s is a phenomenon worth exploring; it speaks to the peculiar flexibility of a Soviet aesthetic. This chapter will examine the production of two of the very first rock operas in the USSR – Aleksandr Zhurbin’s *Orpheus and Eurydice* (Орфей и Эвридика, 1975) and Aleksei Rybnikov’s *The Star and Death of Joaquin Murieta* (Звезда и смерть Хоакина Мурьеты, 1976). Through examining the role of composers and songwriters – the auteurs of the Third Direction – I will argue that the transposition of rock music to the stage helped to improve its status in the Soviet Union, where theater was often prized for its pedagogical and artistic potentials.<sup>302</sup>

The term “Third Direction” was coined in the 1980s, toward the very end of the period it describes. Various sources give conflicting information on which composer used it first (Rodion Shchedrin and Vladimir Dashkevich are just two of the names mentioned as possible progenitors of the phrase). As it so often happens, the terminology began appearing only when the movement

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<sup>301</sup> Ibid.

<sup>302</sup> The notion of “theatricalization” of music is common in Russia; in 2005, it was even addressed in the realm of popular song in O. Deviatova’s “Teatralizatsiya pesni v otechestvennoi massovoi kul’ture poslednei treti XX veka,” (Ph.D. dissertation, Ural State University, 2005).

itself was in full swing, “uniting the gestures, technology, and aesthetics of serious, classical contemporary music on the one hand, and the accessibility, simplicity, and unpretentiousness of light music that was meant for purposes of entertainment, and even more precisely – commerce – on the other.”<sup>303</sup> This term soon started appearing in musical publications, lent its name to a theater studio, and ultimately engendered a Third Direction creative laboratory within the Composers’ Union.<sup>304</sup>

The goal of this movement was not only to bring together diverging aesthetics, but perhaps even more importantly, to reconcile “two almost feuding audiences who were fiercely antagonizing one another.”<sup>305</sup> Russian-born ethnomusicologist Izaly Zemtskovsky discerned qualities such as stylistic variability, a multiplicity of sources, and a tendency toward theatricality as intrinsic to the Third Direction philosophy.<sup>306</sup> It is the latter, “thespian” characteristic that enabled rock opera to flourish in the Soviet Union under this movement’s protection. Its popularity is perhaps partly attributable to “a well-chosen metaphor, rather than [to] any theoretical distinction.”<sup>307</sup> An admittedly vague attribution, the deliberately imprecise talk of a “third way” enabled musical hybridizations, chief among them the rock opera and the rock ballet. Here we find the names most frequently associated with the Third Direction: Aleksei Rybnikov (who will be the focus of the latter part of this chapter), Eduard Artem’ev (best known

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<sup>303</sup> R. Shchedrin, “Nepovtorimost’ talanta i lichnosti,” *Mikael Tariverdiev*, ed. (Moscow: Sovetskiy kompozitor, 1985), 87.

<sup>304</sup> “Tret’e napravlenie: chto eto? Zachem? ‘za’ i ‘protiv’...” *Sovetskaia muzyka* 1 (1990): 22-23.

<sup>305</sup> Tsuker, 6.

<sup>306</sup> I. Zemtsovskiy, in *Kompozitory moskvy*, I. Egikov, ed. (Moscow: Sovetskiy kompozitor, 1988), 63.

<sup>307</sup> A.M. Tsuker, *Both Rock and Symphony...* (Moscow: Kompozitor, 1993), 44.



for soundtracking Tarkovsky's films), and the composer of the USSR's first rock opera, Aleksandr Zhurbin.

### **Composing in the Third Direction**

Zhurbin was born Aleksandr Gandel'sman in the Uzbek capital of Tashkent, the day after the U.S. dropped an atomic bomb on Hiroshima – August 7, 1945. Growing up in the USSR after World War Two, Gandel'sman served in the Red Army and graduated with honors from the Tashkent State Conservatory's cello studio. He subsequently moved on to Moscow's Gnessin Conservatory to study composition, and in the late 1960s, garnered a PhD in musicology from the Leningrad Conservatory with a dissertation on Mahler.<sup>308</sup> In 1972, upon living in Leningrad for two years, Gandel'sman changed his surname to his mother's in order to avoid any conflict with institutional anti-Semitism: "I took a brave and resolute step – I changed my name. And not only because I understood that I would get nowhere with it. The main reason was an incompatibility between my surname and my identity."<sup>309</sup> One Soviet anecdote told of Jews who would change their names twice; in doing so – and when asked what their *previous* surname had been – they could reference a non-Jewish heritage. Against the backdrop of similarly offensive norms, one can predict the professional benefits of the composer's decision.

Like many *estrada* songwriters examined so far, Zhurbin was trained and worked in "academic" genres, writing symphonies and concertos, as well as working in more contemporary and popular realms. In this sense, he was well equipped to bring rock music into the opera hall.

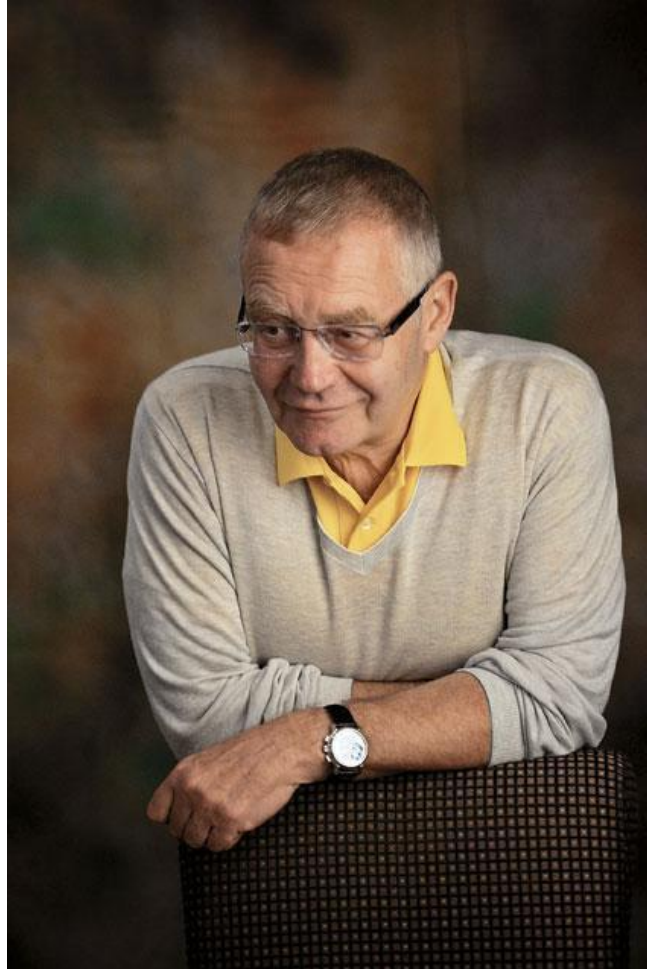
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<sup>308</sup> "Biografia," *Kompozitor Aleksandr Zhurbin: Ofitsial'nyi sait* (2005). <<http://www.alexanderzhurbin.ru/content/biografy.php>>

<sup>309</sup> V. Sal'nikova, V. "Kompozitor Aleksandr Zhurbin: Eskiz k avtoportretu," *Kompozitor Aleksandr Zhurbin* (17 June 2002), accessed 7 November 2015. <<http://www.alexanderzhurbin.ru/content/articles/detail.php?ID=68>>

Soviet musicians and publishers had been “worried by the deep chasm between music designed for entertainment and serious music” since the Fourth Congress of the Union of Composers in 1968.<sup>310</sup>

**Figure 4.1, Aleksandr Zhurbin in 2010**



A.M. Tsuker’s 1993 book-length study on this tension, suitably entitled *Both Rock and Symphony...*, distinguishes between classical and commercial, popular modes in a telling fashion. Rock is described and dealt with as a “lifestyle,” whereas a symphony is deemed to be a formal

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<sup>310</sup> Tsuker, *Both Rock and Symphony...*, 4.

achievement. This subjective and problematic generalization nonetheless helps us to understand the often incompatible discourses or debates within the Soviet Union regarding “light music.” Much of Tsuker’s book is therefore dedicated to a possible synthesis of mass and academic musical enterprise, citing rock opera – somewhat surprisingly – as a possible *mélange* of two opposing poles. Although other Soviet composers followed this path and composed rock operas, Aleksandr Zhurbin would be the first.

