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Boris Asafiev in 1948

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The condemnation of Shostakovich and other leading Soviet composers in a resolution promulgated by the Central Committee of the Communist Party in February 1948 became one of the most notorious incidents in the annals of twentieth-century music, emblematic of the trials endured by artists living under repressive political regimes. Employing as a convenient pretext a recently premièred opera *Velikaya druzhba* (*The Great Friendship*) by the Georgian composer Vano Muradeli, the resolution stridently denounced Western cultural influences on national musical life, and especially on musical creativity. In effect, it signalled an extension of campaigns already under way in other artistic and intellectual domains to reinforce strict ideological conformity and to stifle dissent among the intelligentsia, many of whose members had hoped that the post-war period would bring a relaxation of restrictions on freedom of expression and on contact with the outside world. The party's draconian intervention caused widespread demoralization and, in the longer term, seriously inhibited the development of Soviet composition and musical scholarship. Predictably, the condemned composers were subjected to a protracted ordeal of public humiliation. Opprobrium was heaped on critics and musicologists deemed to have written too favourably about their work.

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A wave of high-profile sackings ensued in musical institutions, and the presidium of the Composers' Union was forcibly reconstituted.[1]

These occurrences were disturbing enough in themselves, but the reactions of some prominent figures in the musical community were even more so. The musicologist Daniėl′ Zhitomirsky recalled being repulsed by the 'obsequious toadying' of colleagues who vied with one another to offer fulsome public praise of the resolution's 'wisdom, profundity and enormous significance'.[2] He was especially dismayed, as were many others, by the behaviour of Boris Asafiev, the venerable 'father of Russian musicology' – who agreed not only to take over as chairman of the Composers' Union in such dubious circumstances, but also to deliver a keynote address in April 1948 at its first national congress, the most important of the forums convened to discuss the resolution and its implications. As it transpired, Asafiev's speech had to be read out on his behalf because he was too infirm to attend, but this did not mitigate the egregiousness of his involvement. His text resoundingly endorsed the party's verdict on the state of Soviet music and its condemnation of the country's major composers – among them Sergey Prokofiev and Nikolay Myaskovsky, with whom his association stretched back 40 years to their time as classmates at the St Petersburg Conservatoire.

Asafiev's actions aroused not only disgust but also puzzlement, as he had been a notable proponent of musical modernism during the 1920s and had written appreciatively about Stravinsky, Berg, Hindemith and other contemporary figures. In his celebrated account *Musical Uproar in Moscow*, the journalist Alexander Werth speculated that the eminent scholar might have been coerced or manipulated into lending his name to the proceedings (could the award of a Stalin Prize first class shortly afterwards for his book on Glinka have been merely coincidental?) and his speech 'very heavily subedited' to reflect the party line more closely.[3] Similarly, the émigré musicologist Andrey Olkhovsky, who had studied with Asafiev in Leningrad, insisted that his teacher had remained to the end 'one of the few who […] kept alight the smouldering spark of creative opposition, who stood steadfastly on guard to protect

[1] A comprehensive critical study of the campaigns of 1948 and 1949 drawing on the substantial quantity of relevant documentation available since glasnost has yet to be written. To date, Yekaterina Vlasova's *1948 god v sovetskoy muzïke* (*The Year 1948 in Soviet Music*; Moscow: Klassika XXI, 2010) is the most wide-ranging account. Of post-Soviet writings in English, see particularly Kiril Tomoff, *Creative Union: The Professional Organization of Soviet Composers, 1939–1953* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2006), 91–214; Patrick Zuk, 'Nikolay Myaskovsky and the Events of 1948', *Music and Letters*, 1 (2012), 61–85; Levon Hakobian, *Music of the Soviet Era, 1917–1991*, 2nd edn (Abingdon and New York: Routledge, 2016), 171–94; and Olga Manulkina, '"Foreign" versus "Russian" in Soviet and Post-Soviet Musicology and Music Education', *Russian Music since 1917: Reappraisal and Rediscovery*, ed. Patrick Zuk and Marina Frolova-Walker (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2017), 221–43.

[2] Daniėl′ Zhitomirsky, 'Na puti k istoricheskoy pravde' ('On the Path to Historical Truth'), *Muzïkal′naya zhizn′* (*Musical Life*), 1988, issue 13, pp. 3–5 (p. 4).

[3] Alexander Werth, *Musical Uproar in Moscow* (London: Turnstile Press, 1949), 96–8.

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its free creative expression', and that his keynote address at the congress did not reflect his real views.[4]

In 1964, however, Asafiev's biographer Yelena Orlova disclosed that while the address had been written 'collectively, with the participation of other Soviet musicians', Asafiev had nonetheless taken an active role in its preparation.[5] A decade later, Boris Yarustovsky, a former doctoral student of Asafiev who acted as director of the Central Committee's Culture Section from 1946 to 1958, revealed that he had been one of the 'musicians' concerned and clarified the circumstances: the group had helped Asafiev to compile the speech from his own writings, since his poor health made it infeasible to undertake the task himself. (Asafiev was gravely ill by this point and died early in the following year.) Yarustovsky emphasized that Asafiev was fully involved in the process and had unreservedly approved the final version.[6]

In spite of this, some commentators continued to seek extenuating explanations. In two articles published in 1988–9, another former student, Vera Vasina-Grossman, attempted to refute Yarustovsky's testimony, insisting that Asafiev must have been intimidated into cooperation by Andrey Zhdanov – though the only evidence she could adduce was a laconic remark made by Asafiev's wife, Irina, who mentioned in conversation that Zhdanov had called on her husband at home.[7] Vasina-Grossman's explanation has since been lent credence by others, including Elina Viljanen, the author of a recent monograph on Asafiev's intellectual development in the 1920s.[8]

A review of the circumstances suggests that there are serious grounds to dispute the idea that Asafiev was an unwilling accomplice. Asafiev's frustrated creative ambitions were a particularly significant factor prompting his actions in 1948: his appointment as chairman of the Composers' Union afforded a belated triumph over more successful colleagues who had refused to take him seriously as a composer and whom he believed to have thwarted his career. The notion that he was compelled to voice sentiments in 1948 that were fundamentally at variance with his convictions also does not stand up to close inspection. Analysis of the text of his keynote speech reveals its contents to be consistent with views propounded in his writings over two decades previously. As I will argue here, Asafiev was one of the principal progenitors of an anti-modernist,

[4] Andrey Olkhovsky, *Music under the Soviets: The Agony of an Art* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1955), 81–3.

