

## Fazit

Die Funktion der deutschen Gastspielreisen bestand offenbar darin, entweder in einem Klima der außenpolitischen Annäherung an Deutschland mittels der Kultur positive Impulse zu vermitteln, oder aber bestehende Bindungen damit zu bekräftigen. Was man heute Imagepflege nennt, nannte man damals ohne pejorativen Beigeschmack Propaganda, ohne dass sich damit über die künstlerische Qualität der Aufführungen urteilen ließe.

Dass die Nazi-Bürokratie gerade im Kunstbereich keineswegs nur hierarchisch funktionierte, sondern oft ein geradezu chaotisches Kompetenzgerangel hervorbrachte, ist inzwischen hinlänglich bekannt. Während jedoch für das Schauspiel umfassende Untersuchungen zur Praxis der politischen Einflussnahme vorliegen, steht dies für das Musiktheater noch aus. Weitere Recherchen in den Akten des RMVP und des Auswärtigen Amtes sind nötig, um die Steuerungsmechanismen offenzulegen, die den Spielplänen und Gastspielen zugrunde lagen. Dass gerade der Oper als Instrument der Außenpolitik große Bedeutung zugemessen wurde, ist jedoch schon jetzt offenkundig.

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## From the Cultural Revolution to the Creative Unions

### Organizing Music in the Soviet Union in the 1930s

The purpose of this paper is to discuss the establishment of the Soviet Composers' Union and how it was related to the concept of the Soviet or New Soviet Music. I have studied the initial stages of the Art Unions of the Soviet Union in the 1930s and concentrated especially on the exchange of views that musicians had about the system of these Art Unions. On the basis of the research, I will explain how Stalinism was linked to the establishment of the Composers' Union. In the 1930s, Soviet society was on the move. The move was one from the Revolution to the Strict Order. The principles of socialism were replaced by the principles of Stalinism.

In the Soviet cultural policy one of the most important watersheds took place in the spring of 1932. On the 23rd of April the Central Committee of the Communist Party passed the resolution »on restructuring literary and artistic organizations«<sup>1</sup>. This reso-

<sup>1</sup> »O perestroike literaturno-hudožestvennyh organizatsij. Postanovlenie CK VKP(b)« 23. 4. 1932, in: *Vlast' i hudožestvennaâ intelligenciâ: Dokumenty CK RKP(b)-VKP(b), VČK-OGPU-NKVD o kul'turnoi politike. 1917–1953 gg.*, ed. by A. N. Ākovlev, A. Artizov and O. Naumov, Moscow 2002, p. 172–173. Version without valuable notions can also be found in: *KPSS o kul'ture, prosvēsenii i nauke: Sbornik dokumentov*, Moscow 1963, p. 213–214.

lution is perceived as the starting point for totalitarian rule of Soviet arts. Indeed, as the resolution stated, for each of the arts a single art union was set up. All the previous art associations were now all closed down. This resolution started a process which gave birth to Socialist Realism, introduced in the first Writers' Congress in August 1934. As regards the beginning of the cultural policy change in the 1930s, a thorough re-evaluation is lacking, especially related to music. Many of the basic works on Soviet music are not based on archival sources. Moreover, the Writers' Union has received the main attention in the research. Literature turned quite quickly to totalitarian rule and it is usually supposed that this change took place also in music right after this April resolution of 1932.<sup>2</sup>

These Art Unions founded after 1932, also known as Creative Unions, were of extreme importance in the development of arts in the Soviet era. They finished the struggle between the so-called revolutionary and modernist art associations. On the one hand, the Art Unions enabled artists to receive regular salary, to have apartments, to be elite in society. On the other hand, they subjected artists to intervention by the Government and through Art Unions the Communist Party was able to effectively intervene in art affairs. The establishment of the Unions and the bureaucratisation of the world of art were closely related. Because the establishment of the Art Unions began simultaneously with the rise of Stalinism, Art Unions have been seen as part of Stalin's plan to ›totalitarianize‹ the whole society. Indeed, the Writers' Union, the first Art Union established, turned out to be repressive and ideologically controlled by the Communist Party and the principle of Socialist Realism.<sup>3</sup> However, artists were themselves strongly involved in the establishment of the Unions by contributing to their actions and operations, as my study points out.

