

# Stalin Era Intellectuals

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Culture and Stalinism

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## Chapter 6

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### **Everyday Symphonism**

Boris Asafiev's Soviet Theory of Popular Music

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## 6 Everyday Symphonism

### Boris Asafiev's Soviet Theory of Popular Music

*Elina Viljanen*<sup>1</sup>

The term *kul'tura* (culture) and its derivatives *kul'turnyy* (cultured) and *kul'turnost'* (culturality) gained prominence in Russia amid early attempts (in the later 1870s) to put into practice the missionary idea of the transmission of education and culture to the backward masses. This terminology is predominant in the texts of major Soviet political writers of the post-1917 period. (Volkov, 2000, p. 212; Hoffman, 2003, p. 16). In this chapter, I review the early intellectual history of the Soviet conception of classical music as a symbol of *kul'turnost'* (culturality, being civilized), which is still a key concept in Russia today (see Viljanen, 2017; 2020; 2021).

I contextualize and intertextualize three terms derived from what I have labelled a 'cultural theory of music' developed between 1917 and 1947 by one of the founding fathers of Soviet musicology, Boris Asafiev (1884–1949): *simfonizm* (symphonism), *muzykal'nyi byt* (everyday musical life), and its derivative *bytovaya muzyka* (everyday music). I show that in the context of the cultural revolution, these terms formed a similar dynamic relationship as the NEP<sup>2</sup>-era (1921–1928) concept *novyy byt* (new everyday life, new way of life)<sup>3</sup> and the Stalin-era *kul'turnost'*, as Kaier and Naiman (2006, pp. 4–5) suggest. I argue that the Soviet conception of classical music as a symbol of *kul'turnost'* developed from the late 'Silver Age' philosophy of 'internal' spiritual life (*vnutrennaya zhizn*). Shaped by the NEP-era Bolshevik discourse of *Novyy byt* and Pan-European cultural and musical theories, the conception emerged during the Stalinist *kul'turnost'* campaigns of the second half of the 1930s.

There is a need for more research on how broadly classical music was understood as a symbol of high civilization during the first Soviet decades. Russian and Western classical music constituted a 'staple' element of early Soviet artistic life in the 1920s, included among the mass-educational tools of the Soviet professional elite (Fairclough, 2016, p. 1). Symphonic music gradually became an integral part of a broad and heterogeneous discourse of Russian civilizationism during the NEP era, which was reinforced during the Stalin era and beyond. Stalin favoured high professionalism in music, the institutionalization of which made it more controllable (Frolova-Walker, 2016, p. 201).

According to Dunham (1976, p. 22), the term *kul'turnost'* served not only as a symbol of sophistication but also as a means of promoting the specific cultural

values of the Soviet government during the Stalin era. Stalinism crystallized and gradually emptied the term of its critical ‘revolutionary’ contents. Indeed, in describing *cultural revolution* as ‘a broad process of revolutionizing culture’ rather than a synonym for the Great Break or Stalinism, David-Fox shows that the Bolshevik political campaigns of *novyy byt* and *kul’turnost* overlapped with the cultural revolution in sharing ‘a war on cultural-ideological backwardness to be pursued as part of the revolutionary advance to socialism’: in the NEP context, the expression *novyy byt* referred to a Soviet Marxist and proletarian version of *kul’tura* in its cultural political meaning. Whereas *novyy byt* emerged as a new cultural strategy of life (family life or the life of new social formations such as the Komsomol), the word *kul’turnost* referred to the utopian characteristics of the new man – his proper behaviour, knowledge and new consciousness (David-Fox, 2015, pp. 105, 116–117).

However, cultural revolutionaries were not just communists confronting culture, but were also Soviet intellectuals, as Katherine Clark points out (Clark, 1996). Several revolutionaries had nothing to do with Bolshevism. Consequently, as a potential social utopia and a moment of practical experimentation, the discourse of *novyy byt* was not uniquely Bolshevik or Soviet Marxist. Influenced by international utopian socialism and the *fin de siècle* feminist movement, Russian literary and philosophical discourses on *byt* also played a role in the larger intellectual and artistic discourse of what was termed ‘new life’ (Ledger, 1997; Attwood, 1999, pp. 1–2). Even in its narrow form, the Bolshevik discourse of *novyy byt* was a mix of ideas contributed by various Soviet Marxist political theoreticians of culture. Coming from slightly different cultural and political camps, they shared the Leninist aim not only to critique capitalistic culture, but also to surpass it. As a large-scale Soviet discourse centring on the formation of the new Soviet man, NEP-era print media brought forward competing theoretical visions of *novyy byt*, which addressed the alternative means and cultural fields that could contribute to the transformation of the old bourgeois lifestyle into a new socialist way of life. This included the question of what type of *music* would be proper to accompany the new life.

If one thinks of Asafiev, a non-Marxist thinker, as a theoretician of Soviet cultural revolution in general, and of *novyy byt* in particular, one could expand David-Fox’s ‘constellation of related concepts’ – *kul’turnaya revolyutsiya*, *byt* and *kul’turnost* – to include the term *zhiznennost* (vitality), and to consider the legacy of *zhiznetvorchestvo* (life creation) of the Silver Age intelligentsia in constructing a new Soviet intellectual culture. This would shed light on the idealist philosophical sides of the Soviet conception of *kul’turnost*.

The role of Stalinism in this intellectual history is complex. As Marxist political philosopher Ivan Skvortsov-Stepanov’s entry of the term *byt* in *Bolshaya Sovetskaya Enstyklopediya* (1927) shows, the juxtaposition of private and individual thinking and common public thinking was not a Stalinist creation. It rather emerged in early Soviet Marxist political philosophical discourse, which sought to outline a new socialist culture. *Byt*, as Skvortsov-Stepanov puts it, referred to domestic life not only as ‘private’ or particular (*chastnyy*), but also as ‘public’ or

social (*obshchestvennyy*), or, indeed, ‘to the connection’ between them. *Novyy byt* would gradually bring the individual way of life under *obshchestvennyy byt* (social way of life) (Skvortsov-Stepanov, 1927, pp. 339–340). As a new public discourse, *novyy byt* purported to replace the introverted private home culture and idealist philosophical traditions, which were seen as remnants of the Western bourgeois and the tsarist past. Bolshevik *novyy byt* targeted the ideas of ‘spiritual’ (*dukhovnyy*) revolution, among other things, which were conceived in the context of the social and political upheavals that culminated in the violent outcome of the 1905 Revolution. The idealist philosophical conception of the ‘spiritual revolution’ is epitomized in a collection of articles, *Vekhi* (*Milestones*, 1909), in which writers sought a new philosophical culture that would re-evaluate the values and assumptions of the intelligentsia (Berdiaev, [1909], 1994; Rosenthal & Bohachevsky-Chomiak eds., 1990, p. 22; Raeff, 1994, p. vii). As a new *cultural political* discourse, *novyy byt* purported to challenge these idealist philosophical theses under socialism with more down-to-earth ‘scientific’ cultural theories and a communal culture. In their attempts to construct a ‘higher culture’ than the previous one, Bolshevik theoreticians also wanted to show that socialism was not culturally inferior to capitalism (on this, see Chapter 10).