[5] Yelena Orlova, *B. V. Asaf′yev: Put′ issledovatelya i publitsista* (*B. V. Asafiev: The Path of a Researcher and Journalist*; Leningrad: Izdatel′stvo 'Muzïka', 1964), 392.

[6] Boris Yarustovsky, 'O Borise Vladimiroviche' ('About Boris Vladimirovich'), *Vospominaniya o B. V. Asaf′yeve* (*Reminiscences of B. V. Asafiev*), ed. Andrey Kryukov (Leningrad: Izdatel′stvo 'Muzïka', 1974), 294–7 (pp. 296–7).

[7] Vera Vasina-Grossman, 'Professiya – istorik' ('Profession: Historian'), *Muzïkal′naya zhizn′*, 1988, issue 16, p. 8, and 'Boris Asaf'yev: Posledniye godï' ('Boris Asafiev: The Final Years'), *Muzïkal′naya zhizn′*, 1989, issue 7, pp. 12–13.

[8] Elina Viljanen, *The Problem of the Modern and Tradition: Early Soviet Musical Culture and the Musicological Theory of Boris Asafiev (1884–1949)* (Helsinki: Acta semiotica fennica, 2016), xix, n. 17.

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ethnic nationalist and xenophobic strain in Soviet writing on music that was given forceful expression in the 1948 resolution.

Let us first turn to examine the circumstances surrounding Asafiev's election as chairman of the Composers' Union and the composition of the keynote address delivered in his name.[9]

The Politburo's decision to make a clean sweep of the Composers' Union's presidium in 1948 was wholly predictable. Two of its members, Aram Khachaturian (the vice-chairman and *de facto* director) and Muradeli, were among the composers censured in the resolution; moreover, the former had been accused of neglecting his duties and the latter suspected of financial impropriety. The new vice-chairman, Tikhon Khrennikov, had a clean record as far as compositional orthodoxy and pecuniary probity were concerned; he was, moreover, a party member and comparatively young, so could presumably be relied on to implement reforms with the necessary energy and zeal. That Asafiev should have been invited to become chairman was also unsurprising. The role was evidently envisioned as an honorary position for an elder representative of the Soviet musical establishment: the previous incumbent, Reinhold Glière, had been little more than a figurehead and was not actively involved in the day-to-day running of the organization. Following the condemnation of Myaskovsky and Prokofiev, Asafiev was virtually the only suitable candidate of comparable eminence and seniority. Although he was primarily known as a writer on music rather than a composer, this did not in itself render him unsuitable, as the Composers' Union's membership also comprised musicologists. By this late stage in his career, Asafiev's position as the leading figure in Soviet musical scholarship had been confirmed by a lengthy list of awards and honours, including the singular distinction of being the first musicologist elected to the Russian Academy of Sciences. His reputation as a composer was not negligible, though it rested almost entirely on two ballet scores dating from the early 1930s, *Plamya Parizha* (*The Flames of Paris*) and *Bakhchisarayskiy fontan* (*The Fountain of Bakhchisaray*). He had long repented of his former enthusiasm for musical modernism, having made an ostentatious public show of reform: after the watershed year of 1932, his writings, like his compositions, had been conspicuous for their impeccably orthodox adherence to Socialist Realism.

At this remove, it is difficult to reconstruct with certainty the chain of events that led to his election. Zhdanov may have called on him in person to discuss the matter, as Asafiev's wife reported to Vasina-Grossman (even if this seems an unusual action for a high-ranking government functionary), since Asafiev was more or less housebound by late 1947. However, my examination of the documentation in Asafiev's personal

[9] The authorship of Asafiev's keynote address has previously been discussed by Meri Herrala in her book *The Struggle for Control of Soviet Music from 1932 to 1948: Socialist Realism vs. Western Formalism* (Lewiston: Edwin Mellen, 2012), 296–303. The analysis presented here diverges markedly from Herrala's and draws on sources not consulted by her.

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archive in the Russian State Archive for Literature and Art (RGALI) in Moscow has failed to turn up any record of this visit, if it occurred: Asafiev's wife kept track of his engagements in an appointment diary, but the volume for 1947 has not been preserved. The only corroborating statement that I have come across is found in the posthumously published memoirs of Levon Atovm′yan, a member of the Composers' Union directorate. According to this account, Zhdanov visited Asafiev in the company of Yarustovsky and, far from finding the encounter unpleasant, Asafiev was deeply flattered both by the proposal and by the attention of such a senior official.[10] Atovm′yan's colourful reminiscences are not always reliable, but Asafiev's pleasure at being offered the post is independently confirmed by the pianist Pavel Serebryakov, who related that Asafiev discussed the offer with him before accepting it:

> He was excited. The offer of such an honour delighted him. He saw it as a sign of recognition, as a reward for his ceaseless creative labours over a period of several decades. But he was concerned about the state of his health. Would he have enough strength? In the end, he decided to accept – to accept for the sake of Music, to which he had dedicated his entire life.[11]

Similarly, the musicologists Yelena Orlova and Andrey Kryukov, who both knew Asafiev, recorded in their co-authored biography of him that he received the news of his nomination for the chairmanship of the Composers' Union 'with joy', seeing it as 'recognition of all the services he had rendered, both as a musicologist and as a composer'.[12]

The most interesting discussion of his probable involvement in events is found in the unpublished autobiography of the musicologist Tamara Livanova, who had extensive professional dealings with Asafiev during this period. Livanova was employed at the Institute for Art History, where Asafiev was a senior figure, and it regularly fell to her to contact him about institute business as his poor health prevented him from attending meetings. Her portrait of him is anything but flattering: she found him slippery and duplicitous, fond of gossip and intrigue, and capable of shameless reversals of decisions and opinions if they subsequently proved inexpedient. Although he spent much of the time in an inebriated stupor, he was routinely consulted about matters of importance in musical life: a vain man, he enjoyed the thought of wielding power and feeling that he was at the centre of things. Livanova writes that his sense of his own importance was gratified 'as never before' by his election as chairman of the Composers' Union,

[10] Levon Atovm′yan, 'Vospominaniya' ('Reminiscences'), *Ryadom s velikami: Atovm′yan i yego vremya* (*At the Side of the Great: Atovm′yan and his Times*), ed. Nelli Kravets (Moscow: Rossiyskiy universitet teatral′nogo iskusstva, 2012), 189–294 (p. 283).

[11] Pavel Serebryakov, 'Drug muzïkantov' ('A Friend of Musicians'), *Vospominaniya o B. V. Asaf′yeve*, ed. Kryukov, 105–13 (p. 109).