Although widely presumed, other Art Unions were not similar to the Writers' Union. After the April resolution, the Composers' Union alongside other Unions, existed as local branches in bigger cities and republics. Since most of the composers lived in Leningrad and Moscow, these two branches were prominent in the 1930s. Considering the totalitarian rule in the Art Unions, a central feature was their central apparatus. The organizing committee, which was to draw out the charters for the Union, plan the establishing congress and nominate members for the key posts, was crucial for the establishment of the central apparatus. On the 7th of May 1932 Orgbyro of the Communist Party held a meeting where the organizing committee of the Writers' Union was established and its members nominated. In regard to the composers' organizing committee, Orgbyro decided to delay the question,<sup>4</sup> and eventually decided not to establish one.<sup>5</sup> In fact, a committee for

2 See for example the basic works on Soviet music: Fred Prieberg, *Musik in der Sowjetunion*, Cologne 1965; Boris Schwarz, *Music and Musical life in Soviet Russia 1917–1981*, Bloomington 1983.

3 The document collection mentioned in footnote 1, *Vlast' i hudožestvennaâ intelligenciâ* 2002, shows quite effectively the situation Writers' Union and literature ended up to.

4 ›Postanovlenie orgbûro CK VKP(b) o meropriâtiâh po vypolneniû postanovleniâ politbûro CK VKP (b) ›O perestroike literaturno-hudožestvennyh organizatsii‹ 7. 5. 1932, in: Âkovlev, *Vlast' i hudožestvennaâ intelligenciâ*, p. 175–176.

5 Rossijskij gosudarstvennij arhiv sotsial'no-političeskoj istorii (RGASPI), fond 17 opis 114 delo 300 list 5, Moscow.

the establishment of the first Composers' Congress appeared only in 3rd of May 1939.<sup>6</sup> The establishing congress of the Composers' Union took place only in 1948. This is the point when the totalitarian rule of the musical world was ready, not in the 1930s, but at the end of the 1940s. This delay was rarely mentioned in the Soviet Union. One notable exception is the Soviet Encyclopaedia of 1981 which states: »Composers' Union of USSR was formed during the years 1932–1948.«<sup>7</sup>

How about the Stalinist nature of the Composers' Union in the 1930s then? During the Cold War, Western research perceived the Soviet society as Party-controlled, totalitarian and monolithic. In this scheme, artists were primarily victims of the system. At the same time, Soviet research tried to prove that society was democratic and artists were themselves beneficiaries, not victims. Recent studies have shown that the truth is perhaps somewhere between. Even at the peak of repression and totalitarianism, there was still a considerable amount of freedom and action independent of the Communist Party. However, studies concerning Soviet art still regard the Art Unions primarily as a part of the totalitarian scheme.

My study indicates that composers and musicologists could act and speak surprisingly freely in the first years after the establishment of the Composers' Union. The reception of the Union on the behalf of composers was good – they enjoyed mostly the benefits of the Art Union system, not the deficits. Moreover, because the Party controls were far from fixed, the discussions on the new Soviet music were free and heated and different opinions were still allowed. All this indicates that ideological control over the Composers' Union was far from totalitarian in the 1930s.<sup>8</sup> Soviet artists were neither heroic dissidents nor victims of the system, but they weren't loyal advocates of the Communist Party either. Most artists were materially beneficiaries, but at the same time they had to make concessions for the system in their art. The important finding is that the concessions made by Soviet composers in the 1930s were mostly voluntary. They were not seriously oppressed by the Party at this phase.

One of the key concepts in the discussions of the Composers' Union in the 1930s was Soviet music. In the 1920s, new music was understood usually as modern music, music re-

6 »Postanovlenie politbûro CK VKP(b) o meropriâtiâh po sozdaniû soûza sovetskih kompozitorov« 3.5.1939, in: Âkovlev, *Vlast' i budožestvennaâ intelligenciâ*, p. 429; see also Rossijskij gosudarstvennij arhiv literatury i iskusstva (RGALI), f. 2077, op. 1, d. 21, l. 1–3, Moscow. To this committee of Composers were nominated composers from Šostakovič to Mâskovskij. In the light of the preceding events it is surprising that musicologists apart from Asaf'ev were lacking. Instead, leading light genre composers Samuil Pokrass and Isaak Dunaevskij were included.