Stalin’s cultural politics of the ‘Great Break’ (1928–1931) and its takeover of the cultural theoretical pattern of ‘new public life’ (contrasted to bourgeois individualism), along with proletarian cultural ideology, created a powerful cultural myth of the total repression of ‘bourgeois’ philosophy. Even in a recent work, Maria Razumovskaya (2018, p. 89) connects the philosophical legacy of the Silver Age to artistic individualism, juxtaposing it with socialist realism. I take a different position. To show how various pre-revolutionary philosophical patterns of the pre-revolutionary philosophical discourse of ‘spiritual revolution’ were transferred to the Soviet cultural revolutionary discourse of *novyy byt*, I view music itself as a *political culture* with inherently political actors, goals, and consequences (cf. Lane and Wagschal, 2012, pp. 3–4).

My understanding of musicologists as political agents arises in part from Clark’s (1996, pp. 28, 208) concept of linguistic *prometheanism*, which implies that science could serve as a vehicle for the kind of transformation sought by the Revolution. By analyzing individual intellectual strategies to explain how Soviet cultural political conditions shaped ‘Western’ musicological and cultural theories, I show that Asafiev’s revolutionary prometheanism also provided the means to compete in the Soviet system against the ‘proletarianization’ or ‘bolshevization’ of music. In this sense, his cultural nationalism was also political opportunism. In striving to achieve his aesthetic vision of developing Russian classical music culture, Asafiev and his opportunist prometheanism contributed to one of the paradoxes of Stalin-era musical culture, namely, its conservative and elitist understanding of the meaning of culture and ‘good’ music.

To illustrate how Stalinism, as a totalitarian political system, shaped the ‘Soviet cultural theory of music’, I refer to the most famous musical composition emanating from the Asafievan aesthetic theoretical framework of the NEP era: Dmitry Shostakovich’s *Lady Macbeth of the Mtsensk District* (1934). Asafiev (penname

Igor Glebov) was one of the most influential Soviet critics of modernist new music in the 1920s and he influenced young composers such as Shostakovich. In 1936, *Pravda* published an article on Shostakovich's opera. The critical views in the article were based on Stalinist standards of *kul'turnost'*. Asafiev's literary response to *Pravda*'s article shows that Stalinist music criticism, its standards of what proper *kul'turnost'* is, made Asafiev reformulate his own theory of music as an individual expression of high culture into a societal analysis of popular music. On the one hand, Asafiev 'successfully' managed to renew his theoretical setting to better suit fluid Stalinist ideological outlines of what a 'socialist approach' to the arts ought to be. On the other hand, his theory was one of the evolving ideas of the 1920s that managed to accomplish this in a way that produced interesting scholarly results. Not only does his complex apology of classical music via 'symphonic', i.e., intellectual and artistic elevation of *bytovaya muzyka* (everyday music), constitute an interesting intellectual history of Russian high appreciation of classical music as a proper type of Russian *kul'turnost'*, it also explains the Soviet understanding of popular music. Ultimately, Asafiev exemplifies an intellectual whose theoretical strategies shaped Soviet culture during the Stalin era.

### 'Symphonism' as Spiritual Vitality

The most visible link between Leninist *novyy byt* and Stalin-era *kul'turnost'* is the way Bolshevik theoreticians such as Bukharin and Trotsky wrote about the 'new way of life', which was conceived as a fundamental change not only in people's habits, but also in their virtues, feelings, desires, and in the way they lived their daily lives (*byt*): in combination, this contributed to the creation of a new proletarian/revolutionary culture (see Neumann, 2012, p. 103; David-Fox, 2015, p. 116). Despite Lenin's opposition to Bogdanov's theory of cultural revolution, Trotsky and Bukharin adjusted his project of a new worldview as part of the *Leninist cultural revolution* in their writings on *novyy byt*. Seeking completely new philosophical principles for a socialist culture, Bukharin chose a path entailing the critical examination of bourgeois intellectual history from socialist, materialist, and practical perspectives, believing that it would lead to a synthesis and a 'higher stage of cognition', as he wrote from prison in 1936 (Bukharin, [1923], 1993, pp. 31–62; Bukharin, [1937], 2005, p. 107). This endeavour is not dissimilar to Asafiev's advocacy of *simfonizm* as a higher perception of life at the end of the 1920s. Both support the idea of creating a culture higher than the previous one that would have a more ethical and democratic basis, but their philosophical premises varied a great deal.

Asafiev's distinction between 'symphonic music' as higher and *bytovaya muzyka* (everyday genres such as salon, street, and folk music) as lower forms of music, and between 'sound' as material for music and 'intonation' as spiritualized or 'worked' material of music, derives from the romantic discourse of folk music that had to be reworked by a trained musical expert. On the philosophical plane, he also likened music (exactly musical intonation) to microcosms of the spiritual world in its Russian neo-Leibnizian meaning that made a hierarchical

distinction between simple monads and those with consciousness. According to Asafiev, sound does not constitute music before it has been recreated, filtered through human consciousness that is high in the hierarchy of conscious life. Thus, the sound of life becomes ‘in-toned’ (interpreted) and is placed in the system of sound relations in an organic whole of musical form (Asafiev, [1947], 1971, p. 198). This anthropocentric aspect of Asafiev’s hermeneutics of music implied a striving towards a spiritual renewal of life, which distinguished it from Heinrich Schenker’s (1868–1935) score analysis that would become the most powerful method of music analysis in the West. Thus, it was not in vain that Soviet musicologists pointed out how the Soviet musicological terms *simfonizm* (symphonic quality) and *intonatsiya* – the two most basic concepts in Asafiev’s theory – differed from the Western understanding of the same terms: the Soviet conception is much broader, unifying various musical aspects and reflecting a closer relationship with *life; both internal and external vitality* (see Kholopova, [1980], 2002, p. 6).

Asafiev’s philosophy of music was rooted in the cultural movement that drove the ‘revolution of the spirit’. His philosophical vision evolved from Aleksey Kozlov’s (1831–1900) Russian neo-Leibnizian philosophical tradition of spiritual metaphysics.<sup>4</sup> Influenced by Nikolai Lossky’s (1870–1965) ‘personalism’, which differed from Kozlov’s panpsychism in its leanings on Henri Bergson (1859–1941),<sup>5</sup> Asafiev’s conception featured intuitivism and life philosophy, which the Bergsonists refer to as vitalism (in Russian, *vitalizm*). For him, *simfonizm* was a metaphor for the vital (*zhiznennyi*) spirituality of music, similar to the way music served as a metaphor for life in Bergson’s organic philosophy.

Asafiev’s conception of *simfonizm* as the artist’s *dynamic* power and *active* perception of life arose from the perceived crisis in the Russian musical community following the death of the ‘messianic’ and ‘Wagnerian’ composer Aleksandr Skryabin (1872–1915). The crisis was part of the broader sentiment about the failure to achieve spiritual renewal in the violent context of the First World War, which brought inner revisionism to late Silver Age philosophy (see Mitchell, 2016). The revisionism continued to evolve after the October Revolution in various forms from post-Symbolist Scythianism to avant-garde Futurism and Proletkult (Rosenthal, 2002, pp. 150–172). Asafiev’s *simfonizm* was influenced by revisionists who went back to the origins of their thought, highlighting the Nietzschean idea of human life as an *active* field of the human spirit that constructs a new ‘more humane’ culture.

Having accepted the Bolshevik Revolution, Asafiev was among those who continued to work for the active spiritual renewal of society by revising the cultural philosophies of the ‘Silver Age’ (cf. *ibid.*, p. 150). Most famously, in 1921, he defined the philosophy of *simfonizm* through his Nietzschean psychological hermeneutics of Tchaikovsky’s *Sixth Symphony*, which represents the ‘strength of will’ (*volevaya energiya*) (Asafiev, [1921], 1981, p. 102). Asafiev’s reason for making Tchaikovsky the role model for the new Soviet generation was not the modern quality of his expression, but rather the musical quality, which Asafiev linked to the composer’s genuinely humane and cultured thought about

*Russianness* in music (Asafiev, [1921], 1981, pp. 101–117). This would become one of the cornerstones of the Soviet philosophy of symphonism and, as such, a symbol of Soviet *kul'turnost'*.

