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Book Review

Patrick Zuk and Marina Frolova-Walker, eds.
Russian Music since 1917: Reappraisal and Rediscovery

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Reviewed by Madeline Roycroft

Since the collapse of the USSR, the easing of censorship and foreign travel constraints has continued to open new avenues for research into Russian and Soviet music. Although there has been no shortage of these studies since the 1990s, *Russian Music since 1917*, edited by Marina Frolova-Walker and Patrick Zuk, is the first volume to give significant attention to the appraisal and reappraisal of both Soviet and post-Soviet music. Each chapter originated as a conference paper at a large scale congress on Russian and Soviet music, held at Durham University in July 2011. The bilingual (Russian and English) proceedings took place over four days, and featured 120 presenters from twenty-three countries.

The resulting collection is unrivalled in its equal-weighted contributions from Russian, Western, and émigré scholars. As only a limited number of Russian musicologists choose to publish in English, German or French, seven of the eighteen chapters required translation into English, which has made several new and important discoveries accessible to readers not versed in the Russian language. To maintain each author's voice, and to avoid forcing Russian scholars to imitate Anglo-American discourse, several of the translated chapters do not read like standard musicological texts. However, this is by no means a criticism; academic writing that recreates the experience of reading original Russian prose is as valuable as it is rare.

Rather than employing a chronological structure, the volume is organised thematically into six distinct groups, preceded by a detailed introduction that brings the reader up to speed on a selection of issues surrounding twentieth-century Russian and Soviet music. The

introduction also makes clear that the editors have successfully limited the use of technical language to ensure that it is substantial enough for the specialist, while remaining accessible and enjoyable to non-specialist audiences.

Four assessments of Russian music history and historiography in the present day constitute the volume's opening section. Read in sequence, these chapters offer a comprehensive and thought-provoking snapshot of the current state of scholarship on both sides of the former Iron Curtain. In a reworking of her 2011 keynote address, Marina Rakhmanova, chief researcher at the State Institute of Arts Studies in Moscow, provides an insightful overview of the most significant musicological contributions from Russian scholars in the post-glasnost' era. Although this chapter also highlights research yet to be conducted, the interpolations Rakhmanova has added to her 2011 survey are a testament to the advancement of the field in the last seven years alone. Patrick Zuk subsequently outlines Western research on Soviet music in the same time period, candidly organising it into three principal groups: composers of the 1920s avant-garde; 'unofficial' Soviet composers of the 1960s; and Shostakovich. That such a broad field can be boiled down essentially to three topics is indicative of how much work lies ahead, and Zuk does not shy away from the alarming fact that almost every Russian composer apart from Shostakovich and Prokofiev awaits either appraisal or reappraisal. Zuk is also compelling in his argument that we should endeavour to treat Soviet music as art, and avoid treating it as the product of enforced limitations on freedom of expression: a reading that continues to hamper Soviet music's acceptance in the West.

Levon Hakobian builds upon Zuk's analysis in 'The Adventures of Soviet Music in the West,' highlighting the condescending nature of many Western studies on Soviet-era music, and indicating how outdated preconceptions continue to affect the assessment of Soviet music in the West. Although Hakobian generally opposes overtly political analyses of Russian music history,[1] his chapter engages with the reluctance of Soviet sources to acknowledge Western performances of prominent Soviet works; for example, there are no records of Shostakovich's *Lady Macbeth of the Mtsensk District* at the 1947 Venice Biennale, nor of Prokofiev's *War and Peace* during the 1953 Florentine Musical May (p. 82–3). In her succeeding chapter, Marina Frolova-Walker also identifies a noticeable absence. Here, it is the omission of all human agents of change—Stalin included—from contemporary materials used for teaching music history in Russia. Recounting her own experiences as an early-career teacher in Moscow, Frolova-Walker urges post-Soviet musicologists to challenge the 'entrenched belief in the aesthetic autonomy of music' (p. 107), and calls for a complete scholarly overhaul on the established educational resources.

Part II comprises another tetrad of chapters that seek to reappraise two elements of the Soviet past: the effectiveness and consistency of state control over music, and the effects of such control on Soviet music and musical life. The first pair of chapters are two of the most captivating in the volume, beginning with Marina Raku's account of the search for a national style in the 1920s and '30s. As well as the re-purposing of popular songs to agitprop texts, Raku tells of the popular belief that music could be stylistically 'translated', in the manner one might translate a text. This phenomenon spawned several stylistic 'updates' to classic Russian works such as *A Life for the Tsar* (1836), which became known as *Ivan Susanin* in the late 1930s. Equally fascinating is Pauline Fairclough's 'From Enlightened to Sublime,' which paints musical life in

[1] Marina Frolova-Walker addresses this in her chapter 'Soviet Music in Post-Soviet Musicology,' with particular reference to Hakobian's resistance of Richard Taruskin's work (p. 108).

Leningrad under Stalin as 'more international, inclusive, and interesting than that in London' (p. 148). That the Leningrad Wagner Society hosted a pared-back staging of *Das Rheingold* in 1924 will come as a revelation to many, as will the fact that Leningrad Wagnerites attempted to reconcile their beloved's association with Hitler in the 1930s by reading *Der Ring des Nibelungen* as a fundamentally anti-capitalist work (p. 156). Bach, Handel, Haydn and Mozart also appeared on Leningrad concert programs (they would have been revolutionaries if they had lived in the right era), but Tchaikovsky was problematic: his nineteenth-century bourgeois image made him incompatible with the working-class values of the Mighty Handful. Together, Raku and Fairclough's contributions encourage us to rethink the extent to which censorship truly impaired musical life in the early Soviet era.