In 1973, he became involved with the VIA The Singing Guitars (Поющие гитары), setting Russian Futurist or avant-garde poetry of the early twentieth century to *estrada* songs. By that time, however, British rock opera *Jesus Christ Superstar* was already being widely circulated within knowing circles of Soviet musicians.<sup>311</sup> Head of the Leningrad Union of Composers Andrei Petrov – who would later use his pull to aid *Orpheus*’ premiere – brought a recording of the Webber musical back to the USSR and organized a listening session for other composers. Zhurbin found the British rock opera immediately compelling, and even began to learn English after his exposure to it.<sup>312</sup> In dialogue with front-man and guitarist of The Singing Guitars, Anatoliy Vasil’ev, the two men noted their mutual desire to see something similar done in the USSR. In 1974, *Orpheus and Eurydice* – with his score and a libretto by playwright Yuriy Dimitrin – was presented to the band.<sup>313</sup>

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<sup>311</sup> See P. Schmelz, “‘Crucified on the Cross of Mass Culture’: Late Soviet Genre Politics in Alexander Zhurbin’s Rock Opera *Orpheus and Eurydice*,” *Journal of Musicological Research* 28.1 (2009): 61-87 for an account of Soviet reception of Webber’s musical, and its effect on Zhurbin’s rock opera. Despite its taboo themes, stagings of the work were not consistently banned, and it was widely heard and even performed by groups such as the jazz-rock band Arsenal.

<sup>312</sup> *Ibid.*, 69.

<sup>313</sup> “Orfei i Evridika.” *Kul’turnyi sloi*. 5-yi kanal, TRK St. Petersburg, 10 May 2009. <<http://www.5-tv.ru/video/502622/>>

**Figure 4.2, Irina Ponarovskaia and Al'bert Asadullin as Eurydice and Orpheus**



After some changes in personnel, the producers found their Orpheus in the figure of Al'bert "Alik" Asadullin – a young architect from Tatarstan who had already gained a reputation as "the best amateur rock singer among faculty music groups" upon his arrival in Leningrad.<sup>314</sup> Zhurbin and Vasil'ev convinced Asadullin to join The Singing Guitars, and for the next five years he toured with the group. Eurydice was found right within The Singing Guitars in Irina Ponarovskaia, daughter of famous jazz musician Vitaliy Ponarovskiy.<sup>315</sup>

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<sup>314</sup> V. Shchëlkin and S. Frolov, *Legendy VIA* (Moscow: Grifon, 2007), 28.

<sup>315</sup> For more biographical details on Irina Ponarovskaia, see her site: <http://www.iponarovskaya.ru/bio.php>.

## The Song of Orpheus

*Orpheus and Eurydice* premiered in the summer of 1975 at the Leningrad Estrada Theater (now the Raikin Estrada Theater in St. Petersburg). It was originally marketed as a *Song-Opera* – from the German *der Song* – because the term “rock” caused a predictable problem within the Soviet Ministry of Culture.<sup>316</sup> A rock aesthetic was played down somewhat, or at least made more palatable with allusions to Brechtian theatre, “where songs are woven into the fabric of the narrative, summarizing and ultimately acting as a moral injunction.”<sup>317</sup> The issue of generic suitability was then complicated further by other concerns:

The theatrical term *der Song*, originating with the German playwright Berthold Brecht, needs to be understood not just as song, but as a [specific form of] “song” by the author, wherein the actors turn to the audience, breaking the fourth wall. This [combination of techniques] both illuminates the author’s subtext and provides commentary for the events on stage. This Brechtian principle has found its reflection in *Orpheus*.<sup>318</sup>

According to librettist Yuriy Dimitrin, once censors were informed of this connection to the work of the “anti-Fascist” Brecht, the production could then be considered an artistic success.<sup>319</sup> Although Brecht may have been deliberately chosen as an artistic figure with whom to advance this idea, Zhurbin cites other theatrical genres, including ancient Greece, as containing the original “rock opera” concept.<sup>320</sup> In this rather byzantine manner, rock opera was born in the Soviet Union under the protection of more acceptable art forms (see footnote 292 on “theatricalization”). Despite any sleight-of-hand, however, the show’s immense popularity would

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<sup>316</sup> P. Pchelintsev, “Edintsvennyi v Rossii,” *Rock-opera.ru*. n.d. <<http://rock-opera.ru/about/about-theatre.html>>

<sup>317</sup> Ibid.

<sup>318</sup> V. Iashkin, ““Poiyushchie gitary.” *Sovetskaia estrada i tsirk* 3 (March 1978), 19.

<sup>319</sup> “Orfei i Evridika.”

<sup>320</sup> A. Zhurbin, *Orfei, Evridika, i ya* (Moscow: Eksmo, 2006), 475.

ultimately make any such quibbling a moot issue. Subsequent projects in the same style were widely referred to – in more open terms – as *rok-opery*.

Zhurbin himself has been inconsistent when speaking of generic or stylistic matters. Looking back upon the prior century, he today considers rock opera a subgenre of the musical – just as *Jesus Christ Superstar* is considered a mixed example of both. In a 2011 article for *Izvestiya* [News], the composer also expressed indignation that another production, *Solomennaia shliapka* [The Straw Hat] (1974) – a “cute vaudeville film, yet without any distinguishing characteristics” – had been labelled “the first Soviet musical.”<sup>321</sup> Yet initially, Zhurbin was unwilling to refer to *Orpheus and Eurydice* as either a musical *or* a rock opera. From our vantage point forty years hence, Zhurbin’s production is simultaneously a representative of all of these debated formats – a “Song-Opera,” a rock opera, *and* a musical. However, it was not until Raimond Pauls’ 1976 *Sister Carrie*, produced in a liberal Baltic setting, that a Soviet composer would willingly and openly use such designations.<sup>322</sup>

One stepping-stone between censorship and acceptance was another form of classical narrative: myth. The choice of ancient Greek myth as subject for the USSR’s first rock opera was clearly a legitimizing act. One critic wrote: “This is a show about love – love that helps an artist keep his soul alive. This is not the love of which we frequently hear of in *estrada*: assertive, optimistic, and aggressive – even when it appears to be unhappy. Here we have a genuinely lofty and sacrificial love.”<sup>323</sup> This idea of thematic and emotional purity was a purposeful choice on the composer’s part, who pronounced the rock opera’s chosen subject matter “entirely chaste and

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<sup>321</sup> A. Zhurbin, “Tezisy o muzykle v Rossii,” *Izvestiya* (8 May 2011).

<sup>322</sup> See Chapter One for a discussion of Pauls’ musical, and for an analysis of what other factors might have enabled him to do so.

<sup>323</sup> Yu. Smelkov, “Liuboviu rozhdaetsya pesnya.” *Komsomol’skaya pravda* (29 August 1981).

beautiful.”<sup>324</sup>

Zhurbin’s experiment, as it was labelled in press reviews of the time, contained echoes of another canonical experiment, as it were: Monteverdi’s 1607 *L’Orfeo*. This early Baroque *favola in musica*, one of the first surviving operas, moved theatrical music beyond any traditional *intermedio* position (i.e., between the acts of a play) and into a complete, self-contained drama. In some ways, Zhurbin’s and Monteverdi’s works have more in common than the operatic canon (e.g. Glück’s *Orfeo*) that lies between them chronologically. Both were composed at transitional points in European history; both employed instrumental groups with the freedom to improvise (Zhurbin’s score speaks of “adlibbed numbers in the style of the latest hits”); and both had a librettist who adapted to the sociopolitical pressures of the times.<sup>325</sup>

In Zhurbin’s case, the incorporation of a rock group and contemporary lyrics from Yuriy Dimitrin meant the libretto had to be set in modern times. Subsequently the core myth was updated within the context of a rock singing contest. This allowed rock to survive within a new opera and be safely contained within a clever plot device. Tsuker sums matters up: “Rock music in Orpheus occupies a sufficiently localized, albeit dramaturgically important place.”<sup>326</sup> Other pieces in the opera, as Peter Schmelz notes, were more “indebted to the aesthetics of art song, or more likely the Russian romance, than to the pop tunes that were Lloyd Webber’s models.”<sup>327</sup>

Only some formal schemas of the Greek plot remain, namely the love of its titular characters, together with their subsequent separations and reunions. The original myth ends

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<sup>324</sup> Zhurbin, *Orfei, Evridika, i ya*, 467.

<sup>325</sup> Tsuker, 186.

<sup>326</sup> *Ibid.*, 178.

<sup>327</sup> Schmelz, 73. See Schmelz’s article for a deeper analysis of musical genre and stylistic distinctions in Zhurbin’s rock opera.

gruesomely, with Eurydice taken back to Hades and Orpheus torn apart by the Maenads, frenzied followers of Dionysus. Monteverdi's librettist, Alessandro Striggio, shies away from Orfeo's death – instead having the Maenads berate the hero – yet leaves his destiny uncertain. In Monteverdi's 1609 score, however, a semi-happy ending emerges. Orpheus is borne up to heaven by Apollo, who encourages him to see Eurydice's likeness in the stars.<sup>328</sup> In Dimitrin's tale, something similar takes place at the end of the opera, as her voice remains with Orpheus as if to represent their eternal spiritual union, while a new couple takes the stage to symbolize a legend of timeless adoration.