As a NEP-era music critic, one of the fundamental problems about the philosophy of music that Asafiev was concerned with was the relation between the proposed revolutionary path of *novyy byt*, musical form, and the inner life (*zhizn*) of a creative composer. His solution reflects the pre-revolutionary conception of the term *byt* and the way the Russian intelligentsia saw *kul'tura* as a bridge between the triviality of *byt* and intellectual life. When Asafiev's philosophy of *simfonizm* became intermingled with the ideals of Leninist cultural revolution and the Bolshevik discourse of *novyy byt* (new everyday life), his conception of 'symphonism' started to reflect a new higher perception of life that would surpass the static nature of Western capitalist forms of music. As such, it became a method for elevating what he considered 'lower culture'.

### **A Cultural Theoretician of *Novyy Byt* in the NEP Era**

The combination of Asafiev's theoretical grounding in Pan-European cultural theories and pre-revolutionary idealist Russian philosophy and the fact that he was one of the most influential theoreticians of Soviet *novyy byt* and socialist realism in music can be interpreted as an example of what Clark calls Soviet Prometheanism. But, while aiming at serving society, Asafiev's combination of the new socialist cultural ideals and Pan-European theories also propelled Soviet musicology in novel directions. With his notion of Soviet enlightenment as a critical continuation of European intellectual history, and as such a self-critical project of popular enlightenment, Asafiev characterizes himself as a Soviet theoretician of *novyy byt*. Indeed, not only did he participate in the Soviet education project in the Leninist sense, i.e., 'from above', but he also pondered the role and the worldview of educators in the new society, and he continued the Bogdanovian project of creating a new consciousness. His conception of 'symphonism' was transformative in essence: a genuine work of musical art was like a microcosm of the world in its spiritual creative essence. Symphonic music was revolutionary life in its sounding energetic form, thrusting humanity forward towards new qualitative stages of life. In addition, his theoretical evolution captures the NEP-era cultural politics reflected in the words of the first Commissar of Enlightenment, Anatoli Lunacharsky, uttered in 1927: 'we will instil proletarian culture in our old culture and abundantly use for this purpose all the good that we find in the West' (Lunacharsky, 1927).

The call for new mass forms of art had been part of the proletarian cultural project since the Civil War (1917–1921), as the Bolshevik government endeavoured to set its own variant of 'bourgeois' popular culture (see Tsipursky, 2016, pp. 19–22; Frolova-Walker & Walker eds., 2012, p. 21). However, the issue of the creation of a new classical music turned into an ideological issue of cultural revolutionary politics, partly because of Lunacharsky's interest in music and his ability to balance between avant-gardist and more traditional worldviews. A speaker

of *novyy byt*, Lunacharsky initiated the Soviet Marxist critical reception of failed cultural revolutions of the past, including the spiritual revolution. Believing in the ability of music to strengthen the community spiritually, he based his ideas on Rousseau's philosophy, but in a genuine Silver Age spirit. Admiring the popular role that music played in the public festivals (*narodnye prazdnestva*) of the French Revolution, Lunacharsky highlighted emotion as an underestimated revolutionary force. He admired the passion manifested by Beethoven in his music, which, for Lunacharsky, represented the high art of humanism, and the exalted musical symbol of bourgeois revolution. (Lunacharsky, [1924], 1981; [1925], 1972, pp. 113–122; see also Geldern, 1993, pp. 23, 26; Roberts, 2011, p. 212.) Mixing ideas of commonality with Marxist reflections on what democracy might mean in artistic terms, he emphasized two qualities – *the highly popular* and *the highly intellectual* – as worthy legacies of the French Revolution. Asafiev theorized on these standards.

The musical Left (*The Association of Proletarian Musicians*, RAPM) raised the question of the music of 'daily life' (*byt*) when it became involved in educational programmes focusing on popular music (Nelson, 2004, pp. 68, 103). However, the RAPM's rival association, namely, the *Association of Contemporary Music* (ASM), with Asafiev as its representative, also had an interest in developing a contemporary musical culture reflecting everyday life (*byt*), thereby bringing music closer to the people. Within this project, popular music faced criticism from a number of quarters reflecting the criticism of the old everyday life and what Svetlana Boym refers to as Russian hatred of the stagnation of daily routine, embodied in the word *byt*, and the music that accompanied it (see Nelson, 2004; Boym, 1995, pp. 3, 25, 34). However, the Left was not unique in trying to correct what it criticized with its *novyy byt*. A new theory of *bytovaya muzyka* (everyday/household music) emerged during the first years of NEP, driven by Asafiev in an attempt to refute accusations of cultural elitism aimed at classical music. He adopted the NEP-era mission of *novyy byt* to dispose of the 'lower' culture, which for him meant the printed popular music of the time. Hence, the main ideological difference between the ASM and the RAPM was not that the former was more tolerant of the way Western popular music influenced classical music, but that it was not ready to 'lower' the aesthetic standards of classical music to the level of the inexperienced 'proletarian' listener. The education of a 'new' listener appeared to be at the core of Asafiev's activity as an ASM critic, but, unlike many other music critics, he developed a concise cultural theory of music to support his arguments.

Following the publication of works such as Bukharin's Marxist thesis *Historical Materialism: A Popular Manual of Marxist Sociology* (1921), Asafiev and his colleagues at the Russian Institute for Arts History (*Rossiyskiy Institut Istorii Iskusstv*, RIII), as forerunners of a nascent university discipline, felt under pressure to formulate their own 'Marxist thesis' with its utilitarian social goals. Asafiev's essential theoretical concepts of 'musical form' and 'intonation' were formulated into a more concise theory after he merged his philosophical views with sociological and linguistics thought, the two major trends in Soviet humanistic sciences in the 1920s.



German sociological and philosophical theories of culture played a crucial role after 1921 as Asafiev incorporated his analytical concept of *simfonizm* into a more concise cultural theory that concerned music as a *form* of culture. Replacing his former strict Bergsonian understanding of metaphysical conflict between the concepts ‘life as a process’ and ‘form as a product’, he adopted the new and more functional logic of the humanities from Ernst Cassirer as the basis of his first theoretical monograph *Muzykal'naya forma kak protsess* (*Musical Form as a Process*, 1930). The ‘process’ of formation, which Cassirer refers to as *forma formans*, must for its own preservation become the ‘product’, the *forma formata*. However, *forma formata* ‘retains the power to regain itself from it, to be born again as *forma formans*’ (Skidelsky, 2008, pp. 181, 184). Following this logic, the essence of Asafiev’s criticism of the ‘old bourgeois hearing’ lies in the way that it locks the meaning of music and forces it into artificial forms, such as symphony, in contrast to the conception of hearing as an infinite ‘symphonic’ process of musical formation. However, Soviet political reality demanded from musicologists an even more practical rendering of music and its relationship with Soviet reality.