7 M. M. Âkovlev, Art. »Soûz Kompozitorov SSSR«, in: *Muzykal'naâ Entsiklopediâ*, vol. 5, Moscow 1981, p. 232–233.

8 RGALI f. 962, op. 3, d. 107, l. 62. In December 1936, Chairman of the Committee for Art Affairs and prominent Party figure Pavel Keržencev expressed his worry that the Composers' Union had fallen under harmful influences. One of the main problems was the lacking of central administration. He also underlined (l. 68) that the Composers' Union should try to achieve the same kind of status that the Writers' Union had in literal front. He suggested that Composers' Union was still far from the level of Writers' Union; RGALI, f. 962, op 5, d. 25, l. 19. In his memorandum from the same meeting, Keržencev regarded that the inefficient Party cell was the main reasons for the problems of the Union.

lated to composers such as Schönberg, Martinů or Webern. In the years preceding the resolution of 1932, the revolutionary and militant associations for proletarian music regarded this kind of music only as corrupted music of the bourgeois world. Proletarian musicians suggested that this modern music should be discarded and instead the autonomic musical expression of the proletariat be promoted.<sup>9</sup> In the Composers' Union these revolutionary as well as modernist traditions lived side by side, but not always peacefully. The establishment of the Composers' Union branches started the discussions on new Soviet music in 1932.<sup>10</sup> What was it going to be like? It is quite common to link the Composers' Union to Stalinism and the notion of Soviet Music to Socialist Realism. It is alleged that Socialist Realism was only a device to control the artistic sphere. But this was not the case at first: the Composers' Union discussed Soviet Music independently even using the concept of Socialist Realism. And all this happened well before the first Writers' congress in 1934, where Socialist Realism was finally introduced and its main principles defined.

In the discussions of the Composers' Union there were several ideas which later became principles of Socialist Realism. Socialist Realist art is often presented as a counterpoint to the avant-garde of the 1920s. Boris Groys has alleged that Socialist art had more links with the avant-garde than previously presumed, for example the strife to move art from its traditional arenas, concert halls and museums to ordinary people.<sup>11</sup> Musicologist Viktor Gorodinskij presented the same objective in one of his writings in *Sovetskaia Muzyka*. He argued that musical Socialist Realism required concrete work amongst people, in the collective farms and factories instead of concert halls.<sup>12</sup> This was also one of the first forms of action the Composers' Union adopted. Composer Vissarion Šebalin recalls that the first creative journey to a collective farm was accomplished in the winter of 1933–34.<sup>13</sup> These kinds of journeys became common in the summer of 1934. Beside farms and factories, divisions of the Red Army were common targets for these journeys. Several compositions and the Composers' ideological growth were presented as results. This kind of ideological work was not of a negative kind, and can be seen mostly as harmless. Thus, composers seemed to participate in them actively.

An important feature already in the early Composers' Union was the prominent position musicologists gained. In one of the leading articles of *Sovetskaia Muzyka* musicologists were accused of being uncommunicative; musicology and compositional work were seen to be too far away from each other.<sup>14</sup> Musicology was attached closely to the objectives of the

9 See Neil Edmunds, *The Soviet Proletarian Music Movement*, Bern 2000; also see Amy Nelson, *Music for the Revolution: Musicians and Power in Early Soviet Russia*, Pennsylvania 2004.

10 Central arenas for these discussions were the organ of Composers' Union, *Sovetskaia Muzyka*, and the different meetings and sections of the Union from which there are some protocols survived in different archives.

11 Boris Groys, *The Total Art of Stalinism: Avant-Garde, Aesthetic Dictatorship, and Beyond*, transl. by Charles Rougle, Princeton 1992, p. 5–7.

12 Viktor Gorodinskij, »Vypolnim naš dolg pered kolhozami«, in: *Sovetskaia Muzyka* 6 (1933), p. 2.

13 Vissarion Šebalin, *Žizn' i tvorchestvo*, ed. by V. I. Raževa, Moscow 2003, p. 41.

14 »Za vysokoe kačestvo sovetsoj muzykal'noj kritiki (k itogam sessii muzykal'noj kritiki v Moskve [7–10 aprilâ 1934 g.]«, in: *Sovetskaia muzyka* 5 (1934), p. 5.

Composers' Union, but it was also experiencing changes as such. Musical criticism was seen as a crucial part of this change. The Chief Editor of *Sovetskaia Muzyka* and the chairman of the Moscow branch Nikolaj Čelâpov maintained that criticism had to be valued highly because it was a powerful mechanism for directing compositional work. With systematic musical criticism it was possible to organize the whole musical front. However, he emphasized that criticism had to serve composers, not the other way around.<sup>15</sup> In short, musicologists were encouraged to define the nature of Soviet music in theory and help composers to realize it in practice. Later on, mere directing became less artistic and more political, but not during the early 1930s.