[12] Yelena Orlova and Andrey Kryukov, *Akademik Boris Vladimirovich Asaf′yev: Monografiya* (*The Academician Boris Asafiev: A Monograph*; Leningrad: Sovetskiy kompozitor, 1984), 260–1.

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and she found it inconceivable that he did not play a major role in shaping the 1948 campaign, even if the extent of that role was probably known only to Yarustovsky: from what she observed of Asafiev's behaviour, she believed him perfectly capable of denouncing friends and colleagues to the authorities if he thought it would be to his personal advantage.[13]

Apart from the testimony of contemporaries, there are other compelling reasons to believe that Asafiev was a willing participant in events. One is the fact that he agreed to become involved despite being terminally ill. His wife's diary records that by February 1948 his doctors were sufficiently concerned by the deterioration in his condition to insist that visitors be kept to a minimum.[14] Throughout his life, he regularly pleaded illness in order to avoid making public speeches or engaging in other activities that he found uncongenial, and he had even greater reason to decline involvement on health grounds now.[15] Had he done so, there would have been very little that Zhdanov or anyone else could have done to compel his cooperation. Notwithstanding these circumstances, Irina Asafiev's diary reveals that no fewer than five meetings with various officials were held in their apartment between 20 January and 12 February 1948 in the lead-up to the first Composers' Union congress. The first, with Yarustovsky and Polikarp Lebedev, the chairman of the Committee on Artistic Affairs, is described as being 'about B[oris] V[ladimirovich]'s appointment as chairman of the Composer's Union'. Yarustovsky called subsequently on his own (on 27 January), as did Khrennikov (on 5 February). Two further meetings were held with Khrennikov, Marian Koval′, Aleksandr Shaverdyan and other members of the union's new directorate on 2 and 12 February, with Yarustovsky once more in attendance at the first of these.[16] An even more incriminating piece of evidence to emerge from his personal archive is a draft of a letter in his own hand to Zhdanov which can be dated on internal evidence to January 1948 – not long after Zhdanov presided over a specially organized three-day forum to discuss the party's dissatisfaction with the state of national musical life prior to the promulgation of the resolution on

[13] Tamara Livanova, 'Vospominaniya' ('Reminiscences'), Glinka Museum of Musical Culture, Moscow (hereafter VMOMK), f. 194, yed. khr. 1754a, ll. 475–6, 506.

[14] Russian State Archive for Literature and Art, Moscow (hereafter RGALI), f. 2658, op. 1, yed. khr. 951, ll. 61–2.

[15] See, for example, his open letter 'Pis′mo v redaktsiyu' ('Letter to the Editor'), *Rabochiy i teatr* (*Worker and Theatre*), 12 (1932), 20, in which he excused himself on health grounds from participating in a public forum to discuss the future development of Soviet composition. It is important to emphasize that Asafiev would almost certainly have declined to deliver his keynote address in person at the Composers' Union congress even if he had been well enough to do so: he was an ineffectual orator and disliked speaking in public. See Margarita Rittikh, 'B. Asaf'yev i nauchnïye sessii klinskogo Doma-muzeya' ('B. Asafiev and the Scholarly Colloquia of the Klin House-Museum'), *Vospominaniya o B. V. Asaf'yeve*, ed. Kryukov, 254–68 (p. 267), and Orlova and Kryukov, *Akademik Boris Vladimirovich Asaf'yev: Monografiya*, 126, n. 2.

[16] RGALI, f. 2658, op. 1, yed. khr. 951, ll. 52, 55, 55ob, 60.

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10 February.[17] In it, Asafiev expressed effusive gratitude for the 'wonderful' speeches in which Zhdanov had reasserted the foundational importance of the Russian musical classics as the only valid basis for the styles of modern Soviet composition: he hailed Zhdanov's pronouncements as inaugurating a 'new era' in which Soviet music would once again become 'healthy, naturally expressive, simple and beautiful'. Taken together, these circumstances are scarcely indicative of reluctant cooperation.

Neither are there strong grounds to dispute Yarustovsky's account of Asafiev's willing assistance with the drafting of his keynote address:

> As is well known, it was decided to entrust Asafiev with delivering an address at the congress. A group of musicians (*muzïkal′nikh deyateley*) took part in its preparation. […] I recall that, when this group visited Boris Vladimirovich, he was not feeling well and he said to us: 'Take my latest articles on the development of Soviet music – they contain everything I would like to say at the congress.' And that is what we did. In reality, precisely in 1947, a year before the congress, Asafiev had published a series of manifesto-like articles (*programmnïkh statey*) directed against elitism in music and advocating its thoroughgoing democratization. […]
>
> Asafiev also said: 'These are all thoughts developing the content of articles that I wrote back in the 1920s' – 'Composers, Make Haste!' and 'The Crisis of Personal Creativity'; he also directed our attention to his article in the fifth issue of *Sovetskaya muzïka* (*Soviet Music*) for 1946, which was dedicated to the same questions; and finally, he dug out for us the manuscript of his [then unpublished] article 'The Composer and Reality'.
>
> Of course, this was very rich material (and it is sometimes quoted verbatim in the keynote address); its basic idea was unquestionably in accord with the general tenor of the party's document: the composer is called on to reflect reality, is obliged to serve the people, to keep up with the new [i.e. Soviet] life, and sensitively discern the requirements, thoughts and aspirations of Soviet listeners.
>
> Asafiev completely approved the text that we prepared.[18]

A close examination of the address, which was published under the title 'Thirty Years of Soviet Music and the Tasks of Soviet Composers',[19] bears out the essential accuracy of

[17] RGALI, f. 2658, op. 1, yed. khr. 460. The text of the letter is reproduced in Vlasova, *1948 god v sovetskoy muzïke*, 326. It is not known whether Zhdanov ever received this communication. Zhdanov's speeches were published in the stenographic transcript of the proceedings, *Soveshchaniye deyateley sovetskoy muzïki v TsK VKP(b)* (*Conference of Soviet Musicians in the Central Committee of the All-Union Communist Party (Bolshevik)*; Moscow: Izdatel′stvo 'Pravda', 1948), 5–10 and 132–48.

[18] Yarustovsky, 'O Borise Vladimiroviche', 296–7. For the articles 'Composers, Make Haste!' and 'The Crisis of Personal Creativity', see n. 42 below. 'The Composer and Reality' was written in 1943 but only published after Asafiev's death: 'Kompozitor i deystvitel′nost', *Akademik B. V. Asaf′yev: Izbranniye trudï* (*The Academician B. V. Asafiev: Selected Works*), ed. Dmitriy Kabalevsky *et al.*, 5 vols. (Moscow: Izdatel′stvo Akademii nauk SSSR, 1952–7), v, 48–50.