By 1924, Asafiev’s musicology department in RIII was under increasing pressure to determine the relationship between music and the construction of a new Soviet life. He began to reconsider his Formalist hermeneutics of music after the publication of Trotsky’s critical article on ‘formalism’ in 1923. In addition, after the Civil War he had expressed his concern about the threat posed by the lower genres of popular music to the intellectual tradition of classical music. He reformulated this hermeneutics along educational lines so as not to sound too elitist: the Commission of the Petrograd Administration of Scientific Establishment, under the leadership of linguist Nikolai Marr, carried out an inspection at the Institute in 1923 (Kumpan, 2014). Sympathetic to the Institute, Marr’s report also pointed out shortcomings, such as the ‘museumization’ (*muzeefikatsiya*) of the research, i.e., an increasing lack of contemporary cultural or, more precisely, everyday (*bytovaya*) perspective in the research (*ibid.*, p. 545). Asafiev now took Trotsky’s Leninist vision of *novyy byt* as his model for overcoming the gap between the elite and the masses. Trotsky’s depiction of ‘the struggle for cultured speech in 1923 as a particularly revolutionary task of *novyy byt*’ shaped the views of Asafiev and his colleagues concerning music education for the masses via the classics as the basis for cultural education.

Furthermore, Trotsky contributed to the overall nationalist idea of the Russian Revolution with his notion of a ‘struggle for the purity, clearness, and beauty of Russian speech’, which is somewhat similar to Asafiev’s growing idealization of the ‘melodic pattern’ – *melos*<sup>6</sup> – of Russian folk songs. In addition, arising from Russian *byt*, Trotsky ([1923], 1986, p. 55) combined the ideal of Russian speech and the ‘dynamic and more precise’ language of revolution with its inherent connotations of progressive modernity. The latter contributed to Asafiev’s new narrative of *simfonizm* as an intellectual musical method of *novyy byt*. *Bytovaya muzyka*, a term referring to popular folk, salon, and street music, which he now introduced, became a target of the symphonic method. As a consequence, one of the most significant outcomes of the dialogue on art and politics in the Soviet

discourse of *novyy byt* was that Asafiev, like many Formalists whom Trotsky had opposed since 1923, began to seek new genre types and to conduct new research showing the similarities and differences between art and everyday life alongside the theorization of art as a creative process.<sup>7</sup> In the following, I focus first on Asafiev's theory and then on his music criticism.

### **Elevating Street Music: *Intonatsiya* as a Theory of Popular Music**

Five theses can be discerned in Asafiev's musicological articles portraying the development of a particular theory of classical music for the general public. German music theoretician Hermann Kretzschmar (1848–1924) exerted the greatest influence on Asafiev's new critical historical hermeneutics of the classics. Kretzschmar had been part of the folk movement in Germany that lamented the decline in the popular cultivation of music and highlighted the teaching of singing in public schools as a way of raising awareness of folk culture (Rothfarb, 1991, p. 10), and Asafiev was, to some extent, his Russian parallel. He harnessed Kretzschmar's theory to show the popular music inspiration of 'great' works that he believed would abolish the view of classical music as an elitist form of art.

1. *Music may be shared, individual and absolute at the same time. It may be absolute and still reflect popular (i.e., shared cultural experiences) and subjective images and emotions.* Kretzschmar's social-historical perspective, which reworked Eduard Hanslick's classic formalism in a novel direction and underlined his hermeneutics of music (*musikalische hermenutik*), complemented Asafiev's view of musical form as a cultural concept by accepting music's referential powers. People attach images and emotions to music, and we should look upon this subjective phenomenon as constitutive of the historical and social context.
2. *To have such referential power, great works of classical music appear as generalized forms of surrounding sound environment* (Glebov, 1924, p. 70). Asafiev embraced Kretzschmar's (1920, p. 16) critical historical hermeneutics, namely, his call for familiarization with 'the entire practical establishment of music at the time of its origin' (*gesamtes praktisches Musikwesen der Entstehungszeit*), which linked professional music analysis to professional historical methodology. It provided 'an awareness and justification of auditory sensations' contrasting with analyses by people who were merely 'emotionally disposed to enjoy music' (Asafiev, 1924, pp. 65–66). Translating Kretzschmar's ideas simply as *muzykal'nyy byt* (musical everyday life), Asafiev supplemented its theoretical content with his own hypothesis of *muzykal'noe soznanie* (musical consciousness). *Muzykal'nyy byt* refers to epochal musical *consciousness* emanating from the shared cultural experience of people belonging to the same era and society. Within this everyday musical experience, popular or *bytovye intonatsii* (everyday intonations) are the smallest meaningful musical units that are regularly repeated and

circulated within a community, thereby forming part of its shared consciousness of sound (Glebov, 1924a, pp. 53–80; 1925, pp. 5–27). Conceptualized as a shared social experience through *muzykal'nyy byt*, music became a concrete phenomenon, which was significant in the development of a Soviet Marxist theory of music. As Asafiev wrote in 1924, reformulating Kretzschmar's theory:

Musical everyday life (*muzykal'nyy byt*) is the concrete appearance of music, [it is] its truer, visible and audible appearance, i.e., organized and formalized sounds. This [comprises] the whole area of the reproduction of music and all that which makes music an existing, perceptible [phenomenon]. (Glebov, 1924a, p. 70.)

3. *Popular music (bytovaya muzyka) signifies conceptual changes in society as it stands on the ground of shared epochal musical consciousness (muzykal'nyy byt). Muzykal'nyy byt is a key term in Asafiev's theoretical development, referring to the theory of intonation as it appears in Intonatsiya (1947). If intonation is considered a theoretical concept through which Asafiev links the formal and theoretical sphere of musical sound and its social and cultural revolutionary aspect, intonatsiya could be described as a cultural historical concept, which indicates gradual change not only in musical language, but also in the whole organism of music.*
4. *The smallest meaningful musical unit of muzykal'nyy byt (everyday musical life) is a popular intonation. Popular intonations are created when certain musical works repetitively accompany activities of life: they are context-bound cultural signifiers in music.* Designing a theory of popular music, Asafiev concluded that repetition and, consequently, memory played an important role in *muzykal'nyy byt*, constituting the basis of *bytovaya muzyka*, an application of anthropological economist Karl Bücher's theory of *Gebrauchsmusik* (also known as *Zwecks-musik*). According to Asafiev, for a musical work to become popular it had to enter the collective memory and be performed so often that it no longer had to be in an active state of 'sounding' to be present in people's everyday consciousness. Seeking to substitute the lighter genres of *bytovaya muzyka* with more serious music, Asafiev used an example of classical music to clarify what he meant by the formation of a shared musical consciousness in the totality of *muzykal'nyy byt*: Mussorgsky's opera *Boris Godunov* (1874) was not staged last season, but 'this does not mean that it has no room in the musical consciousness' or 'influence on our musical everyday life' (Glebov, 1924a, p. 71).
5. *Classical music can be brought closer to the masses in two ways. (1) Making it part of Soviet everyday life through repetition, and thus popular (as presented above). Or (2) by turning popular music into classical music through elevation, by recreating it using higher artistic means. The implication is that composers use popular intonations as the basis of their music and 'symphonize' this material.* The term *Gebrauchsmusik* appeared regularly in German articles as an integral part of the German *Neue Musik* (new music)

project, which Asafiev nationalized since 1924 as ASM critic. Reacting against the ‘joyous purposelessness of absolute music’, *Gebrauchsmusik* sought to establish a new meaningful connection to the world around it (Janik, 2005, p. 43). Following this view, Asafiev pointed out that the call for a more intense relationship between music and everyday life did not imply something ‘low, trivial, and street-like, and the uselessness of large forms’ (Asafiev, [1924], 1957, p. 20). Instead, when envisioning the new Leningrad compositional school under composer Vladimir Shcherbachev at the conservatory, he elevated the street-like and reduced the large forms to ‘professional aristocratism’ (Asafiev, [1924], 1957, pp. 20–21).