Formalism, which is today remembered as being the original sin of Soviet composers, was already present in the early discussion of the Composers' Union. While formalism was something Dmitrij Šostakovič was accused of in the spring of 1936, it was not a new concept during those times. In Soviet use, formalism was older than Art Unions, but in the musical field it became a key concept after 1932. Socialist Realism of music was experienced to be hard to define. Formalism did not define Socialist Realism, but it provided an antithesis, a counterpoint for it. Musical formalism meant emphasis of form in compositions at the expense of content. If composition was able to carry socialist content, then the form in composition should unambiguously serve this content. This view was well presented in the spring of 1936, when Šostakovič's opera and ballet were attacked in the Party's newspaper *Pravda*. Reports of the following discussions underlined the central role of formalism.<sup>16</sup> An important feature is, however, that nobody in the musical field was persecuted after these events. In the field of literature the kind of accusations Šostakovič experienced in music in many cases ended up in camp sentences or even in death. Šostakovič was not the only victim, if at all a target. The main target was artistic modernism. Not music alone, but artistic modernism as a whole.

If the Party would have controlled the Composers' Union, this kind of campaign by the *Pravda* would have been pointless. I argue that the Composers' Union in its early years presented ideas about formalism and socialism in music, but there were also strong opinions on behalf of modern Western music. Ivan Sollertinskij was perhaps the best known of these modernists. The modernist cause experienced a setback in 1936, when modernist music was attacked and in the autumn Šostakovič's 4th Symphony was banned. The biggest blow, however, was delivered during the first Composers' Congress in 1948. Soviet Music was considered as something comprehensible to broad masses, which Western-style modern music definitely was not. This was one measure to make music better able to serve

15 Nikolaj Čelâpov, »Istoričeskaâ godovšina«, in: *Sovetskaâ muzyka* 2 (1933), p. 4; Nikolaj Čelâpov, »Marksistsko-leninskoe muzykovedenie na novuï stupen'!«, in: *Sovetskaâ muzyka* 4 (1933), p. 5; Vladimir Iohel'son, »Leningradskii Soûz sovetskikh kompozitorov k XVII s'ezdu partii«, in: *Sovetskaâ muzyka* 1 (1934), p. 15.

16 »Sobranie leningradskih kompozitorov«, in: *Pravda* 4.3.1936, p. 4; »Âsnii i prostoï âzyk v iskusstve. Obzor pečati«, in: *Pravda* 13.2.1936, p. 4. In *Pravda's* articles, close friend and main defender of Šostakovič, Ivan Sollertinskij was called as »defender of formalism«. However, Sollertinskij was accused already in the 1934 as »modern recitivist of formalism«: see Viktor Gorodinskij and Vladimir Iohel'son, »Za bol'shevistskuï samokritiku na muzykal'nom fronte«, in: *Sovetskaâ muzyka* 5 (1934), p. 6–12.

the State. But the principles the Party newspaper presented in the spring of 1936 came from the composers, they were not the invention of the Party. All this indicates that musical Socialist Realism was not only determined by higher echelons of the Party, but rather it was a compromise between various groups and aspirations.

Socialist Realism in music was raised as a question in *Sovetskaia Muzyka's* first issue. Musicologist Viktor Gorodinskij tried to approach the concept on a full scale. He tried to call all composers and musicologists to take part in the evolving of Socialist Realism.<sup>17</sup> It is interesting that he received very few answers. One of the few to answer was Šostakovič who »had a bad impression of the article«. Although he mentioned Gorodinskij as a scholarly person, he regarded the presented questions as ill-defined; they did not help to direct composers' attention to the problems of Socialist Realism.<sup>18</sup> In the footnote, editors replied to Šostakovič that Gorodinskij's article was only the first step and it was not meant to be an exhaustive definition.<sup>19</sup>

Gorodinskij made several attempts in the course of the following years to give a more precise definition of Socialist Realism. Few used the concept of the Socialist Realism, but rather spoke of the prerequisites of Soviet music on a more general level. In practice, Socialist Realism and Soviet Music were used as parallel concepts in many cases. In Gorodinskij's use Soviet Music was different from Western music. Consequently, when he spoke of Socialist Realism he meant socialist art, art supporting the construction of the Socialist State.<sup>20</sup> Instead of Socialist Realism, composers spoke of music representing Soviet themes. For example, Sergej Prokof'ev told in a published letter of his intention to compose an opera on Soviet themes.<sup>21</sup> Soviet themes and socialist art were not the only subjects discussed. In fact, I argue that for most material benefits it was a far more interesting subject than theoretical discussions about Socialist Realism.