[19] Boris Asafiev, 'Tridtsat′ let sovetskoy muzïki i zadachi sovetskikh kompozitorov', *Pervïy vsesoyuznïy s″ezd sovetskikh kompozitorov 1948: Stenograficheskiy otchyot* (*First All-Union Congress of Soviet Composers 1948: Stenographic Report*), ed. Viktor Gorodinsky *et al.* (Moscow: Izdaniye Soyuza sovetskikh kompozitorov SSSR, 1948), 7–23.

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Yarustovsky's description of it. Roughly 6,000 words in length, the address comprises four sections:

(1) an exordium reiterating the party's diagnosis of a serious crisis in Soviet musical composition, as outlined in Zhdanov's January speeches and the February resolution;
(2) a disquisition on the centrality of melody to Russian compositional styles;
(3) an attack on apologists for Western musical modernism and on the cultural decadence supposedly manifested in the work of leading Western composers, artists and writers;
(4) a peroration affirming fundamental tenets of Socialist Realism – the requirement for Soviet music to embody lofty ideological content, to eschew Western decadence, to be stylistically accessible, to draw on folklore for inspiration and to continue Russian national musical traditions.

Like many Soviet official pronouncements about cultural matters, and, indeed, Asafiev's other essays in a similar vein, it makes for tedious reading – a concatenation of sententious clichés conspicuous neither for stylistic elegance nor for cogency of expression.

No drafts or notes have been preserved in Asafiev's archive which shed light on the process of the address's composition apart from an intriguing two-page fragment, once again in his own hand, which incontrovertibly demonstrates that he attempted to write at least part of it himself. The wording of this fragment is markedly similar to the fourth-to-last paragraph of the published text of the address, which praises the resolution as a manifestation of the concern for Soviet music shown by the Communist Party and 'the great Stalin'. It concludes with a sentence that does not appear in the published text, but which clearly indicates that the passage forms part of a draft of his keynote speech: 'This is the most important point, dear friends and comrades, organizers of the very first congress of composers and musicologists.'[20] The existence of this fragment raises the possibility that Asafiev may have drafted other passages of his speech, the manuscripts of which have been lost. It can be established beyond any doubt, however, that at least one entire section of the address – the second – was definitely composed by Asafiev himself, because the text here is virtually identical to lengthy stretches of an essay entitled 'The Loss of Melody' which was published in the journal *Voprosï filosofii* (*Philosophical Questions*) in 1948,[21] but is known to have been completed some months before the April congress: in his memoir (see above, n. 11), Serebryakov states that Asafiev read it to him and the Leningrad musicologist Sergey Bogoyavlensky from the manuscript when they visited him together in late 1947.[22] Several paragraphs of 'The Loss of Melody' were

[20] Untitled fragment, RGALI, f. 2658, op. 1, yed. khr. 427, ll. 6–6ob; Asafiev, 'Tridtsat' let sovetskoy muzïki', 22.
[21] Boris Asafiev, 'Poterya melodii', *Voprosï filosofii*, 1 (1948), 144–9.
[22] Serebryakov, 'Drug muzïkantov', 108–9.

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also incorporated into the fourth section of the keynote address.[23] Although 'The Loss of Melody' is not among the writings mentioned by Yarustovsky in his memoir (his recollection of the items to which Asafiev referred him may not have been entirely reliable after an elapse of 25 years), these passages confirm his statement that the compilers of the address employed verbatim quotations from Asafiev's own works: it was not simply ghost-written on his behalf, even if Yarustovsky does not clarify the exact nature of his and his colleagues' contribution. As will be discussed presently, 'The Loss of Melody' was one of several pieces that Asafiev wrote or drafted in 1947–8 in anticipation of, or in response to, the party's intervention in musical life. The notion that Russian folk music and art music evinced a unique melodiousness had been a constant trope in his writings since the beginning of his career (a subject to which I will also return later), and it is not surprising that he should have reiterated this theme in 1948, given the strictures voiced in the resolution about the lack of melody in Muradeli's opera and in Soviet composition more generally.[24]

A comparison with the other writings that Asafiev published in 1948 reveals that the remainder of the keynote address is broadly similar to the essay 'Classical Traditions in the Development of Soviet Music', which appeared in an anthology entitled *On Soviet Socialist Culture*.[25] A reference to a BBC radio broadcast by Bertrand Russell criticizing the February resolution,[26] which also features in the keynote address, dates its completion to the latter half of March or early April (Asafiev's address was delivered on 19 April, the first day of the congress). There are fairly marked discrepancies in wording between the essay and the corresponding passages in the address, but the

[23] Compare 'Tridtsat′ let sovetskoy muzïki', pp. 10–13 and 21, with 'Poterya melodii', pp. 145–7 and 148.

[24] One of the key sentences in the resolution reads: 'Characteristic signs of [formalist] music are the negation of the fundamental principles of classical music; the propagation of atonality, dissonance and discord as a supposed manifestation of "progress" and "innovation" in the development of musical forms; abjuration of such vital bases of a musical composition as melody; a preoccupation with confused, neurasthenic [sound] combinations that transform music into cacophony, into a chaotic agglomerate of sounds.' 'Postanovleniye Politburo TsK VKP(b) ob opere "Velikaya druzhba" B. Muradeli, 10 fevralya 1948g.' ('Resolution of the Politburo of the Central Committee of the All-Union Communist Party (Bolshevik) on the Opera *The Great Friendship* by V. Muradeli, 10 February 1948', *Vlast' i khudozhestvennaya intelligentsiya: Dokumentï TsK RKP(b), VChK-OGPU-NKVD o kul'turnoy politike 1917–1953 gg.* (*Power and the Artistic Intelligentsia: Documents of the Central Committee of the All-Union Communist Party (Bolshevik) and the All-Russian Extraordinary Commission for Combating Counter-Revolution, Profiteering, and Corruption/All-Union State Political Directorate/People's Commissariat for Internal Affairs on Cultural Policy, 1917–1953*), ed. Andrey Artizov and Oleg Naumov (Moscow: Mezhdunarodnïy fond 'Demokratiya', 1999), 631.

[25] Boris Asafiev, 'Klassicheskiye traditsii v razvitii sovetskoy muzïki', *O sovetskoy sotsialisticheskoy kul′ture* (Moscow: Goslitizdat, 1948), 234–48.