Zhurbin and Dimitrin's musical – despite any hesitant, lukewarm reactions from the press – enjoyed tremendous popularity. In 2003, it entered the Guinness Book of World Records as the longest-running original cast musical (at that time, 2,350 performances had been staged in eight different productions).<sup>329</sup> Even in 1976, despite never having been performed abroad, it garnered the British Musical Award from industry publication *Music Week*.<sup>330</sup> Looking back on their hard work and surprising success, both composer and librettist would reminisce about the burden of daily performances:

That had never happened in Russia before. For plays or musicals to run every day was unheard of. Then we started touring. We were sold out for two, even three months. You couldn't even get a friend or your relatives into the hall. But even the show's fantastic popularity couldn't absolve it of "ideological sedition."<sup>331</sup>

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<sup>328</sup> M. Ringer, *Opera's First Master: The Musical Dramas of Claudio Monteverdi* (Newark, N.J.: Amadeus Press, 2006), 39-40.

<sup>329</sup> I. Vorob'eva and A. Gladyshev, *Velikie miuzikly mira* (Moscow: Olma-Press, 2002), 400.

<sup>330</sup> Ibid.

<sup>331</sup> "Orfei i Evridika."



The opera's staging – despite such official grumbling in high places – got off to a remarkably smooth start, for which Aleksandr Zhurbin could thank aforementioned fellow composer Andrei Petrov. Zhurbin's friend and colleague had intervened on the show's behalf during a meeting:

The artistic council convened. Andrei Pavlovich [Petrov], an experienced diplomat, thought that everything depended on who spoke first. He immediately took the floor and said: "I consider this a huge success. It is a colossal step forward. Our socialist culture has achieved new dimensions." Then he started saying things no one could oppose, especially since he was a member of the Regional Committee [of the Communist Party], chairman of the Composers' Union, and so on. After a few of Petrov's comments, I could already see that the officials were somehow deflated. They had wanted to ban the show. [Thanks to Petrov, however], it turned out it to be nothing more than a love story without anything anti-Soviet. And so they [the high-ranking officials] resentfully told us that we had permission.<sup>332</sup>

Some complications, however, proved rather stubborn. At a later date, the opera was – once again – denounced, this time as both "ideologically vicious and aesthetically helpless."<sup>333</sup> Librettist Dimitrin recalls getting a phone call from a ministry friend warning of a commission that would travel to Leningrad and close down *Orpheus*. Apparently, the Russian Minister of Culture himself – Yuriy Melent'ev – had found something politically erroneous with the show. Yet at the last minute, as Zhurbin and Vasil'ev recount in a 2009 interview, the Minister had a chat with an old friend, who happened by good fortune to be an admirer of the production. As a result, the members of the commission received instructions to support the opera upon their arrival in Leningrad.<sup>334</sup>

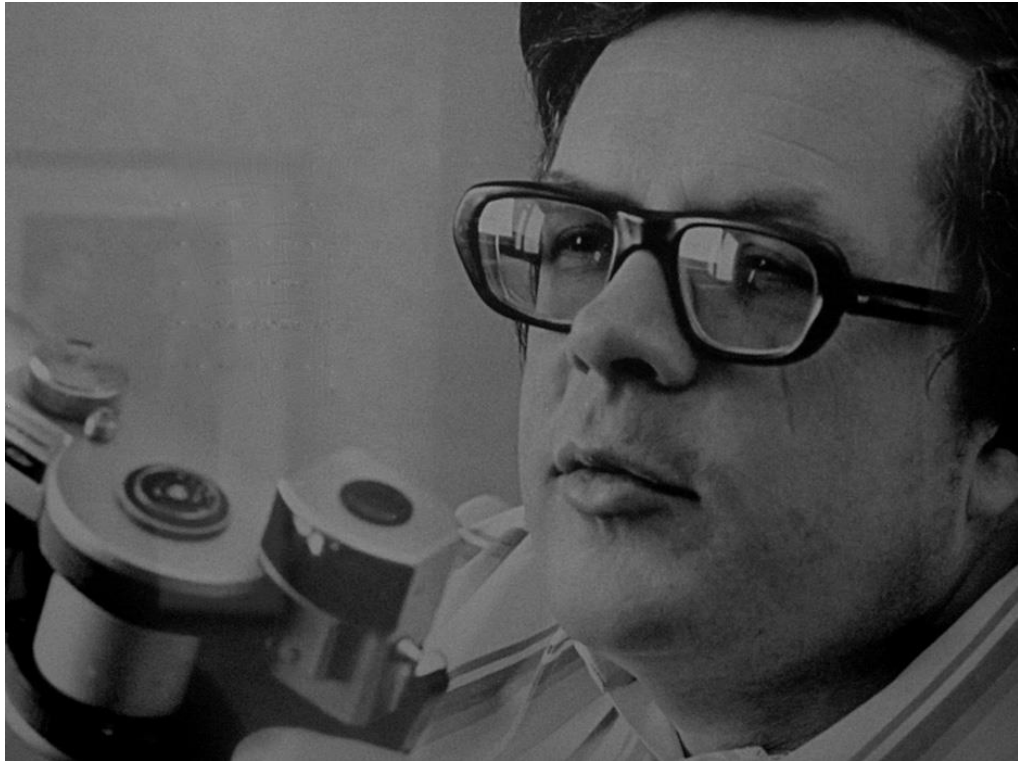
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<sup>332</sup> Ibid.

<sup>333</sup> Ibid.

<sup>334</sup> Ibid.

Figure 4.3, Composer Andrei Petrov, who helped support Orpheus and Eurydice



In other words, the first Soviet rock opera came into existence thanks to a number of chance events within the censorship network, together with enormous public approval. Once authorization was begrudgingly given, the press then had to somehow justify that enormous popularity. Rhetoric was needed to echo an ideological *volte-face*. Newspapers' explanations frequently came in discussions of Soviet theater and its "power of communication," which unlike the small stage of *estrada*, allegedly had the capacity to both reach and deeply move observers – of all ages. By way of illustration, music journalist M. Provorov wrote in 1976: "The sound of an electric guitar is very pictorial, textural, and theatrical; not surprisingly, many directors have started using it in their dramas."<sup>335</sup> Slowly yet surely in the mid-1970s, the instrumentation and

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<sup>335</sup> M. Provorov, "'Obratnyi put' poterian." *Iunost'* 5.252 (May 1976), 108.

performance style of the VIA were gradually considered to be in sync with youth culture across the Soviet Union. *Orpheus and Eurydice*'s original director Mark Rozovski put it thus in his discussion of the opera's themes:

The youth lifestyle of the 1960s and '70s engendered a contemporary "musico-theatrical" form. In our show, opera's traditional form has been transformed into an energetic and carnivalesque spectacle. And carnival doesn't always mean celebration. Ironic comedy and tragedy always coexist in carnival, constantly and invisibly flowing into one another.<sup>336</sup>

This genuine movement toward a Third Direction – particularly toward purported educational potentials through a thespian tradition – meant that press reviews slowly became more positive, acknowledging the hybridization of previously separate genres:

We still recognize the VIA ensemble's performance style; it has not changed, but rather been filled with new and more significant content... *Estrada* is usually called a "light" genre, though neither pathos nor civic themes are alien to it. And now, the modern *estrada* fan is offered performances that, while composed in this same light genre, are actually quite serious. That is to say, these shows not only entertain, but they also offer an aesthetic education in the most direct sense of the word. For a certain youth demographic (and *estrada* spectators are predominantly young people), music begins with an *estrada* song.<sup>337</sup>

The *song-opera Orpheus and Eurydice* – the first such experiment on our stage – will undoubtedly acquire a noteworthy place in the life of Soviet musical theater. It will also play its role in the creative destiny of The Singing Guitars, and – let's hope – in the education of Soviet youth, too.<sup>338</sup>

It is the elevation of popular music to the Soviet stage that allowed The Singing Guitars to "transcend their *estrada* past, their long-time repertoire of hits, their own selves of yesterday.

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<sup>336</sup> Ibid., 108-9.

<sup>337</sup> Yu. Klimov, "Chto na estrade?" *Pravda* 197 (15 July 1976): 6.

<sup>338</sup> "Poyushchie Gitary staviat operu," *Smena* 173 (25 July 1975): 3.