When the Art Unions were established, one of the important issues for artists was their acceptance by the emerging new Soviet elite. This did not happen overnight but was a long-term change. Right from the start, however, the Composers' Union tried to improve the well-being of their members. Very illustrative in this sense is Lev Atovmjan's report of the first plenum of the Composers' Union. This large report presented the material status of the Composers' Union as the major issue affecting the whole future of Soviet music. Atovmjan presented the material issues as the most important question to be settled concerning the Composers' Union.<sup>22</sup> While the establishment of the Art Unions took place, the Soviet Union was recovering from the destructive famine and chaos caused by the first Five-Year Plan. Still, the Composers' Union was able to demand holiday resorts, better sal-

17 Viktor Gorodinskij, »K voprosu o sočialističeskom realizme v muzyke«, in: *Sovetskaâ muzyka* 1 (1933), p. 6–18.

18 Dmitrij Šostakovič, »Sovetskaâ Muzyka l'naâ kritika otstaet«, in: *Sovetskaâ muzyka* 3 (1933), p. 121.

19 Ibid.

20 Gorodinskij, »K voprosu o sočialističeskom realizme v muzyke«, p. 6–18; Gorodinskij, »Problema soderžaniâ i obraznosti v muzike«, in: *Sovetskaâ muzyka* 5 (1933), p. 2–22.

21 Sergej Prokof'ev, »Zametki«, in: *Sovetskaâ muzyka* 3 (1933), p. 99.

22 Lev Atovmjan, »SSK. Tvorčeskaâ i organizatsionnaâ deâtel'nost'. O material'no-bytovom položenii kompozitorov (iz materialov k plenumu SSK)«, in: *Sovetskaâ muzyka* 4 (1933), p. 156–162.

ary and closed food stocks for its members. It should also be noted that Atovmjan was one of the few Party-members in the Composers' Union.

Discussions about the principles of Soviet Music as such were not dangerous for art. Discussions became dangerous when they aimed at setting up only one option. In the 1930s, the Composers' Union did not end up in any single concept of Soviet Music or Socialist Realism in music. Only after the Composers' Union was finally established in 1948, did the secretariat of the Composers' Union and the Communist Party came close to achieving totalitarian rule over the musical front. Until that point, the Communist Party had left music mostly alone. But why? Among the Soviet composers, there were too few members of the Party. Most of the Party-minded composers were former members of the proletarian associations and the rest seem to have been loyal for the needs of composers. The Party wanted to control the Art Unions from inside – by the loyal artists themselves. It gave all the artists major benefits and elite status in return for their loyalty. However, in the 1930s the Composers' Union was not ready to adopt the model of the Writers' Union.

Another point is that the Party did not have enough time. It considered that literature was more important and urgent. Music could wait. For music this was a great advantage, if we take a look at the situation afterwards. But at the time composers saw this as a deficit. They did not get the benefits quickly enough. This is illuminated by the statement given by Moscow chairman Čelâpov in defence of the operations of the Moscow branch. He maintained that the main reason for the Composers' Union's problems was its unsatisfying material basis.<sup>23</sup> Instead of ideological control, the leadership of the Composers' Union had concentrated on collecting money and benefits for their members.

Consequently, totalitarianism did not take place in the Composers' Union in the 1930s. Moreover, the Party did not intervene severely in music matters before 1948; even the events of 1936 were not very serious in this sense. The Composers' Union was not controlled by an internal party cell as was the Writers' Union. I have found clear signs from the archives that the Composers' Union's Party cell was working ineffectively. Even the Socialist Realism of music was without clear definition. It was a matter discussed by composers, not forced by the leadership of the Party. In conclusion, the Composers' Union differed from the Writers' Union in several decisive points. The fate of these Art Unions was different when it comes to the 1930s. Totalitarianism and a Stalinist nature can be attached to the Composers' Union only from the year 1948 onwards.<sup>24</sup>

23 RGALI, f. 962, op. 3, d. 107, l. 37, 1–2.

24 These are all matters I discussed more in detail in my doctoral thesis. See Simo Mikkonen, *State Composers and the Red Courties: Music, Ideology and Politics in the Soviet 1930s* (= Jyväskylä Studies of Humanities 78), PhD. Diss. Univ. of Jyväskylä 2007; see also under <http://dissertations.jyu.fi/studhum/9789513930158.pdf> 1.2.2008.