[26] Russell's talk, 'Culture and the State', was broadcast on the European Service on 14 March 1948. I would like to thank Dr Kenneth Blackwell and Dr Arlene Duncan of the Bertrand Russell Research Centre at McMaster University, Canada, for their assistance in identifying the broadcast in question.

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content is essentially identical. The essay also displays a small degree of textual overlap with 'The Loss of Melody'. No drafts of 'Classical Traditions in the Development of Soviet Music' have come to light among Asafiev's papers – but this does not in itself furnish sufficient grounds to dispute his authorship, since the manuscripts of other writings of which he was indisputably the author are also missing. Nor can his authorship – whether sole or partial – be ruled out because of his serious indisposition in late 1947 and early 1948. For one thing, Asafiev had produced a number of texts on aspects of Russian and Soviet music during the war years, some of which had remained unpublished and in varying stages of completion – so he could have drawn on or reworked pre-existing writings that have not been identified. (The bibliography compiled for the fifth volume of his selected works lists manuscripts from this period that were known to have existed, but were lost – and there may have been others.[27]) Moreover, he evidently felt sufficiently well at times in 1948 to work on additional responses to current events. Apart from a plan for a new book on Socialist Realist musical aesthetics, his archive in RGALI contains a three-page fragment which explores similar themes to those of 'Classical Traditions in the Development of Soviet Music' and extols the resolution for 'raising the significance of [Russian] classical art to unprecedented heights, to the pinnacle of humanity (*na vershinu chelovechnosti*)'.[28] Finally, the text of 'Classical Traditions in the Development of Soviet Music' could have been dictated to his wife or an assistant – a practice to which Asafiev sometimes had recourse.[29]

Orlova refers to the essay as one of several shortened versions of Asafiev's address published in the wake of the April congress, but this description is misleading.[30] Abbreviated versions of the address were printed in *Sovetskaya muzïka* and *Sovetskoye iskusstvo* (*Soviet Art*) as part of these publications' reportage on the event, and their provenance from the address is clearly indicated. 'Classical Traditions in the Development of Soviet Music', by contrast, was published as a free-standing piece: it makes no allusion to the April congress (merely to the January forum convened by Zhdanov) and is not identified as a version of the keynote address, as the *Sovetskaya*

[27] 'Bibliografiya', compiled by Tat′yana Dmitriyeva-Mey, *Akademik B. V. Asaf′yev: Izbranniye trudï*, ed. Kabalevsky *et al.*, v, 291–350.

[28] 'Plan stat′i o postanovlenii TsK VKP(b) ot 10 fevr. 1948 ob opere V. Muradeli, Velikaya druzhba' ('Plan of an Article on the Resolution of 10 February 1948 of the Central Committee of the All-Union Communist Party (Bolshevik) on V. Muradel's Opera *The Great Friendship*'), RGALI, f. 2658, op. 1, yed. khr. 425, ll. 26–8. The same folder contains drafts of 'The Loss of Melody' and an essay entitled 'The Composer and the People'.

[29] See, for example, entries 877 and 939 in 'Bibliografiya' (pp. 337, 342). Livanova, who was evidently familiar with Asafiev's working methods, suggests that he may have dictated sections of his address to a scribe: Livanova, 'Vospominaniya', VMOMK, f. 194, yed. khr. 1754b, ll. 529.

[30] Orlova, *B. V. Asaf′yev*, 392.

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muzïka and *Sovetskoye iskusstvo* versions are.[31] This would seem to indicate that it was completed *before* the congress, rather than afterwards. Furthermore, the essay is not merely a short version of the keynote address, but a substantially different variant of the text of its first, third and fourth sections (lacking, in other words, the lengthy quotation from 'The Loss of Melody' that constitutes its second section), with pronounced divergences in wording. This suggests that, when drafting the keynote address, Yarustovsky and his colleagues conflated 'The Loss of Melody' with either a completed or a largely extant draft of 'Classical Traditions in the Development of Soviet Music', which they reworked somewhat in the process. A comparison of the opening of 'Classical Traditions in the Development of Soviet Music' with the opening of the keynote address seems to support this supposition: the address commences with four introductory paragraphs outlining the aims and purpose of the congress, and the textual resemblance between the two commences at the fifth paragraph, which corresponds to the first paragraph of the essay. The most obvious explanation would be that the compilers of Asafiev's address added these introductory paragraphs when incorporating text from the essay. On the whole, the possibility that the essay was produced by the reverse process – in other words, that Asafiev or someone else fashioned the text of the essay from the keynote address by removing the opening paragraphs and its second section based on 'The Loss of Melody', and then rewriting the remainder – seems less plausible.

As with 'The Loss of Melody', the content of 'Classical Traditions in the Development of Soviet Music' is not only highly relevant to the February resolution, but also treats a theme that Asafiev had already explored quite extensively. It is, moreover, generally consistent in tone with his other publications from the 1930s and 1940s, especially in the outer sections. In the light of Asafiev's comments in his draft letter to Zhdanov, the extended quotations from the latter's January speeches reproduced in the essay's opening section can hardly be adduced as evidence of Yarustovsky's authorial ventriloquism – as Viljanen seems to suggest.[32] For one thing, the inclusion of so-called 'obligatory quotations' (*obyazatel'nïye tsitati*) from ideological authorities was generally considered *de rigueur* in quasi-official policy statements of this kind. Moreover, fulsome expressions of admiration for the party and its senior functionaries occur in Asafiev's writings well before 1948: for example, an autobiographical essay entitled 'My Path', which appeared in *Sovetskaya muzïka* in 1934, credits 'the Communist Party and its leaders of genius' for prompting his ideological reform in the early 1930s.[33]

[31] 'Za novuyu muzïkal'nuyu ėstetiku, za sotsialisticheskiy realizm' ('For a New Musical Aesthetic, for Socialist Realism'), *Sovetskaya muzïka*, 2 (1948), 12–22; 'Doklad B. V. Asaf'yeva' ('B. V. Asafiev's Address'), *Sovetskoye iskusstvo*, 24 April 1948. The latter is accurately described as a 'précis' of Asafiev's speech, but reproduces a considerable portion of the original text verbatim.

[32] Viljanen, *The Problem of the Modern and Tradition*, xix, n. 17.

[33] Boris Asafiev, 'Moy put'', *Sovetskaya muzïka*, 8 (1934), 47–50 (p. 48).