The force which elevated them was *theater*.<sup>339</sup> Opera allegedly shaped, promoted, and thus even saved rock music – just as the latter style was clearly ascending and *using* opera to gain acceptance. The inclusion of rock within Zhurbin’s project was justified by the show’s large-scale impact on young audiences:

If we remember the fact that *estrada* is one of the most popular forms of art, and that its audience is comprised of mainly young people, then we understand that the price of *Orpheus and Eurydice*’s success is especially high. This play invites spectators to experience thoughts and feelings to which theatergoers are rarely accustomed.<sup>340</sup>

Such a viewpoint shows the spreading growing “reappraisals of popular music instigated by Zhurbin’s *Orpheus and Eurydice*.”<sup>341</sup> The authorities and state-run media increasingly concurred with one another and by 1980, the show’s creators had even been given permission to record. A troublesome stage show was allowed to create a permanent, endlessly replicable document of itself. The resulting double album sold over a million copies, surviving even the demise of the group who started it all – The Singing Guitars.<sup>342</sup> After the fall of the Soviet Union, the show was revived in 1999 by Vladimir Podgorodinskiy, the founder of the Rock Opera Theater. This St. Petersburg (initially Leningrad) organization was founded in 1975 simultaneously with the genesis of *Orpheus and Eurydice*. Its mission was to serve as an “antipode to classical opera, a theater by young people – *for* young people.”<sup>343</sup> The R.O.T. has subsequently enjoyed productive relationships with contemporary Russian composers – as well

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<sup>339</sup> Provorov, 109.

<sup>340</sup> Smelkov.

<sup>341</sup> Schmelz, 67.

<sup>342</sup> "Orfei i Evridika."

<sup>343</sup> More information about the theater can be found at <http://rock-opera.ru/about.html>.

as established figures of the Soviet past such as Andrei Petrov, Zhurbin's influential contemporary who helped set the rock opera on a course toward approval in the mid-1970s.

Needless to say, not everyone was convinced of the validity of combining *estrada* with art music. Avant-garde composer Edison Denisov expressed his displeasure with this trend in the mid-1980s: "There isn't any 'third direction!' That is a false movement which has gathered around itself people incapable of writing good *estrada*, jazz, or rock music. And because they can't compose any of them properly, they've chosen something in the middle."<sup>344</sup> Ticket sales and popularity, however, told a different story. Aleksandr Zhurbin's philosophy, despite these enduring hassles, would always remain more inclusive: "Some people think that rock music is something of a lower order; they insist that a serious composer would never engage with it. I think that's said out of ignorance."<sup>345</sup> In the same spirit, Zhurbin is remembered today as one of the first composers to endorse and work toward that elusive Third Direction. Ultimately, this opera "embodies the shifting nature of Soviet taste, both musical and otherwise, both 'official' and unofficial,' and both young and old, during the final decades of the USSR."<sup>346</sup> Once the door was open, others would draw inspiration from Zhurbin's foray into generic syntheses – in realms where no Soviet composer had gone before.

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<sup>344</sup> T.A. Kuryшева, *Muzykal'naia zhurnalistika i muzykal'naia kritika* (St. Petersburg: Vlados Press, 2007). Accessed 31 July 2015 at [http://thelib.ru/books/tatyana\\_aleksandrovna\\_kuryшева/muzykal'naya\\_zhurnalistika\\_i\\_muzykal'naya\\_kritika\\_uchebnoe\\_posobie-read.html](http://thelib.ru/books/tatyana_aleksandrovna_kuryшева/muzykal'naya_zhurnalistika_i_muzykal'naya_kritika_uchebnoe_posobie-read.html).

<sup>345</sup> Provorov, 109.

<sup>346</sup> Schmelz, 67.

## **Splendor and Death**

A fellow, equally intrepid composer, was Aleksei Rybnikov. Born on July 17, 1945 – only a few weeks before Zhurbin – he remains a peer, compatriot, and product of the same cultural environment. Rybnikov was a precocious child of two creative parents, and wrote his first pieces for piano at age eight. Like many of the composers discussed so far, he attended the Moscow Conservatory and studied with Aram Khachaturian, going on to teach in the Conservatory's composition department. In 1979, he was recognized as the most popular Soviet composer of the year.<sup>347</sup> Another classically trained member of the Third Direction, he is remembered today for his film and stage music, including the two rock operas *The Star and Death of Joaquin Murieta* (1976) and *Juno and Avos* (1979).<sup>348</sup>

We turn here to the former, one of the very first Soviet rock operas along with *Orpheus and Eurydice*. Whereas Zhurbin was overtly inspired by Andrew Lloyd Webber's *Jesus Christ Superstar* and worked within an incipient rock music environment, Rybnikov's *Joaquin* was first conceived as a stage show. Film and stage director Mark Zakharov, who was appointed artistic director of the Moscow Lenkom Theater in 1973 (and still holds the position), had been urged by Vladimir Panchenko – Culture Director of the Communist Central Committee – to stage an

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<sup>347</sup> "Rybnikov Aleksei L'vovich," *Muzhdunarodnyi ob'edinënniy biograficheskiy tsentr*, n.d., accessed 7 November 2015.  
<[http://www.biograph.ru/index.php?option=com\\_content&view=article&id=1013:rybnikoval&catid=6:music&Itemid=29](http://www.biograph.ru/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=1013:rybnikoval&catid=6:music&Itemid=29)>

<sup>348</sup> As Peter Schmelz mentions regarding Rybnikov's later opera: "Alexei Rybnikov's *Juno and Avos* (*Iunona i Avos'*, 1981; libretto by Andrei Voznesensky) is often mentioned as the first instance of the genre in the USSR, although it postdates Zhurbin's composition and also postdates Rybnikov's earlier rock opera, *The Splendor and Death of Joaquin Murieta* (*Zvezda i smert' Khoakina Mur'ety*, 1976; libretto by Pablo Neruda). See S. Frederick Starr, *Red and Hot: The Fate of Jazz in the Soviet Union 1917–1991, With a New Chapter on the Final Years* (New York: Limelight Editions, 1994), 374 n. 78; Alexei Rybnikov, *Juno & Avos*, Melodiya CD, 60 00327 (1996; the back cover proclaims it as "Russia's First Rock Musical"); and Carol Pratl, "A Russian Rock Opera: 'Junon and Avos'," *The Drama Review* 28/2 (1984), 125–28."

“ideologically flashy action show.”<sup>349</sup> General Pinochet’s recent coup d’état and the death of Chilean poet Pablo Neruda mere days after the overthrow influenced Zakharov’s thinking, and he chose Neruda’s 1967 poetic drama – termed an “insurrectionary cantata” – as his foundation text.<sup>350</sup> The director’s intention was to “somehow adapt Neruda’s free verse, which is beautiful yet somehow alien to us [in Russia].”<sup>351</sup>

*Figure 4.4, Aleksei Rybnikov in the studio*



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<sup>349</sup> P. Grushko, “‘Khoakin Murieta’ dvadtsat’ let spustia,” *Ogonëk* (9 June 1996).

<sup>350</sup> P. Neruda. *Splendor and Death of Joaquin Murieta*, trans. Ben Belitt (New York, NY: Farrar, Straus & Giroux, Inc, 1972), viii.

<sup>351</sup> Grushko.

He turned for a libretto to poet Pavel Grushko, who had translated Neruda's play in 1971 for the journal *Foreign Literature*. This led to some major changes into the story – including changing the title from *The Splendor and Death of Joaquin Murieta* (*Fulgor y Muerte de Joaquin Murieta*) to *The Star and Death of Joaquin Murieta* (Звезда и смерть Хоакина Мурьеты). Grushko recalls this titular change as “not much of a boon in the [original] translation of the cantata,” but reports that “it really helped” when transitioning to a libretto.<sup>352</sup> It allowed for the creation of two eponymous characters – Star and Death. The most crucial change, however, was pairing Neruda's text with the popular VIA Araks – which by this time had garnered a reputation for covering songs by Led Zeppelin, Deep Purple, and Santana.<sup>353</sup> Other popular ensembles Rok-Atel'e and Integral subsequently joined the soundtrack of the rock opera's 1982 film version.

As for the historical figure of Joaquin Murieta, it is entirely possible he never actually existed. Considered the Robin Hood of the California Gold Rush, Murieta – real or otherwise – had captured the imagination of other artists, starting with the Native American novelist John Rollin Ridge in the mid-nineteenth century. Ridge, writing under his Cherokee name “Yellow Bird,” published *The Life and Adventures of Joaquín Murieta: The Celebrated California Bandit* in 1854. According to Ridge scholars, this novel – the first by a Native American, and one of the first written in California – was intended as a work of fiction, yet was taken as documentary truth by historians of the time.<sup>354</sup> Due to its mass popularity and the low social status of its author, the

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<sup>352</sup> M. Tereshchenko, “Vsë perevod, dazhe rech – s iazyka myslei,” *Liudi* (2 February 2002).