Asafiev applied Trotsky’s vision of *novyy byt* in an inverse way with reference to the theory of *Gebrauchsmusik*, but he was not ready to give up his intellectual concept of art. He simply theorized upon the popular quality of art music. If his Russian translation of the term *Gebrauchsmusik*, *bytovaya muzyka* was not the opposite of art music, it was at least a lower category. He negotiated between the higher intellectual consciousness of *simfonizm* and the lower cultural sphere of *byt*, which became elevated within an intellectual artistic re-creation. *Bytovaya muzyka* lacked artistic quality, but it had other valuable qualities: its closeness to life, aim for maximal expression, understandable for everyone, and it did not need adjustment or special environments such as concert halls as it accompanied life (Asafiev, [1926], 1973, pp. 33–34). Art music required more complex ‘reflective thinking’ as it was subordinate to rational compositional systems, which is why it was hard to find audiences for it. Raising above the everyday level, it lacked a ‘straight emotional response’. In his theory of popular music, Asafiev sought a solution that facilitated the rapprochement of art and popular music without lowering the level of the former (Asafiev, [1926], 1973, p. 34). The answer was for professional composers to elevate *bytovye intonatsii* (‘popular’ or ‘everyday’ intonations) in their art. This would constitute the cornerstone of both socialist-realist aesthetics of music and Asafiev’s second theoretical monograph *Intonatsiya* (1947), which presented a social theory of music as communication.

### ***Simfonizm: A Tool for Musical kul’turnost’ in Soviet Novyy Byt***

Successfully reformulating his philosophical aesthetics in the NEP context, Asafiev used *simfonizm* as a desired aesthetic criterion for music, a synonym for critical and humane creative thinking in the modern world. Six further theses, derived from Asafiev’s usage of symphonism as an analytical term in his late NEP-era music criticism, show what kind of recipe he envisioned for Russian musical *kul’turnost’*. He established various new works of Western music as role models for a new type of Russian music, the ‘progressive humanism’ meant to eventually surpass Western models. Adding Russian messianism to Lunacharsky’s idea of democratic music, Asafiev described new Russian music as the humane leader of the modern music project. His discourse reflects the larger European conversation

about the ethical and social role of contemporary music and musicians, which had evolved since Wagner's time.

Echoing the idea that the emancipation of humanity was part of Soviet *novyy byt*, Asafiev points out that the history of music, like the history of thought, reflected the gradual liberation of the human spirit, which the Soviet new-music project was fulfilling. The intellectual historical narrative of his first theoretical monograph (1930), in which he parallels Beethoven's *simfonizm* with Hegel's dialectics, was inspired by the claim of German comparative ethno-musicologist Werner Dankert (1900–1970) in his *Geschichte der Gigue* (1923) that the difference between the baroque and classical eras was that 'the central, subordinating, functional principle of the classical composer – the organizational method of free, autonomous mankind, [...] has finally renounced pre-Classical restraint' (Asafiev, [1930], 1977, pp. 492–493). Seeking a replacement for the prematurely deceased Scriabin in the Soviet context, Asafiev gradually nationalized the European new music discourse via Russian revolutionary *byt* and picked out Stravinsky and Prokofiev as its most promising representatives.

1. *New popular forms of classical music are symphonic expressions of life.* The most successful opera in capturing the modern urban *byt* was, according to Asafiev, Alban Berg's *Wozzeck*. As a drama about life and humanity in the neo-realist style, he compares it to Bruckner's dramas in which the 'symphonic development always proceeds in line with maximal expressionism and without any external illusion' (Asafiev, 1927a, p. 33). *Simfonizm* appears in Asafiev's article 'Muzyka Wozzeka' (1927a p. 30) as a narrative concept that refers to something that 'gives characteristic words and a humane quality to the voice that carries the dramatic action'. *Wozzeck* offers a psychological portrait of a European composer who is more distant from nature and countryside folk songs than a Russian composer. Instead, Asafiev defines *Wozzeck's urban lyricism* as a peculiar 'urban melos' brought about by various urban elements (Asafiev, 1927a, pp. 31–32). Expressing criticism of Western culture, Asafiev notes that this opera portrays 'a struggle for existence' of 'all the contradictory sides of contemporary Western European urbanism'. For him, 'the music of *Wozzeck* is the most genuine document of modernity' (Asafiev, 1927a, pp. 38–39).
2. *New Russian music is deeply ethical in its intellectual perception of life.* Asafiev wrote in 1927 that *bytovaya muzyka* could facilitate the evolution of more democratic music genres in Soviet Russia in promoting a 'healthy music of life' (*zdorovaya muzyka byta*) as a 'promising way of developing the music of intellectual higher culture' and thus of bringing it closer to the masses (Asafiev, 1927b, pp. 17–32). He pointed out that *bytovaya* element was present as melodic contours derived from everyday Russian speech in the eighteenth-century composer Mussorgsky's music (Asafiev, [1930], 1979, pp. 16, 19). Describing Stravinsky and Prokofiev as followers of Mussorgsky on the path to linking music with Russian *byt*, Asafiev stated ([1929], 1982, p. 184) that both extracted their art from songful tension. To him, Prokofiev was

‘a Scythian’ leading Western European new music culture towards rebirth by animating the ‘schematic’ harmony with the *zhiznennost*’ of his *melos* (Glebov, 1924b, p. 16; Asafiev, [1926], 1982, pp. 92–93).

3. *New Russian music could become the spiritual leader and mediator of humanity.* According to Asafiev, Stravinsky’s and Prokofiev’s compositional methods offered an alternative humane intellectual path to the over-rationalized Western European culture. Stravinsky’s evolutionary path led not only towards symphonic music but also towards a new and newly profound symphonic theatre, the ‘social role’ of which gives it ‘a significance akin to that of Greek theatre’ (Asafiev, [1929], 1982, p. 157). Furthermore, in connecting Stravinsky with the line of development in the West that originated with Bach ‘as a supreme phenomenon of colossal energy incarnating the musical mentality of the Enlightenment’, Asafiev portrayed him as continuing both Beethoven’s democratic endeavours and Scriabin’s spiritual cultural mission (*ibid.*). Analyzing Stravinsky’s usage of jazz elements, Asafiev saw in the vitality and reality of Stravinsky’s music something that could speak directly to people: manifesting thereby a ‘supra-individualistic’ and ‘extra-personal energy of human life’, it possesses that energy of life which results from human relations and unifies humanity (Asafiev, [1929], 1982, p. 160). Asafiev’s interpretation of Stravinsky’s music reflects Russian panpsychicism.
4. *Simfonizm represents a higher intellectual perception of life.* The most salient aspect of Asafiev’s conception of *simfonizm* in terms of *kul’turnost*’ is that it represents an intellectual perception of social life. At the micro level, it manifests an ultimate collectiveness portrayed in the structure of music. Here, he returns to the original Italian meaning of the word ‘sinfonia’, namely, ‘sounding together’, although expressing the Bergsonian idea of the organicity of form. According to Asafiev, sound gains meaning through the totality of sounds in the system that manifests a higher idea. He wrote in 1927 that *simfonizm* was rooted in the ‘higher social appointment of music as an art form, which organizes the consciousness and gives a particular aspect of knowledge of life’, and then in 1928 that ‘symphonic’ music portrayed ‘higher’ consciousness (Glebov, 1927b, pp. 17–32; 1928, pp. 19–24). He was now equating *simfonizm* with Hegel’s dialectics, explaining its principles as a process of ‘higher consciousness’ (Glebov, 1928, pp. 19–24). Presenting a cultural-evolutionary hypothesis, he suggests that eventually the lower forms of music could disappear to be replaced with genuinely symphonic forms of *muzyka byta* (Glebov, 1928, p. 19).
5. *Beethoven’s popular simfonizm stands as the role model for creating democratic music.* The fact that the higher consciousness of *simfonizm*, *byt*, and the democratic ideal of popularity are connected, most notably in Asafiev’s interpretation, shows that he used his view of Beethoven as a true revolutionary, as a weapon in his war against the RAPM’s proletarianization of music. He pointed out that the very difference between a march favoured by the RAPM and *simfonizm* is that the former hypnotizes listeners emotionally,