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The only portion of the essay that seems out of keeping with the rest is its central section (corresponding to the third section of the keynote address),[34] which consists of several pages of scattergun invective aimed at Western modernist composers (among them Schoenberg, Berg, Webern, Stravinsky, Hindemith, Křenek and Messiaen; rather oddly, the name of Menotti also features, despite his much more conservative stylistic orientation), writers (Gide, Marinetti, Cocteau), visual artists (Cézanne, Matisse, Picasso) and their supposed apologists (Henri Bergson, Raymond Mortimer, Bertrand Russell). The intemperate rhetoric here seems uncharacteristic: even at his most polemical, Asafiev's manner of expression was habitually more restrained. It may be that this passage was composed by Yarustovsky and his colleagues in collaboration with Asafiev for inclusion in the keynote address because they considered the criticisms of Western modernism in his original texts to be insufficiently trenchant, and that Asafiev subsequently added it to an unfinished draft of 'Classical Traditions in the Development of Soviet Music' before submitting the essay for publication.[35]

Two details in particular might indicate the intrusion of another authorial voice – the reference to Russell's radio broadcast and an oblique allusion to an article on the 1948 resolution that appeared in the *Manchester Guardian*.[36] The obvious question arises of how Asafiev would have been aware of these: foreign newspapers and radio stations were not generally accessible in the USSR at this time, and it is doubtful that he had a sufficient command of English to understand either source.[37] Once again, however, the matter is not entirely straightforward. Russell's broadcast and the *Manchester Guardian* article are both mentioned in an essay countering hostile foreign responses to the February resolution that was published in the English-language bulletin distributed abroad by VOKS,[38] the All-Union Society for Cultural Relations with Foreign Countries – an organization with which Asafiev had been closely linked since his move to Moscow in 1943. He was on friendly terms with the musicologist Grigoriy Shneyerson, the head of its Music Section, who recounted in a memoir that he met Asafiev frequently, lent him scores and recordings of new Western works from VOKS's library (including music by 'Bartók, Hindemith, [Roy] Harris or even completely unknown young composers') and kept him informed about foreign

[34] Asafiev, 'Klassicheskiye traditsii', 239–43; 'Tridtsat′ let', 13–17.

[35] Livanova similarly noted that the tone of the essay's central section seemed out of keeping with the remainder, and conjectured that it had been written by others: 'Vospominaniya', VMOMK, f. 194, yed. khr. 1754b, ll. 529.

[36] 'Russian Music', *Manchester Guardian*, 12 February 1948.

[37] In an autobiographical résumé compiled in the late 1920s, Asafiev claimed to read and understand English 'fluently' (*svobodno*), as well as French, German, Italian and Spanish: see *Materialï k biografii B. Asaf′yeva* (*Materials for a Biography of B. Asafiev*), ed. Andrey Kryukov (Leningrad: Muzïka, 1981), 29. Asafiev never set foot in an English-speaking country and I have not come across any evidence to corroborate his claim to be proficient in the language.

[38] Unsigned editorial, 'Against Formalism in Music', *VOKS Bulletin*, 54 (1948), 10–11. I would like to thank Dr Kevin Bartig for his assistance in tracing this reference.

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musical life.[39] Asafiev may consequently have heard about Russell's broadcast and the *Manchester Guardian* article from Shneyerson or someone else at VOKS, and decided to refer to them in 'Classical Traditions in the Development of Soviet Music'. His contact with VOKS may also explain the rather surprising allusions in this essay to composers such as Menotti and Messiaen, whose work would have been 'completely unknown' to most musicians in the USSR during this period.

At this remove, it is unlikely that we will ever be able to reconstruct the process of redaction of his address with complete certainty, identifying all the sources used and establishing which passages may have been composed or compiled by others. However, on the basis of textual evidence alone, it can safely be said that his own contribution was considerable. Yarustovsky's statement that Asafiev was fully consulted also seems to be borne out by the presence of a typescript of the address among the papers in his archive, bearing annotations in his hand.[40]

Before we proceed to examine the congruence that the address exhibits with his other writings, one further point should be made about the circumstances surrounding its composition. Throughout his life, Asafiev had shown a consistent tendency to issue position statements on Soviet music at important junctures when cultural policy was undergoing marked change. From the outset of his journalistic career, he aspired to be regarded as a leading commentator, much as his mentor Vladimir Stasov had been for a previous era.[41] These articles were not written from a position of altruistic disinterest, however: Asafiev's primary concern was to confirm the political reliability of his responses to events in the eyes of the authorities. As the ideological winds blew from different quarters, Asafiev tacked his sail accordingly. When proletarian artistic groups, among them the Russian Association of Proletarian Musicians (RAPM), started to become prominent in the mid-1920s, Asafiev published several articles (including 'The Crisis of Personal Creativity' and 'Composers, Make Haste!',[42] mentioned in Yarustovsky's reminiscences) in which he warned composers cultivating modernist idioms that their music was irrelevant to working-class audiences – in spite of his sympathetic advocacy of modernist music elsewhere. The articles alienated many of his colleagues, who rightly suspected him of opportunism.[43] When it became clear during the cultural revolution of the late 1920s and early 1930s that so-called 'fellow

[39] Grigoriy Shneyerson, 'Asaf'yev v VOKSe' ('Asafiev in VOKS'), *Vospominaniya o B. V. Asaf'yeve*, ed. Kryukov, 286–94.

[40] RGALI, f. 2658, op. 1, yed. khr. 427.

[41] Stasov made Asafiev's acquaintance in 1904 and was sufficiently impressed with his abilities to adopt him as a protégé: the young man frequently visited the venerable critic at home until Stasov's death in October 1906. See Boris Asafiev, 'O sebe' ('About Myself'), *Vospominaniya o B. V. Asaf'yeve*, ed. Kryukov, 317–508 (pp. 379–419, *passim*).

[42] 'Krizis lichnogo tvorchestva', *Sovremennaya muzïka* (*Modern Music*), 1924, issue 4, pp. 99–106; 'Kompozitorï, pospeshite!', *ibid.*, issue 6, pp. 146–9.

[43] For a discussion, see Marina Frolova-Walker and Jonathan Walker, *Music and Soviet Power, 1917–1932* (Woodbridge: Boydell Press, 2012), 102–3 and 122–5.