<sup>353</sup> For a history of the ensemble, see their site: <http://www.araks-rock.ru/story.html>

<sup>354</sup> For more information on the Native American author, see J.W. Parins, *John Rolling Ridge: His Life and Works* (Lincoln, NE: University of Nebraska Press, 2004).



book suffered from widespread plagiarism, which robbed John Rollin Ridge of any deserved income yet simultaneously helped spread the tale of Joaquin Murieta.

**Figure 4.5, Aleksei Rybnikov (2<sup>nd</sup> row, 4<sup>th</sup> from L), director Mark Zakharov (2<sup>nd</sup> row, 4<sup>th</sup> from R), VIA Araks, and other performers**



The legendary bandit was allegedly born in northwestern Mexico and went to California to join the Gold Rush in 1849. Ridge's fictional account has Murieta and his family treated poorly by racist miners jealous of his success, who both rape the hero's wife and horsewhip him.<sup>355</sup> Other sources tell of Murieta's paramilitary band, made of friends and relatives who

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<sup>355</sup> J. Rollin Ridge, *The Life and Adventures of Joaquín Murieta, The Celebrated California Bandit* (Fresno, CA: Three Rocks Research, 2005).

illegally traded horses with Mexico and help Murieta avenge his attackers.<sup>356</sup> Most agree on the fact that he was a highwayman who, together with his posse, attacked both wagon trains and settlers alike. In 1853, a group of California State Rangers – formed specifically to deal with Gold Country outlaws – came upon Murieta’s gang, known as the Five Joaquins, and killed him. The California State Military Museum tells of the Rangers decapitating Murieta and displaying his head throughout the state, along with the three-fingered hand of an accomplice.<sup>357</sup> Nonetheless, newspapers of the time cast aspersions on the official “identification” of the head as that of Murieta.<sup>358</sup> In short, a cattle thief with the same name probably lived during the 1850s, but there is no consensus on whether he was Chilean or Mexican; an ethical Robin Hood or a manic beast. What does remain clear, however, is that the story was compelling to writers and readers alike.

Neruda took creative license with an already muddled account. His 1967 play opens with a brief foreword, describing the author’s genre and general approach:

These pages are not concerned with confirming history or validating fantasy. On the contrary. Between the fantasy and the history of things, I have interposed my personal identity. Around it whirls a maelstrom of fire and blood, avarice, outrage, and insurrection.<sup>359</sup>

The cantata begins with a choir, telling of the renowned bandit Joaquin Murieta, a bold Chilean whose spirit haunts California to this day. We then find ourselves in the port of Valparaíso,

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<sup>356</sup> F. Latta, *Joaquín Murrieta and His Horse Gangs* (Exeter, CA: Bear State Books, 1980).

<sup>357</sup> For more information on the California State Rangers and Murieta, see [www.militarymuseum.org](http://www.militarymuseum.org) (under California Militia and National Guard Units, then California State Rangers).

<sup>358</sup> “The Los Angeles Fruit Crops – The Head of Joaquin Muriatta not taken – A strange story!” *The Daily Alta* 4.23 (23 August 1853): 2.

<sup>359</sup> Neruda, vii.

where Three-Fingered Jack persuades a customs agent to come to California with them in search of gold. During the trip, Joaquin weds his beloved Teresa – although at this point in Neruda’s cantata, they are only silhouettes on the stage. Upon Teresa’s arrival, she is raped and then murdered by local rangers who proclaim the White race to be superior to all others. Joaquin returns home and promises revenge; from that day forth, he will live as a bandit. He is ultimately captured and beheaded. The play ends with Murieta’s severed head lamenting his love, death, and the passing of time.

Like other fictional depictions of Murieta, Neruda’s grants both depth and feeling to the title character – while adding a clear authorial presence (in fact, the disembodied voice opening the prologue and narrating throughout is labelled “The Poet’s Voice”). A translator’s note emphasizes Neruda’s presence:

The poet is constantly present in his drama of “splendor and death,” meditating the occasion of his poem, appraising the morality of his hagiography of violence, vindicating the banditry of his hero, mediating, justifying, disclosing: the theophanic god-in-the-machine of his contrivance.<sup>360</sup>

In the same way, the creators of this Russian rock opera left their own indelible mark on the legend of a charismatic bandit. The pitiful narrative arc scribed in Neruda’s poetry – then amplified by Aleksei Rybnikov’s heavy soundtrack – became downright grim in its Soviet guise. He recalls: “I decided to do ‘The Star and Death...’ as symphonic rock, a combination of big symphonic form and rock rhythms.”<sup>361</sup> Much like the creators of *Orpheus and Eurydice*, so the composer of *Joaquin Murieta* was moving parallel to the aesthetic and philosophical trajectory of the Third Direction.

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<sup>360</sup> Neruda, xvii.

<sup>361</sup> L. Guzeeva, “‘Yunona’ proshla rify na Avos’,” *Novaya Gazeta* (9 July 2001).

Although similarities are clear with Zhurbin's narratively contained variety of rock 'n' roll, *Joaquin Murieta* went a little further in its embrace of rock onstage. As Peter Schmelz states:

*Jesus Christ Superstar* was hybrid on many levels: low/high, political/apolitical, religious/critical of religion, rock/classical, 'entertainment'/'art.' Zhurbin's *Orpheus and Eurydice* was a diluted version of this hybridity. It was seen as provocative by its composer, its listeners, and many (but not all) Soviet officials, but its musical style was relatively orthodox for 1975, especially since it featured one of the better-known officially sponsored VIAs.<sup>362</sup>

Rybnikov's piece exhibited a less diluted form of generic hybridity that aligned matters more closely with Western models, specifically *Jesus Christ Superstar*. Whereas *Orpheus and Eurydice* kept a rock aesthetic paired with "clear 'classical' signifiers" such as "the running scales that each singer performs while warming up for the contest," *Joaquin Murieta* expanded its range of appropriate uses.<sup>363</sup> Through an examination of musical style and narrative in this quasi-Western rock opera, I next hope to demonstrate how Rybnikov continued the development of the Soviet rock opera genre – while simultaneously taking another step toward the burgeoning Third Direction.<sup>364</sup>

The opera begins with a cabaret-style showman, who announces the spectacle of Murieta's head and the three-fingered hand of his accomplice, both on display at a macabre sideshow. In the 1982 film version of the piece, the announcer's mask is stripped off to reveal the unsmiling face of Death – a visage the viewer does not yet recognize, but will soon come to

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<sup>362</sup> Schmelz, 84.

<sup>363</sup> *Ibid.*, 74.

<sup>364</sup> For work explicitly naming Aleksei Rybnikov as one of the pioneers of the Third Direction, see Stetsiuk & Abakumov (2005), as well as Kuryшева (2007).

associate with everything gruesome and horrible.<sup>365</sup> At 1:50, the credits launch into a stirring theme, in function not unlike the “chase motifs” mentioned in Chapter Three’s discussion of *The Twelve Chairs*. Although similarly cinematic, this theme differs in its less comical affect and instrumentation (frantic percussion reminiscent of Mitch Mitchell circa *Jimi Hendrix Experience* era, heavily distorted ascending electric guitar riffs, and intermittent brass punctuation). *The Twelve Chairs* theme alerts the audience of slapdash hijinks to follow; *Joaquin*’s opening action theme warns of darker things to come.

A few minutes later (3:38), the driving assemblage of riffs lets up and melts away into what we might call the “Chile theme.” This simultaneously indexes a folk aesthetic – complete with strummed strings, lively (although not overly wild) percussion, and a balladic feel – as well as stereotypical “South American” signifiers, such as the pan flute. The Chile theme grounds any action taking place in the homeland; it also serves to summon a sense of nostalgia for home later in the opera. The Chileans’ relationship to their homeland is a complex one, as witnessed by “Song of the Organ Grinder” (beginning at approximately 8:00 in the film version). This eerie, carnivalesque tune – speeding up cartoonishly as it goes – relays that: “We’ve been taught since childhood that there is no country more wonderful than Chile.” It lists the nation’s many charms, yet ends each list of attributes by declaring “there is no life” to be had there.

The first “diegetic” appearance of rock music, aside from the overture, comes with the appearance of capitalistic sirens – who entice the Chileans with promises of gold. This motif is redolent of *Orpheus*, where Zhurbin grants “conventional rock songs, with bluesy electric guitar

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<sup>365</sup> *Zvezda i smert' Khoakina Mur'ety*. Dir. V. Grammatikov. Tsentral'naia kinostudia detskikh i yunosheskikh fil'mov imeni M. Gork'ogo, Yaltinskiy filial, 1981. The film can be viewed at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=1sWla0p4oaQ>.

solos to indicate their authenticity” to the other participants of the singing contest.<sup>366</sup> Their repetition of the word “gold” [золото] acts as a rhythmic driver and compels all listeners to pack up and head for California. Nonetheless, when Joaquin and his friends are talking alone after this sonic barrage, he does not echo their obsession with gold, but rather sings a simple pop ode à la Andrew Lloyd Webber’s “Everything’s All Right” to the things that really matter – “a house by a pond...a garden with cherry trees...and roosters singing at dawn.” Thus it is established from the outset that while folk music belongs to the Chileans, and affable pop to Joaquin and his Soviet-approved values, rock music is the provenance of capitalists.