whereas *simfonizm* makes them think (Glebov, 1928, pp. 19–21). Returning to his Bergsonian point, he emphasized that symphonic music is knowledge of movement as the fundamental factor of life. ‘The greatest human viability is expressed in the coordination of movement with constant subconscious sensations of the state of unstable equilibrium around oneself’ (Glebov, 1928, p. 22). Beethoven was the first true European symphonist who ‘intuitively comprehended the great vital meaning of music to oppose the hedonistic principle of musical enjoyment in the conditions of *château* culture with its ethical democratic principles’ (Glebov, 1928, p. 21).

6. *New Soviet symphonic music is an expression of individual kul'turnost' in a popular form.* As Asafiev saw it, *simfonizm* was the target of a historical process that was taking a more democratic turn in the Soviet context: it was both an enlightened and an enlightening discourse of music. Although his vision of new music combined social and popular aspects, in his theory of *Muzykal'naya forma kak protsess* (1930), music was a *linear* creative process driven by an intellectual individual: (1) composer (sender), (2) performer (mediator)/musical work (message), and (3) audience (receiver). The composer as an *active* listener of surrounding life holds the key in the cultural revolutionary (educational) process of constructing a new culture. The aim of the composer is to enlighten the mass listener.

### **The Stalinist Turn: Music as a Collective Expression of *Kul'turnost***

Wrapping up his ever-developing socialist cultural theory of Soviet *novyy byt* in his prison cell in 1937, foremost Bolshevik theoretician of socialism Bukharin recalled that individual ‘personality’ (*lichnost*) appeared for the first time in the Soviet Union as a mass phenomenon (Bukharin, [1937], 2006, p. 16). However, it was Stalinist politics rather than the Bolshevik discourse of *novyy byt* or Bukharin’s theory that persuaded Asafiev to follow this line and to reformulate his thesis of music from an individual to a collective expression of *kul'turnost'*. After 1934, the ‘true virtues of the Soviet man’ along with internal consciousness and ideological commitment took the front seat in the campaigns of *kul'turnost'* of the Stalin-era Cultural Revolution (David-Fox, 2015, p. 129; cf. also Volkov, 2000, p. 226). It is true that what Fairclough refers to as ‘Stalinist enlightenment’ did not radically shape the cultural theory of music before 1936 when Shostakovich’s opera was publicly criticized in *Pravda* (Fairclough, 2016, pp. 4, 103–105). However, the Stalinist turn in 1928 that resulted in the domination of RAPM’s political aesthetics emerges in Asafiev’s theory of music as a gradual change of emphasis that transmitted the power of and responsibility for creation from the individual to society.

It is pertinent to return to the Marxist philosopher Skvortsov-Stepanov’s point about connecting private life with ‘public’ or social life in Soviet *novyy byt*, given that one concession Asafiev made to the Stalinist turn was the fusion of the individual and the social. Curiously, he also did this partly to protect the individual.

But having removed creative power and responsibility from the individual in his theory by the end of 1940s, he had also allowed the subjugation of critical thinking in his cultural theory of new perception.

The domination of proletarian creative associations and ideological criticism of Asafiev during Stalin's 'Great Break' (1928–1931) pushed him towards composition, which allowed him to continue to cultivate his theoretical ideas (Viljanen, 2020). On the one hand, many musicologists, including Asafiev, perceived Stalin's April 1932 resolution 'On the Reconstruction of Literary and Artistic Organizations' as a relief (see Fairclough, 2016, p. 101). The fact that Gorodinsky's article (Gorodinskiy, 1933, p. 14) in the newly established *Sovetskaya Muzyka* (*SM*) highlighted Asafiev's ideas on intonation as a suitable theoretical basis for socialist realist musical aesthetics, and the admission by Shostakovich (1933, p. 121) that he missed Asafiev (Glebov) as a music critic, suggests that, at the very least, the creative intelligentsia thought that a milder and more constructive atmosphere had returned. Asafiev was among the first to announce 1933 as a 'historical year', implying the end of RAPM domination (Asafiev, 1933, pp. 106–108).

On the other hand, however, Asafiev's first reaction to socialist realism shows how the RAPM's politicized aesthetics that had dominated Stalin's 'Great Break' shaped his view of the relationship between the composer and society in the USSR. Reflecting upon music as a social expression, he moved to the macro level in his theory, and now sought to unify the private sphere with the social sphere according to the Bolshevik political philosophy of *novyy byt*. Meanwhile, he was still loyal to his neo-Formalist conviction of 'absolute' music as a spontaneous mirror of life, which called for composers to create a soundscape of the politics of the 'Great Break':

*Your own* ("svoe") will not become lost. Yet it ceases to be a "property". ... [Y]ou hear not yourself, but the breath, rhythm and intonation of the struggling classes. Nothing remains of the notorious mechanical objectivity, nor of myopic subjectivity. (Asafiev, 1933, p. 107.)

Asafiev's vision of music as a cultural expression is similar to his Bergsonian idea of organic form. The composer's own voice would not be lost in this new more social methodology of composition, because an individual composer creates music as a constitutive part of the higher goal of democratic culture. On this view, the individual matters, but not in terms of subjectivity.

Asafiev made further concessions. Self-criticism became one of the features of the Stalinist Cultural Revolution following the Great Break (David-Fox, 2015, pp. 126–127). Maksim Gorky's point of departure in formulating socialist realist aesthetics was strictly materialist, and his denunciation of Bergson's philosophy as a sign of the conservatism of the Western bourgeoisie and his encouragement of self-criticism led Asafiev to write an account that was critical of himself as a theoretician. He wrote in the August 1934 issue of *Sovetskaya Muzyka* about the Marxist direction he had taken after a long,



romantic utopian journey (Gorky, [1934], 1935, pp. 48, 63; Asafiev, 1934, p. 48). However, neither the effects nor the extent of self-criticism should be exaggerated in the sphere of 1930s Soviet intellectual culture. The very fact that Asafiev's self-portrait was presented in the section entitled 'The Podium of Composers and Musicologists' in the first place was a sign that he was encouraged to continue his work as a theoretician by the Composers' Union, for which the journal served as a mouthpiece.

An example of the continuation of the Asafievan NEP-era musical aesthetics of *novyy byt* in the Soviet musical discourse of *socialist realism* is Shostakovich's opera *Lady Macbeth of Mtsensk District*, premièred in 1934.<sup>8</sup> Asafiev referred to the opera as the leading development in Soviet musical theatre since the October Revolution that revealed Shostakovich's unique talent and intellect (Asafiev, [1934], 1975, p. 311). The opera contained everything in national music about which Asafiev had theorized in the 1920s: Tchaikovskyan lyricism, Mussorgskyan speech, folk intonations, Berg's *bytovaya opera* quality in a more 'Beethovenian' symphonic, and social critical setting.<sup>9</sup> Following the new standard of socialist realism, Asafiev praised *Lady Macbeth* for its objectivity and realist musical speech: with his ability to portray something 'general in existence' and 'deeply' 'greatly humane', Shostakovich was on his way to revealing the 'growth of the new human being and new life' (Asafiev, [1934], 1975, pp. 315–317).