The subsequent two chapters challenge misconceptions of how fear shaped Soviet musical identity. Yekaterina Vlasova lays out the creative and ideological insufficiencies of the operatic projects directly supervised by Stalin, and Inna Klause's preliminary findings reveal that Soviet musicians in the Gulag were mostly imprisoned for reasons unrelated to their artistic production. These revelations are significant in that they have the potential to unravel the popular belief that the aesthetic value of Soviet-era music lies in its depiction of state terror.

Historical musicology in the USSR is the focus of Part III, with Olga Manulkina's contribution proving to be particularly valuable for the twenty-first-century historical musicologist. In '"Foreign" versus "Russian"', Manulkina, sheds light on the 1949 'musicologists' affair', which has been largely overshadowed by the better-known denunciation of Soviet composers in 1948. The later condemnations forced Soviet scholars of Verdi, Krenek, Hindemith, and even Stravinsky to rewrite their dissertations and issue formal apologies. From here, few dared to risk their careers by researching Western music. Manulkina suggests that these events caused musicology's exit from the humanities, forcing the discipline to retreat into music theory and other 'safer, but more limited fields of study' (p. 243). Evidently, such a claim has the potential to cause offense; however, in the spirit of reappraisal, identifying the root of the problem is a useful step towards dismantling the present-day Western prejudice against the ability of Russian musicologists to research non-Russian music.

Given that the field has advanced further than that of any other Soviet composer, a volume on Russian and Soviet music would necessarily be incomplete without a section dedicated to Dmitri Shostakovich. Carrying the tongue-in-cheek title of 'The Newest Shostakovich',[2] Part IV sees Russian scholars Liudmila Kovnatskaya and Olga Digonskaya subject the popular figure to two new readings. The latter, 'Shostakovich's Lenin Project', looks at the composer's unfinished attempts to write a large scale work about Lenin (not to be confused with the Twelfth Symphony, surtitled 'To the memory of Lenin'). While her near-forensic research proves that Shostakovich intended to produce such a work, Digonskaya exhibits no desire to explore why the composer abandoned his project, which would likely have made for a more thought-provoking discussion.

The two cohesive chapters on Russian émigré musicians is another of the volume's undoubted highlights. In raising the question 'Is There a Russian Music Abroad?', Richard Taruskin unpacks a 1931 survey of Russian music published in the influential Parisian journal

[2] The title of this chapter references Ian McDonald's notoriously disreputable text, *The New Shostakovich* (London: Fourth Estate, 1990).

La Revue musicale. The historical article saw émigré composer Arthur Lourié claim that émigrés were continuing the Russian style of composition, as the Soviet Union had become Westernised. Taruskin goes full Taruskin on Lourié's problematic assertions, calling out the author's 'flagrant double standard,' and describing the article as propaganda (p. 314). Although Lourié's survey helped to shape the small Russian diaspora in France, Taruskin reasons that this community was never a 'Russian school abroad' in the same way as in literature, which convincingly explains the absence of any 'community' that might have linked prominent twentieth-century Russian composers abroad (Schnittke, Gubaidulina, Finko, et cetera). Taruskin ends with a quote from Elena Dubinets—a Russian-born American musicologist, and the author of the following chapter—who elaborates on this idea of 'anti-community' in a globalising world. Described by Taruskin as 'both a member of the group and its most avid student,' Dubinets explores the complex psychology of USSR-born musicians who made the decision to leave their homeland. Her analysis is based on personal interviews with over a dozen subjects, all of whom represent the middle generation of the four waves of emigration—the dissolution of the Tsarist empire, post-World War II, the peak of Cold War tensions and the collapse of the USSR. Dubinets proposes that the lack of autonomy, hegemony and political agency of this group prevents it from forming a community (p. 331), and she is persuasive in her argument that, in the era of globalisation, the term 'émigré' and the concept of diaspora will soon become irrelevant. As well as its important content, this chapter is also significant for its five 'musical interludes,' which contain no notation, but offer enjoyable descriptions of little-known works by expatriate Russian composers.

Rounding out the volume is 'Russian music in the post-Soviet period', in which Shostakovich scholar Laurel Fay contributes a vivid, personal account of the uproar at the Eighth All-Union Congress of Soviet Composers in 1991, and William Quillen writes insightfully on contemporary readings of modernist art, music and literature from the early Soviet era. Lidia Ader's concluding examination of the Russian avant-garde documents a movement that, in 2006 urged its followers to 'Kill off the DSCH in yourself' (p. 401). Although the difficulties of translating Russian prose into English are most clear in this chapter, Ader's unapologetically subjective writing nonetheless makes for a compelling finish, and her attention to recent pop-music trends in Moscow and Saint Petersburg balances out the art music focus of many previous chapters.

To be presented with eighteen studies on Russian and Soviet music that avoid dramatic or romanticised language brings great hope for the future of the field. Frolova-Walker and Zuk are to be congratulated on the quality, detail, and accessibility of their volume, which marks a milestone in Russian and Soviet music studies, an area for which appraisal and reappraisal has been long overdue.

About the Author

Madeline Roycroft is currently a PhD candidate and tutor in Musicology at the University of Melbourne. Her research examines the reception of Dmitri Shostakovich in twentieth-century France.