**Figure 4.6, L-R, Aleksei Rybnikov, director Mark Zakharov, poet Andrey Voznesenskiy, and performer Nikolai Karachentsov in 1981**



The most striking and systematic use of rock in *Joaquin Murieta*, however, is inextricably tied to the character of Death. After the appearance of Joaquin’s Star – his guiding

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<sup>366</sup> Schmelz, 74.

force and, it seems, guardian angel – we see and hear Death for the first time (around 22:30 in the film version). In contrast to the Star’s tuneful aria, his almost spoken delivery has no real melody to speak of; it is reminiscent of the lower ranges of Captain Beefheart’s gravelly tessitura. The lyrics warn of the dangers of “following the Star without looking under their feet,” foreshadowing that “the path to the Star is littered with hundreds of heads.” His rhythmic repetition at the ends of certain phrases (“в пропасть упадет, в пропасть упадет!”) recalls *Jesus Christ Superstar*’s accentual irregularities (as in on the words “Nazareth, your famous son...” in Judas’s opening number, “Heaven on Their Minds”). Each time Death appears subsequently, his tuneless assertions are underscored with the same frantic percussion and driving bass ostinato. Each of his appearances is also marked by some sort of vocal anomaly, whether it is the funk/soul-style grunts in “Death’s Aria” or the distorted, rhythmical “hee-hee-hee, ha-ha-ha, ho-ho-ho” in the aforementioned “Budet zavarukha,” where he predicts a time when “son and daughter will fight” and “mother will rob daughter.” Although such vocal manipulations can be borderline comical, such as in Ariel’s “Komnata smekha,” or surrealistic, such as in the Beatles’ “I am the Walrus,” the distortion here has a morbid affect – beyond human reason.<sup>367</sup>

The most narratively significant scene of the opera, Teresa’s rape and murder, is marked by boogie-woogie tinkling piano, which accompanies the gold-panners’ unexpected appearance in her home. The juxtaposition of this innocuous, almost good-natured music, and the horrible crime that is to occur (“I’ll need help for this business... We’ll help you, get in line, boys!”) seems both jarring and unsettling. It eventually gives way to a hectic rock beat reminiscent of a Led Zeppelin jam. As Joaquin returns and vows revenge, mourning Teresa’s death, all singing concludes and harsh, driving rock takes over. In the shoot-out that follows (Chileans vs.

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<sup>367</sup> Ariel’, “Komnata smekha.” *Kazhdyi den’ tvoi*. Melodiya, 1982. The song can be heard here: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=jmA1EKrMTAI>.

Americans), the distorted ascending guitar riff from the overture returns again, identifying itself as the revenge motif. As opposed to the mixed-meter deviations of Death's songs, Joaquin's revenge music is in 4/4, stable and grounded in its destructive certainty. Interspersed with quiet, poignant moments of the Chile theme, we see Joaquin's band slaughtering the Americans – and vice-versa – all to this unrelenting beat. After the bloodbath lessens, we hear Death's final aria (again in an irregular rhythm), where he breaks his previous monotone declamation style and sings of “red fountains” in a melodramatic, soaring voice more reminiscent of Webber's Judas than any Soviet *estrada* performer. This is not the golden voice of Orpheus; it is instead the hoarse screech of Death – and in some ways, it has the final word.

Despite Rybnikov's avoidance of the term “rock opera” and the neat “good Chileans versus bad Americans” binary of the original story, *Joaquin Murieta* still encountered bureaucratic meddling that reminds us of Zhurbin's experience. Librettist Pavel Grushko recalls the show being banned – a legendary eleven times! – before finally premiering in May 1976 at the Lenkom Theater.<sup>368</sup> Yet the public had already been primed with Zhurbin's rock opera on the Soviet stage, and *Joaquin* grew to enjoy enormous popularity, just like its predecessor. As we have seen, a film version was then authorized; the Rybnikov/Zakharov creative team also went on to produce yet another – this time thematically Russian – rock opera based on the work of Soviet poet Andrey Voznesenskiy in the early 1980s. In other words, their chosen style proved to be enduringly popular once initial obstacles were overcome. Even despite potential taboos, a scripted opera was ultimately less unpredictable than a rock concert, and therefore “easier to

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<sup>368</sup> Guzeeva.



restrict within moral and ideological bounds.”<sup>369</sup> Taking this into account, Soviet rock opera was very much a product of its liminal age, and grew – in retrospect – to be viewed as a contribution to music history under the aegis of the incipient Third Direction.

## **Conclusion**

Rock opera’s appearance in the Soviet era of “stagnation” may still seem somewhat anomalous. But as St. Petersburg historian/journalist Lev Lurie has it:

The year 1975 was a safe, calm time. Oil prices were high. Salaries were improving. The state was building houses, apartments, and metro stations... The powers that be allowed previously forbidden phenomena to come to fruition. The appearance of the rock opera *Orpheus and Eurydice* in this leisurely, yet stagnant environment was no accident.<sup>370</sup>

Yet as we have seen in our outline of the show’s history, even in this relatively peaceful time, composers and producers were obliged to carefully navigate the system – preferably with friends in high places – in order to achieve anything genuinely novel.

Russian musicologist A. Tsuker defines rock opera as a fundamentally multifaceted phenomenon: “The principle of ‘poly’ functions on all of [rock opera]’s levels, allowing us to speak of the polyvalence of its plots, dramaturgy, genre status, and stylistic features.”<sup>371</sup> This has been immediately evident in composers’ and librettists’ traditional choices of historical source (such as Greek myth, for example) as a rock opera’s initial subject. Tsuker further explains the inherent, yet fruitful duality in such decisions, which allowed for a potentially wide appeal in a

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<sup>369</sup> Y. Steinholt, *Rock in the Reservation: Songs from the Leningrad Rock Club 1981-86* (Larchmont, NY: The Mass Media Music Scholars’ Press, 2005), 24.

<sup>370</sup> "Orfei i Evridika."

<sup>371</sup> Tsuker, 170.

conservative milieu, yet were couched in modern language. He cites *Jesus Christ Superstar* as an archetypal example:

On one hand, the authors' turn to an evangelical plot allowed them to widen the range of associations, to imbue the narrative with high tragedy, and raise it to a level of eternal, universal impact – which was also aided by parallels with Bach's Passions. On the other hand, they seriously modernized the known story, bringing it as close as possible to the understandings and values of modern man. This [rock] opera reflected the spiritual search of the Western youth in the '60s and '70s, carrying hippy ideology, and evoking very direct parallels with the social atmosphere and specific ideas of that movement... No matter which rock opera we examine, we see everywhere a similar parallelism and duality of content, connecting within itself the universe and daily life, the philosophical and the social, balancing between modernized eternity and the symbolic present.<sup>372</sup>

This same state of affairs can be seen in both of the operas examined in this chapter. Zhurbin's *Orpheus* is a modern rock singer dealing with the complexity of twentieth-century life – yet he faces the age-old question of fame's ultimate price. Even in Rybnikov's historical show, the resounding echoes of Joaquin Murieta's tragic fate are “preserved within folk memory and embellished with fantasy.” They “have long embodied eternal human values.”<sup>373</sup> In Rybnikov's rock opera – even more clearly than in Neruda's cantata – “heroic personalities are larger than life. The [original] fable is stripped of many details and specifics, concrete circumstances are generalized, and the symbolic personages of Star and Death emerge, giving us the flavor of Greek myth/opera.”<sup>374</sup> This is where theater, *estrada*, and rock meet, each lending its dominant qualities to affect the Soviet observer in novel ways.

In a reflective discussion of Soviet “rock music” during the late 1980s, Rybnikov divided the evolution of Russian rock into three stages. The first was amateur and largely derivative,

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<sup>372</sup> Ibid., 170-1.

<sup>373</sup> Ibid., 173.