Two years later, *Pravda*'s anonymous Stalinist article '*Sumbur vmesto muzyka*' ('Muddle Instead of Music', 1936) took the opposite view. As the title indicates, the case exemplifies Stalinist 'enlightenment' as nothing more than a means of political control: Shostakovich's opera did not follow the Stalinist cultural political code of *kul'turnost*, a formulation that did not tolerate Shostakovich's multi-layered modernism. The stamp of 'unculturedness' in official criticism in 1936 implied weaker ideological commitment and had far more serious consequences than in the 1920s. Asafiev, who was strongly attached to the aesthetics of Shostakovich's opera, grasped this. Rethinking Gorky's statement in 1934 about the 'collective body' of the Soviet Union, he wrote a response for the music conference in which the *Pravda* article was discussed.

In his speech '*Volnuiushchie voprosy*' ('Exciting' or 'Disturbing Questions', 1936), read in his absence, Asafiev turned music into a collective activity through which Soviet music could be viewed as a social rather than as an individual expression. Fearing for his career (and even for his life), he denounced Western modernism as part of his intellectual past in the ASM, stating that *Pravda*'s article had revealed 'important' aspects of Soviet musical contemporaneity ([1936], 1957, p. 116). However, his self-criticism and denunciation of Shostakovich's music, which has been pointed out in earlier research, seem less significant in terms of how Stalinist political ideology influenced Asafiev's theory than his apologia of Shostakovich as an individual composer. The latter implies that Shostakovich was no longer individually responsible for music that should mirror the whole of society. In fact, one of the few times Asafiev offers any self-criticism is his cryptically expressed notion that he had not always been 'saved' from substituting an

assessment of the social significance of a composer with ‘an assessment of the talent of its author’ (Asafiev, [1936], 1957, p. 117). Upon closer reading, however, this remark serves as a prelude to the cunningly written defence of an individual composer. It reveals how the political doctrine of socialist realism redirected his theoretical focus from an analysis of the music of an individual genius to the analysis of music *as* fundamental to society. Consequently, Asafiev implies that the ‘contradictions’ in Shostakovich’s work should no longer be assumed only to reflect his ‘personal errors’ (Asafiev, [1936], 1957, p. 117).

Following Gorky, who, in 1934, had highlighted the masses as the organizers of culture and the creators of ideas, Asafiev writes that ‘the anxiety of the masses of people, the colossal re-education of people’s psyche after the last years of great achievements found the strongest reflection in people’s musical creativity’ (Asafiev, [1936], 1957, p. 116).<sup>10</sup> In the past, the bourgeois artist ‘proudly dictated to the crowd’ with his personal sentiments, imagining that he did not need anybody’s observations but his own. Now, in the era of the ‘world’s greatest socialist mass culture’, the composer must observe folk music, selecting topics not for scientific development, ‘but for living speech, which reflects emotionally, sensitively, and excitedly the most complex vital sensation (*zhizneoshchushcheniya*) of mass and spontaneous feeling – responses to joyful impressions of the new world, which the masses created’ (Asafiev, [1936], 1957, p. 116). He further states that the Proletarian Revolution had ‘stirred up and unfolded’ ‘new creative national powers in the musical sphere’ and, therefore, a deeply ‘exciting process’ in the ‘diversity’ of ‘musical language’ was now taking place: ‘the sensation of new wonderful creative life (*tvorennaya zhizn*)’ was being ‘fixed in intonations’ (Asafiev, [1936], 1957, p. 116). The habit of evaluating music only through great works had always led composers and critics to ‘*miss the process* that takes place in the mass musical consciousness, i.e., in the sphere of musical intonation’ (Asafiev, [1936], 1957, p. 116). Thus, in Asafiev’s view, Shostakovich’s work and criticism of it reflected the general intonational renewal of musical language that was taking place in Soviet society.

Asafiev’s criticism of Shostakovich’s music was not as harsh as Solomon Volkov suggests, noting that Asafiev’s usual ‘florid manner’ of writing about Shostakovich sounded at this point like an ‘open denunciation’ (Volkov, 2004, p. 94). The Asafiev quote in Volkov is translated incorrectly by Antonina Buis:

*Menya lichno vsegda porazhalo v Shostakoviche sochetanie motsartovskoy legkosti i v samom luchshem smysle – nespechnogo legomyслиya i iunosti s daleko ne iunym, zhestokim i grubym ‘vkusom’ k patologicheskim sostoianiyam za schiot raskytiya chelovechnosti*

(Asafiev, [1936] 1957, p. 118). / I personally was always surprised by the combination in Shostakovich of Mozartian lightness and – in the best sense – feckless light-heartedness and youth with a far from youthful, cruel and crude ‘taste’ for pathological states *instead* of revealing humanity.

(Volkov, 2004, p. 94)

'*Za schiot raskytiya chelovechestva*' should be translated as 'due to revealing humanity' or 'at the expense of revealing humanity' rather than 'instead of revealing humanity'. Instead of criticizing Shostakovich, Asafiev explains the composer's way of using both cruel and crude taste and Mozartian lightness in order to reveal humanity. This commonplace post-First World War modernist narrative technique, which Asafiev had initially admired in Shostakovich's work, did not paint a rosy picture of the condition of human life. In creating his *bytovaya opera*, Shostakovich used, among other things, an expressionist narrative musical technique of the grotesque to exemplify the realistic portrayal of humanity. This type of critical realism was considered the moral responsibility of artists in socialist circles across Europe. Thus, in his 1936 speech, Asafiev critically remarked that the social criticism in *Wozzeck* – which had revealed not only the crisis of the capitalist world and the artists' position in it, but also the crisis of Western music – was no longer needed in the Soviet Union. Consequently, Western musical language (as used by Shostakovich) was based on the 'experience of modern bourgeois musical creativity', and it was foreign to Soviet creativity (Asafiev, [1936], 1957, p. 117). However, removing part of the responsibility of an individual composer from society and referring to *Pravda*'s criticism, Asafiev defended Shostakovich, stating that 'no one dared to point out to Shostakovich that overcoming the nightmares of violence with a naturalistic display of violence was a method foreign to Soviet art' (Asafiev, [1936], 1957, p. 118).

Stalinist criticism of Shostakovich indicated that the intonations of symphonic *kul'turnost* could no longer be derived from Western 'capitalist' modernism. A new Soviet 'socialist' modernity based on Russian classics had to be constructed. What was left of Asafiev's symphonic aesthetics of *novyy byt* after the Stalinist criticism of music in 1936 were the intonations of Russian and Soviet *byt*, the creative method he claims to have learned from Mussorgsky: '[he] helped me to develop a new critical and creative consciousness in the sense of understanding musical speech in its objective significance' (Asafiev, [1936], 1957, p. 118).

How did this influence Asafiev's cultural theory of music? He puts the collective emphasis behind the Soviet ideal of democratic music into its theoretical context in *Intonatsiya* when he refers to the evolution of humanity and its 'public ear' (Asafiev, [1947], 1977, p. 929). In his first theoretical monograph (1930), he describes the individual composer's spiritual vitality as the key factor in musical creation, whereas in *Intonatsiya* (1947) he describes the process of musical form on the macro level of society as a *process of communication* in the spirit of Ferdinand de Saussure's sociolinguistics. A selection of popular intonations allows the composer's message to traverse the performer's intonations to the listener, who needs to share the same code to understand it.