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travellers' were expected to embrace Marxism–Leninism with greater fervour, he duly published statements proclaiming his new-found ideological orthodoxy and writing of modernist composers as class enemies.[44] When RAPM was discredited in 1932, after having dominated Soviet musical life for the previous four years, Asafiev lost no time in hailing the organization's downfall in spite of his previous expressions of support for it (and this notwithstanding the fact that he had been a prominent target of RAPM's hostility).[45] Shostakovich's condemnation in 1936 prompted a contribution to *Sovetskaya muzïka* in which he not only retracted his previous praise of Shostakovich's opera but also declared his enthusiasm for musical modernism during the 1920s to have been a regrettable error. With the advent of the Zhdanovshchina in 1946,[46] Asafiev hastened to laud the Central Committee resolution 'O zhurnalakh *Zvezda* i *Leningrad*' ('On the Journals *Zvezda* and *Leningrad*'), which inaugurated a large-scale witch-hunt to extirpate ideological heterodoxy in Soviet cultural and intellectual life.[47] Given this pattern of behaviour, it was predictable that Asafiev would publicly endorse the party's actions in 1948.

As Yarustovsky observed, Asafiev had indeed produced a number of 'manifesto-like articles' that anticipated the criticisms of contemporary Soviet composition voiced in the resolution. The timing of one of these is especially noteworthy. On 20 December 1947, *Sovetskoye iskusstvo* carried a lengthy press release announcing the scope and objectives of the forthcoming first conference of the Composers' Union, which was initially scheduled to take place from 26 February to 3 March 1948. Though praising the 'great successes' achieved in some areas of Soviet composition, the anonymous author sounded some distinctly ominous notes, declaring 'the struggle with modernist tendencies' to be far from over and underlining the pertinence to musical life of the Central Committee's recent 'historic' resolutions on literature and art. The piece also signalled the need for a more thoroughgoing 'democratization' of Soviet orchestral and chamber music, which, it alleged, were still found difficult to comprehend by 'even the musically trained masses among Soviet listeners', and suggested that critics had been negligent in pointing out composers' failings – especially their conspicuous neglect of genres with greater mass appeal.[48] As Werth records, by late 1947 rumours

[44] See, for example, Boris Asafiev, 'Simfoniya Oktyabrya' ('October Symphony'), *Sovetskoye iskusstvo*, 4 November 1932.

[45] Boris Asafiev, 'Istoricheskiy god' ('A Historic Year'), *Sovetskaya muzïka*, 3 (1933), 106–8.

[46] 'Zhdanovshchina' can be translated roughly as 'the Zhdanov era', and refers to the period immediately following the Second World War when the senior Communist Party official Andrey Zhdanov conducted at Stalin's behest an aggressive campaign to counter Western cultural influences which drastically curtailed artistic and intellectual freedoms.

[47] The resolution 'O zhurnalakh *Zvezda* i *Leningrad*' was published in *Pravda* on 21 August 1946. See Boris Asafiev, 'Puti razvitiya sovetskoy muzïki' ('The Paths of Development of Soviet Music'), *Ocherki sovetskogo muzïkal′nogo tvorchestva* (*Sketches of Soviet Musical Creativity*), ed. Asafiev (Moscow: Gosudarstvennoye muzïkal′noye izdatel′stvo, 1947), 5–19; repr. in *Akademik B. V. Asaf′yev: Izbranniye trudï*, ed. Kabalevsky *et al.*, v, 51–62.

[48] 'Vazhneyshiye zadachi' ('Tasks of High Importance'), *Sovetskoye iskusstvo*, 20 December 1947.

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were rife that 'one hell of a row' was imminent in the musical world,[49] and with the publication of this piece it did not require much perceptiveness to infer what was in store. On the same page of the newspaper, adjacent to the text of the press release and under the same banner headline 'Before the First All-Union Congress of Soviet Composers', we find an article by Asafiev bearing the title 'Music for the Millions'. In it, he praised the 'fairy-tale-like growth of mass interest in art' in the USSR thanks to the 'attention and care of the government and the party', and in prose of a deeply purple hue he hymned the nation's devotion to the works of its great nineteenth-century composers and its folk-music traditions. 'These are the joyous voices of spring', he proclaimed, 'heralding the flowering of an emotionally exciting lyrical renewal of our native music':

> Only we must safeguard and tend, keep watch over and direct these heralds of rebirth. For composers who are stubbornly and intransigently fighting for their keenly individual principles and tastes, and to make their original 'mark' (*otstoy*) by speaking only in their own dialect, striving not to repeat themselves or to resemble anyone else, the time has come to think about the future of their creative development. The country is breathing all-unifying feelings and slogans – in this gigantic celebration of Soviet democracy. Composers ought to strive for a musical language that would be audible to the hearts of many millions – from mass song to operas, cantatas and symphonies, lofty intellectual syntheses. This is where the ideas and the forms manifesting these ideas should be directed.[50]

Notwithstanding his veiled language, there can be no doubt about the intended target of Asafiev's criticisms – the same 'individualistic' composers alluded to in the press release, whose work was held to exhibit 'the "complexity" for its own sake that alienates art from the people and testifies to the artist's isolation from real life and the tasks of an authentically progressive art'.[51] I have been unable to establish whether 'Music for the Millions' was written at the request or suggestion of Yarustovsky or of another senior official, but the possibility seems highly likely. Its simultaneous publication with the announcement of the Composers' Union congress and the fact that it echoed the content of the press release were scarcely coincidental: Asafiev evidently knew in advance of writing it that the party planned to undertake an extensive critical review of musical life. And in the tense climate of the Zhdanovshchina, coming after events such as the expulsion of Anna Akhmatova and Mikhail Zoshchenko from the Writers' Union, he can hardly have been unaware of its likely consequences.

The causes of the 1948 anti-formalism campaign were complex, but one of its primary objectives was to enforce stricter adherence to the doctrines of Socialist Realism as part of the wider drive then under way to reinforce ideological orthodoxy. This much is clear from a secret report on the state of contemporary musical life

[49] See Werth, *Musical Uproar*, 25–7.
[50] Boris Asafiev, 'Muzïka dlya millionov', *Sovetskoye iskusstvo*, 20 December 1947.
[51] *Ibid*.

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submitted in December 1947 by Zhdanov's assistant Dmitriy Shepilov, in which he highlighted composers' failure to engage sufficiently with ideologically appropriate subject matter, their widespread cultivation of complex 'abstract' instrumental music, and their corresponding neglect of the so-called 'democratic' genres with mass appeal such as opera.[52] Shepilov also criticized the dearth of melody in the work of leading Soviet composers and their abandonment of nineteenth-century nationalist musical traditions. Similar themes were raised in Zhdanov's speeches at the January forum, in the resolution itself and in the discourse on music that the latter generated – which aimed to dispel any lingering ambiguity about what was expected of composers when it came to the application of Socialist Realism to musical creativity.[53] Needless to say, 'Music for the Millions' and 'The Loss of Melody' were regarded as important contributions to this discourse, emanating as they did from the country's most eminent writer on music. However (and this is the other crucial point that must be made about these writings), they do not represent a dramatic rupture with Asafiev's prior views: on the contrary, as Asafiev himself pointed out to Yarustovsky, they evince a close thematic relationship to essays that he had published more than 20 years previously.