<sup>374</sup> Ibid.

when Russian “beat-groups” sang in English and took their cues from foreign bands such as The Beatles.<sup>375</sup> The next stage summarized those early efforts and turned toward something more individualistic, such as the folk-rock of VIAs Ariel’ or Pesniary. The third and final phase – which coincided with the composer’s post-*perestroika* interview – marked a time when it was “no longer necessary to speak of rock music, but of rock poetry and rock thinking, perhaps... if the word ‘rock’ means anything at all.”<sup>376</sup> He goes on to explain:

After all, more often than not, we take [the word “rock”] to mean something penetrating, catchy, and directly affecting the soul of your peers. It means sharing our pain openly, while breaking through the framework and blinders of [state-run] radio and television, which have severely limited what’s possible.<sup>377</sup>

This definition of “rock” as something with a particular communicative intention (rather than any specific technical qualifications) rings especially true in Soviet society. Whenever officials objected to the title “rock opera,” it was the presumed political intent behind such terms that shocked more than any aesthetic gestures. This is why the Third Direction aimed to reconcile not only disparate musical trajectories, but their disparate *audiences* as well.

Ultimately, rock opera as it is understood in the West was most suited to the USSR because of the Soviet penchant for theatricalization, as well as the Third Direction’s preoccupation with blending popular and classical styles. This put *estrada* songwriters such as Zhurbin and Rybnikov in a unique position – classically trained composers who undertook the “socially responsible” task of writing popular music in order to both educate and enlighten the youth of their society. Zhurbin’s first effort opened the door for increasing reassessment of

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<sup>375</sup> For a discussion of VIAs, see Chapter Two.

<sup>376</sup> A. Rybnikov, “Rok-muzyka: prodolzhenie razgovora.” *Muzykal’naia zhizn’* 13 (6 May 1987): 5.

<sup>377</sup> *Ibid.*

popular music under the guidance of late socialism. As Peter Schmelz writes, “*Orpheus and Eurydice* becomes an ideal indicator of both late socialism and late socialist realism; its reception illustrates the cracks that were beginning to appear – and were often allowed to appear – in official orthodoxy.”<sup>378</sup> *Joaquin Murieta* followed in its footsteps, increasing the potential musical provocations. The mid- to late-1970s were a unique time in Soviet history – a period of trepidation, yet also of creative openings. The experiences of Rybnikov and Zhurbin help to show how artistic agents could operate under Brezhnev, claiming both authorship and agency in liminal states between the official and unofficial.

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<sup>378</sup> Schmelz, 67.

## CONCLUSION

### TOWARD A POST-COLD WAR POPULAR MUSICOLOGY

In this dissertation, I have shown how state-approved composers, songwriters, filmmakers, directors, performers, and other creative agents negotiated the political and social waters of a Soviet “stagnation” in the 1970s. Through an examination of popular figures who provided the soundtrack to this decade of Soviet life, I have demonstrated how room for Western-influenced rock aesthetics existed within Soviet state-approved music. I have also shed light on the contrary forces that drove both musical production and promotion within the USSR. Moreover, this dissertation has charted the ways by which popular music can be used to construct highly personal meanings and spaces within a rigidly political system that both affects *and* enables it.

State-sponsored popular music, or *estrada*, of the Soviet 1970s assumed a variety of shapes. By examining the output and reception of two socially active, outspoken composers – Aleksandra Pakhmutova and Raimond Pauls – I have shown how official ideology was transmitted (and transmuted) through popular song. A consideration of Vocal-Instrumental Ensembles has helped us explore issues of genre in the Soviet Union. An inquiry into the music of such VIAs, as well as that of well-known composer David Tukhmanov, has shed light on the influence of Western popular genres – particularly progressive rock – on homegrown *estrada*. Similar examinations of popular music on the silver screen and the rock opera stage have illuminated creative process and social negotiation within those realms. With the theories of anthropologist Alexei Yurchak and media theorist Boris Groys, I have demonstrated how Soviet cultural producers (especially those involved in the composition of popular music) existed in an

oblique relationship with the state – neither fully “official” nor “unofficial.” A recognition of this complexity in Soviet popular music, a practice so often ignored or dismissed as “light entertainment,” particularly within the former USSR and its successor states, has implications both for the study of other restrictive governments worldwide and for future research into twentieth-century Eastern European culture.

Most importantly, however, this dissertation works toward a post-Cold War popular musicology – along the lines proposed by Nicholas Tochka in 2013:

In providing justifications for academic funding, shaping scholarly research agendas or even bringing into being entire fields of inquiry, the Cold War disciplined the English-speaking academy in far-reaching ways. By encouraging the reassessment and revision of core analytical concepts or re-examinations of particular histories and areas, the Cold War’s end proved no less significant across the humanities and social sciences. What might music scholars gain by examining how the Cold War inflected the study of popular music? What questions might a ‘post-Cold War’ popular music studies raise? The term ‘post’ here indicates both a recognition and a refusal of an ideology that partitioned the world into a ‘free’ First World, an ‘unfree’ Second World and a ‘traditional’ Third World.<sup>379</sup>

By examining tremendously popular composers who remain almost unacknowledged in English-language research, this dissertation has both challenged and refined some assumptions inherent in studying music within a censoring and censorious system. Following in the footsteps of Gleb Tsipursky’s substantial 2011 dissertation, I focus on the role of *estrada* in demonstrating that:

Official socialist culture in the height of the postwar Stalin period [and in the 1970s], far from being monolithic, was riven by tensions between economic incentives

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<sup>379</sup> N. Tochka, “Pussy Riot, Freedom of Expression, and Popular Music Studies After the Cold War,” *Popular Music* 32.02 (2013), 307-8.

oriented toward consumption and ideological directives from the top, a conflict ultimately attributable to the policies of the Kremlin itself.<sup>380</sup>

Nuancing the social context of Soviet popular music production in this way can be seen as one of the aims of a post-Cold War popular musicology. This dissertation has also addressed some larger questions about popular music and society: for instance, how do we as scholars approach the artifacts and baggage of a collapsed system – one responsible for decades of cultural production and communal formation? By looking at the complex relationships between state, composer, and listener in the USSR of the 1970s, I hope to have contributed a distinct perspective in approaching the vibrant musical artifacts of a defunct system. Their nuanced and ambivalent original context may have been left behind in political ruins, but their sounds and meanings remain to this day in the hearts of many.

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<sup>380</sup> G. 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), 121.

## Appendix A

Судьба моя, мечта моя - далёкие пути,  
Да вечное движение, да ветры впереди.  
Глаза пристанционные зелёные сверкнут  
До отправления поезда осталось пять минут.

Старый мотив железных дорог,  
Вечная молодость рельсовых строк...  
Кажется, будто вся жизнь впереди.  
Не ошибись, выбирая пути!

За окнами вагонными гитары говорят,  
Как будто вся страна моя - строительный отряд.  
Друзья мои надёжные с дороги не свернут.  
До отправления поезда осталось пять минут.

Старый мотив железных дорог,  
Вечная молодость рельсовых строк...  
Кажется, будто вся жизнь впереди.  
Не ошибись, выбирая пути!

И пусть уже раскована космическая даль,  
Идет-грядёт великая земная Магистраль.  
Проложим за Байкалом мы невиданный маршрут.  
До отправления поезда осталось пять минут.

My fate, my dream – faraway roads,  
And perpetual motion, and winds ahead.  
The station's green eyes sparkle –  
There is only five minutes until the train leaves.

The old railroad motif,  
The eternal youth of the railway lines...  
It seems as though all of life is just ahead.  
Do not err in choosing your path!

Guitars talk beyond the windows of the train car,  
As if my entire country is a construction team.  
My faithful friends will not stray from the path.  
There is only five minutes until the train leaves.

The old railroad motif,  
The eternal youth of the railway lines...  
It seems as though all of life is just ahead.  
Do not err in choosing your path!

And now we have unlocked the cosmic depths,  
The great terrestrial mainline unfolds.  
We shall lay down an unprecedented route past Baikal.  
There is only five minutes until the train leaves.



## Appendix B

### **Original poem by Evgeniy Evtushenko:**

Со мною вот что происходит:  
ко мне мой старый друг не ходит,  
а ходят в мелкой суете  
разнообразные не те.  
И он не с теми ходит где-то  
и тоже понимает это,  
и наш раздор необъясним,  
и оба мучимся мы с ним.  
Со мною вот что происходит:  
совсем не та ко мне приходит,  
мне руки на плечи кладёт  
и у другой меня крадёт.  
А той - скажите, бога ради,  
кому на плечи руки класть?  
Та, у которой я украден,  
в отместку тоже станет красть.  
Не сразу этим же ответит,  
а будет жить с собой в борьбе  
и неосознанно наметит  
кого-то дальнего себе.  
О, сколько  
нервных  
и недужных,  
ненужных связей,  
дружб ненужных!  
Куда от этого я денусь?!  
О, кто-нибудь, приди, нарушь  
чужих людей соединённость  
и разобщённость близких душ! (1957)

### **Song lyrics:**

Со мною вот что происходит  
Ко мне мой старый друг не ходит  
А ходят в праздной суете  
Разнообразные не те  
И он не с теми ходит где-то  
И тоже понимает это  
И наш раздор необъясним  
Мы оба мучаемся с ним  
Со мною вот что происходит  
Совсем не та ко мне приходит  
Мне руки на плечи кладет и у другой  
меня крадет  
А той скажите бога ради  
Кому на плечи руки класть  
Та у которой я украден  
В отместку тоже станет красть  
Не сразу этим же ответит  
А будет жить с собой в борьбе  
И неосознанно наметит  
Кого-то дальнего себе  
О сколько нервных и недужных связей  
Дружб ненужных во мне уже  
осатаненность  
О кто-нибудь приди нарушь  
Чужих людей соединенность  
И разобщенность близких душ  
Со мною вот что происходит  
Ко мне мой старый друг не ходит  
А ходят в праздной суете разнообразные  
не те  
Со мною вот что происходит  
Со мною вот что происходит  
Со мною вот что происходит.