The change in Asafiev's theory after the Stalinist turn is that the linear process of creating music as an individual expression takes a circular form, which turns it into a social expression. The receiver is no longer a passive listener, but has become *active*, reacting to the musical work. Audiences also participate in the creation of music in giving feedback to the composer. Asafiev's *Intonatsiya* is based on the assumption that audiences react negatively to music when its intonations

are not *popular* or vital and thus cannot be understood or interpreted as meaningful. This happens when the intonations lack the capacity to express the surrounding human life and its intonation vocabulary or when the composer is completely ahead of his/her time. Thus, while the composer is a barometer of the popular intonations of his/her era, a representative of Soviet popular culture, he/she is also a professional musician whose task is to create symphonic music as an intellectual expression of *Soviet* cultural life.

### **Conclusions: From the Construction to the Description of Soviet *Kul'turnost'***

Together with David-Fox's understanding of the intertwined trajectories of the 'cultural revolution' and the Bolshevik political projects of *novyy byt* and *kul'turnost'*, the legacy of the Silver Age 'spiritual revolution' is the key in understanding the cross-fertilization and overlap of ideas in early theories of Soviet culture. In a context in which 'bourgeois' specialists and Bolshevik ideologues collaborated in constructing a new culture during the NEP, the intellectual discourse of *novyy byt* became a life strategy of a kind for Soviet cultural politics. It also produced directives governing the formation of new theories of ideologically correct and 'public' (*obshchestvennyy*) *spiritual kul'turnost'* on the basis of 'the best achievements of Western and Russian intellectual traditions'. Classical music represented one of these achievements. Its justification as an important revolutionary tool in constructing the new socialist culture in the case of Asafiev's musicological work derived directly from pre-revolutionary idealist Russian philosophy, which sought the spiritual renewal of culture through – among other ways – new 'symphonic' musical perceptions. He aimed primarily at formulating a culturally *constructive* theory of classical music with direct societal goals.

Furthermore, viewed as a culturally constructive theory, *simfonizm* produced a specific cultural hierarchy of music. Not only did Asafiev elevate classical music to the symbolic position of *kul'turnost'* by theorizing on *bytovaya muzyka* (everyday music), but he also produced a theoretical framework through which to explain the Soviet conception of popular music. *Bytovaya muzyka* became a theoretical field in the Soviet sociological discourse of popular music (among Arnold Sokhor, Yuri Kapustin, Nikolai Fomin, and Viktor Zukermann) in the 1960s. As such, it served as a counterpart to Western definitions of commercial *pop* music. Although it was not a negative term, Soviet ideological control politics reinforced the fact that *bytovaya muzyka* was treated with suspicion, revealing the cultural value hierarchy of Soviet music with symphonic music at the top (see Selitskiy, 2010, p. 20).

Influenced by Western sociology and cultural philosophy, Asafiev's neo-formalism gradually developed into a *descriptive* analytical theory of intonation concerning the relationship between music and society. Moreover, in considering Asafiev's theory and his intellectual strategies in a transnational context we can explain how Russian intellectual traditions and Soviet political conditions shaped 'Western' musicological and cultural theories. Asafiev instilled the essence of

music in Soviet thought on two levels by approaching music as an *autonomous* cultural discourse: music is absolute and has referential powers, i.e. people attach images and emotions to music enabling cultural communication. Increasingly expressing his ideas in the vocabulary of sociolinguistics (and limiting his idealistic philosophical premises) during the Stalin era, he succeeded in having his principal theoretical concept, intonation, accepted as a generalized sign of *social consciousness*. A pure sound comes into being as an intonation only when the unifying communal and communicative aims of an individual expression are fulfilled and society is able to interpret the sound for its own communicative purposes. In this way, Asafiev's theory describes music as a cultural discourse that is narrated by people belonging to its epoch irrespective of whether it aligns with their political inclinations or not. Meanwhile, the anthropocentric spiritual philosophy of 'symphonism' that grew from Russian intellectual traditions exemplifies one of the core differences between Western and Soviet analytical music theory. The latter emphasizes the idea of classical music as a symbol of Soviet cultural humanism – the exportation of Soviet culture (cf. Chapter 8).

Stalinism influenced Asafiev's theory by making it a particular '*Soviet* cultural theory of music' at both the descriptive and the constructive level. The Shostakovich case exemplifies how Asafiev diminished the meaning of the individual as the creator of Soviet music and made the composer the mediator of the Soviet cultural experience of life. He elevated the newly educated masses as the creators of symphonic music, thus consolidating Soviet *simfonizm* as the symbol of a highly *intellectual and shared perception of life*. Asafiev's linear theory of music as an individual expression of cultural life became a circular theory of the professional expression of Soviet social life. Corresponding to Soviet cultural politics, the ideal of Soviet *simfonizm* was now to serve as a symbol of highly civilized spiritual life within Russian popular culture. In the Stalinist context, Asafiev's theory of *simfonizm* lost its force as critical individual perception aimed at creating a new ethically higher culture. Due to the influence of Stalinism, the world is familiar with its harmful cultural and political implications. However, *Intonatsiya* as a descriptive sociological theory of music could also be used as a critical analytical theory of socialist production of culture.

## Notes

- 1 I would like to thank Saara Ratilainen, Jonathan Rosenberg, and Rebecca Mitchell for their comments on an earlier draft of this chapter. I also acknowledge the support, which the Ella and Georg Ehrnrooth Foundation working grant provided to the preparation of this chapter.
- 2 *Novaya ekonomicheskaya politika* (New Economic Policy).
- 3 There are several English translations of this term: 'daily life', 'way of life', 'everyday life'. 'Mode of life' is perhaps the closest in a philosophical context. The Bolshevik philosopher Ivan Skvortsov-Stepanov defines *novyy byt* in his entry in *Boskhaya Sovetskaya Entsiklopediya* (*BSE*) as 'a special pattern/nature (*kharakter*) and mode of life (*uklad*)' (Skvortsov-Stepanov, 1927, p. 33).
- 4 On Kozlov's neo-Leibnizianism and Lossky's relation to it, see Tremblay, 2020, pp. 175–176, 184–186.

- 5 On Lossky's relation to Bergson, see Tremblay, 2017.
- 6 Asafiev used the term *melos* in its Greek meaning, referring to the 'elements of song' (see Asafiev, [1918] 2003, p. 238).
- 7 Asafiev arranged a meeting on the 3 May 1924 to discuss how to bring Lenin's ideas into practice at the department of music history. The subject of the meeting was 'Music and social life', and it concerned the coordination of available Marxist works. The memo contained three epithets describing the study of music: 'dialectical, dynamic, and historical' (Kryukov ed., 1981, pp. 209–210).
- 8 The article '*O tvorchestve Shostakovicha i ego opera Ledi Makbet*' ('On Shostakovich's Creativity and His Opera *Lady Macbeth*') was published in a collection of articles of Leningrad State Academic Maly Theatre.
- 9 Shostakovich also wrote about these qualities in his opera and his Western classical music influence: Mahler, Verdi, and Wagner (Shostakovich, 1934, pp. 24–25).
- 10 '[I]t is the toll of the masses which forms the fundamental organizer of culture and the creator of all ideas, both those which in the course of centuries have minimized the decisive significance of labour – the source of our knowledge – and those ideas of Marx, Lenin, and Stalin which in our time are fostering a revolutionary sense of justice among the proletarians of all countries, and in our country are lifting labour to the level of a power which serves as the foundation for the creative activity of science and art' (Gorky, [1934] 1935, p. 53).

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