### Original poem by Boris Pasternak:

Никого не будет в доме,  
Кроме сумерек. Один  
Зимний день в сквозном проеме  
Незадёрнутых гардин.

Только белых мокрых комьев  
Быстрый промельк моховой,  
Только крыши, снег, и, кроме  
Крыш и снега, никого.

И опять зачертит иней,  
И опять завертит мной  
Прошлогоднее унынье  
И дела зимы иной.

И опять кольнут донине  
Не отпущенной виной,  
И окно по крестовине  
Сдавит голод дровяной.

Но неожиданно по портъере  
Пробежит сомненья дрожь,-  
Тишину шагами мера.  
Ты, как будущность, войдешь.

Ты появишься из двери  
В чем-то белом, без причуд,  
В чем-то, впрямь из тех материй,  
Из которых хлопья шьют. (1931)

### Song lyrics:

Никого не будет в доме,  
Кроме сумерек. Один  
Зимний день в сквозном проёме  
Незадёрнутых гардин...  
Незадёрнутых гардин.

Только белых мокрых комьев  
Быстрый промельк моховой.  
Только крыши, снег и, кроме  
Крыш и снега, -- никого...  
Крыш и снега, -- никого.

И опять зачертит иней,  
И опять завертит мной  
Прошлогоднее унынье  
И дела зимы иной...  
И дела зимы иной,

Но неожиданно по портъере  
Пробежит вторженья дрожь.  
Тишину шагами мера,  
Тишину шагами мера,  
Тишину шагами мера,  
Ты, как будущность, войдешь.

Ты появишься у двери  
В чём-то белом, без причуд,  
В чём-то впрямь из тех материй,  
Из которых хлопья шьют...  
Из которых хлопья шьют.

Никого не будет в доме,  
Кроме сумерек. Один  
Зимний день в сквозном проёме  
Незадёрнутых гардин...  
Незадёрнутых гардин.

### Original poem by Bella Akhmadulina:

По улице моей который год  
звучат шаги - мои друзья уходят.  
Друзей моих медлительный уход  
той темноте за окнами угоден.

Запущены моих друзей дела,  
нет в их домах ни музыки, ни пенья,  
и лишь, как прежде, девочки Дега  
голубенькие оправляют перья.

Ну что ж, ну что ж, да не разбудит страх  
вас, беззащитных, среди этой ночи.  
К предательству таинственная страсть,  
друзья мои, туманит ваши очи.

О одиночество, как твой характер крут!  
Посверкивая циркулем железным,  
как холодно ты замыкаешь круг,  
не внемля увереньям бесполезным.

Так призови меня и награди!  
Твой баловень, обласканный тобою,  
утешусь, прислонясь к твоей груди,  
умоюсь твоей стужей голубою.

Дай стать на цыпочки в твоём лесу,  
на том конце замедленного жеста  
найти листву, и поднести к лицу,  
и ощутить сиротство, как блаженство.

Даруй мне тишь твоих библиотек,  
твоих концертов строгие мотивы,  
и - мудрая - я позабуду тех,  
кто умерли или доселе живы.

И я познаю мудрость и печаль,  
свой тайный смысл доверят мне  
предметы.  
Природа, прислонясь к моим плечам,  
объявит свои детские секреты.

И вот тогда - из слез, из темноты,  
из бедного невежества бывшего  
друзей моих прекрасные черты  
появятся и растворятся снова. (1959)

### Song lyrics:

По улице моей который год  
Звучат шаги, мои друзья уходят.  
Друзей моих медлительный уход  
Той темноте за окнами угоден.

О одиночество как твой характер крут!  
Посверкивая циркулем железным,  
Как холодно ты замыкаешь круг,  
Не внемля увереньям бесполезным.

Дай стать на цыпочки в твоём лесу,  
На том конце замедленного жеста  
Найти листву и поднести к лицу,  
И ощутить сиротство как блаженство.

Даруй мне тишь своих библиотек,  
Твоих концертов строгие мотивы,  
И – мудрая – я позабуду тех,  
Кто умерли или доселе живы.

И я познаю мудрость и печаль,  
Свой тайный смысл доверят мне  
предметы.  
Природа, прислонясь к моим плечам,  
Объявит свои детские секреты.

И вот тогда из слез, из темноты,  
Из бедного невежества бывшего  
Друзей моих прекрасные черты  
Появятся и растворятся снова.  
Друзей моих прекрасные черты  
Появятся и растворятся снова

### Original poem by Aleksandr Aronov:

Когда у вас нет собаки,  
Ее не отравит сосед,  
И с другом не будет драки,  
Когда у вас друга нет.

А ударник гремит басами,  
А трубач выжимает медь –  
Думайте сами, решайте сами,  
Иметь или не иметь.

Когда у вас нету дома,  
Пожары вам не страшны,  
И жена не уйдет к другому,  
Когда у вас нет жены.

Когда у вас нету тети,  
Вам тети не потерять.  
И раз уж вы не живете,  
То можно не умирать.

А ударник гремит басами,  
А трубач выжимает медь –  
Думайте сами, решайте сами,  
Иметь или не иметь. (1963)

### Song lyrics:

Если у вас нету дома,  
пожары ему не страшны  
И жена не уйдет к другому,  
Если у вас, если у вас,  
Если у вас нет жены,  
Нету жены.

Если у вас нет собаки,  
ее не отравит сосед,  
И с другом не выйдет драки,  
Если у вас, если у вас,  
Если у вас друга нет  
Друга нет

Оркестр гремит басами,  
Трубач выдувает медь,  
Думайте сами, решайте сами  
Иметь или не иметь.

Если у вас нету тети,  
ее вам не потерять  
И если вы не живете,  
То вам и не, то вам и не,  
То вам и не умирать,  
Не умирать.

Оркестр гремит басами,  
Трубач выдувает медь,  
Думайте сами, решайте сами  
Иметь или не иметь.

## Appendix C

По блюду, блюду серебрянному,  
Плавала чарочка в сладком меду.  
В сладком меду, в сладкой патоке вся,  
Ой воля, ту чарочку принется пить,  
Взялся, принялся один муженек –  
Да сам и запьет и жене подает.  
Сам запьет и жене подает:  
- Ой, выпей-ка женушка, выпей, душа!

- Право же сударь, я пить не хочу!  
Право же, худо, не можется мне.  
Ночью младеньке маленько спалось,  
Мало спалось, много виделось.

Будто у нас на широком дворе  
Выросла травушка шелковая,  
Разные цветики аленькие,  
Аленькие, веселковенькие.  
По этой травушке ходит павлин,  
Ходит павлин с сизой павушкою!

Я тебе, душечка, все расскажу,  
Все расскажу и пером опишу.  
Шелкова травушка – люди при нас,  
Алые цветики – дети при нас.  
Сизый павлин – это твой муженек,  
А сизая павушка – ты у меня,  
Сизая павушка, радость моя,  
Ой, выпей-та женушка чару до дна!

On a silver platter,  
There was a glass of sweet mead.  
So sweet, as sweet as syrup.  
Who will drink this glass?  
One man takes this task on,  
Takes a drink, then passes it to his wife.  
Takes a drink, then passes it to his wife --  
“Drink, my love!”

“Thank you, my sire, but I don’t thirst!  
Thank you, but I cannot.  
I slept very little last night,  
Slept little but saw much.

I saw that in our wide yard,  
There grew silky grass  
And little red flowers,  
Little red ones and little blue ones.  
A peacock walked on this grass,  
A peacock with his peahen.”

“I will explain everything to you, dear heart,  
Explain everything and write it with a quill.  
The silky grass is the people around us,  
The little red flowers – the children by us,  
The peacock is your husband,  
And you are my peahen,  
My dove-colored peahen, my joy,  
Drink the glass to the bottom, my wife!”

**THE SOUNDTRACK OF STAGNATION:  
PARADOXES WITHIN SOVIET POP AND ROCK MUSIC OF THE 1970S**

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