In the light of Asafiev's involvement with promoting musical modernism during the 1920s, in his capacities as journalist and consultant to Leningrad theatres and performing groups, the above may seem surprising. It is important to emphasize, however, that Asafiev's attitudes to this repertory were far from uncritical: as Yekaterina Vlasova has pointed out, important sources for the study of his life, such as his unpublished correspondence with Myaskovsky during the 1920s, reveal his private responses to have been highly ambivalent, notwithstanding the copious quantity of writings that he produced on Berg, Hindemith, Casella and other notable Western figures during this period.[54] This ambivalence finds expression in a series of newspaper articles and essays that could best be described as opinion pieces about the state of contemporary musical life. In them, Asafiev articulated aesthetic standpoints that,

[52] Shepilov's report, entitled 'O nedostatkakh v razvitii sovetskoy muzïki' ('On Shortcomings in the Development of Soviet Music'), is preserved in the Russian State Archive for Social and Political History (Moscow), f. 17, op. 125, yed. khr. 636, ll. 103–12. The text is reproduced in an unpaginated appendix to Tikhon Khrennikov, *Tak eto bïlo: Tikhon Khrennikov o vremeni i o sebe* (*That's How It Was: Tikhon Khrennikov on Himself and his Times*), ed. Valentina Rubtsova (Moscow: Muzïka, 1994). For a discussion of its contents, see Zuk, 'Nikolay Myaskovsky and the Events of 1948', 71–3.

[53] In addition to publishing the transcripts of the January forum and the April congress, the Composers' Union also brought out a book entitled *The Paths of Development of Soviet Music*, which critiqued undesirable tendencies and offered guidance on how composers were to approach the tasks of writing for particular genres: *Puti razvitiya sovetskoy muzïki*, ed. Aleksandr Shaverdyan (Moscow: Gosudarstvennoye muzïkal′noye izdatel′stvo, 1948).

[54] Yekaterina Vlasova, 'Perepiska B. V. Asaf′yeva i N. Ya. Myaskovskogo (1906–1945) v svete problem sovremennogo istoricheskogo muzïkoznaniya' ('The Correspondence of B. V. Asafiev and N. Ya. Myaskovsky (1906–1945) in the Light of Problems of Historical Musicology'), *Yuzhno-Rossiyskiy muzïkal′nïy al′manakh* (*The Southern Russian Musical Almanac*), 4 (2016), 29–34.

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with the introduction of Socialist Realism, would subsequently become intrinsic to official envisionings of the nature and purpose of musical creativity.

Among the central tenets of Socialist Realism were the requirements that artworks should be broadly accessible in style and content, and engage with subject matter of general relevance to Soviet citizens.[55] Asafiev had aired similar views within a short time of 1917: a recurrent theme of his early writings is the need for composers to recognize that they were now operating in very different conditions and that the new proletarian audiences would reject complex works in 'advanced' idioms. Writing in the Petrograd newspaper *Zhizn′ iskusstva* (*Life of Art*) in 1918, he condemned those who 'enclosed themselves in a narrow circle of purely personal experiences, supposedly creating only for themselves, as though not wishing to propagate their compositions', adding: 'This is the exhaustion (*iznïvaniye*) of creativity!'[56] In part, such thoughts were undoubtedly prompted by his work for Narkompros (the new ministry overseeing educational, cultural and intellectual activities), where his portfolio of responsibility initially included music education and amateur music-making – but they also seem to have been fundamental to his outlook on art from the very beginning. In the immediate post-revolutionary period, the issue of contemporary compositional styles was not of pressing relevance, given the restrictions that the dire social and economic conditions of these years imposed on professional musical activity: very little new music was performed. However, when concert life began to revive after the introduction of the New Economic Policy, Asafiev returned to the issue in a series of opinion pieces published in 1924 – four under the title 'Questions of Musical Modernity' in the newspaper *Krasnaya gazeta* (*The Red Newspaper*),[57] and three others in the periodicals *Muzïkal′naya kul′tura* (*Musical Culture*) and *Sovremennaya muzïka* (*Modern Music*). In the latter group were the articles 'Composers, Make Haste!' and 'The Crisis of Personal Creativity' (see n. 42), to which Asafiev drew Yarustovsky's attention during the discussions of his keynote address, and 'The Crisis of Music'.[58] There is a considerable degree of overlap between the content of these articles, which hover around a consistent set of themes. The most fundamental is Asafiev's conviction that a major crisis was imminent in Soviet musical life because the music being written by native composers, and especially those of modernist stylistic inclinations, held

[55] As one notable primer explained, Socialist Realism required artists 'to express by means of art the fundamental interests of the Soviet people and to address art directly to the masses'. Ivan Smol′yaninov, *Sostialisticheskiy realizm – tvorcheskiy metod sovetskogo iskusstva* (*Socialist Realism: The Creative Method of Soviet Art*; Leningrad: Vsesoyuznoye obshchestvo po rasprostraneniyu politicheskikh i nauchnïkh znaniy, 1954), 37.

[56] Boris Asafiev, 'Zatish′ye' ('A Fallow Spell'), *Zhizn′ iskusstva*, 28 December 1918.

[57] Boris Asafiev, 'Voprosï muzïkal′noy sovremennosti', *Krasnaya gazeta*, 20 and 26 November, 10 and 18 December 1924.

[58] Igor′ Glebov (Boris Asafiev), 'Krizis muzïki (nabroski nablyudatelya leningradskoy muzïkal′noy deystvitel′nosti)' ('The Crisis of Music (Vignettes by an Observer of the Conditions of Musical Life in Leningrad)'), *Muzïkal′naya kul′tura*, 2 (1924), 99–120.

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little appeal for the new proletarian audiences. Although he was careful to hedge his statements with disclaimers and qualifications (assuring the reader, for example, that 'wonderful' music was still being composed, though he did not specify by whom), his conclusions are stated in a fairly categorical fashion:

> Composers are obstinately composing sonatas and symphonies, leaving their evaluation to future generations, and the immediate result is a crisis of Russian music, which has given the world Musorgsky, Skryabin and Stravinsky. This seems strangely unreal. It seems to be that the crisis is not only unavoidable, but is already upon us.[59]

Asafiev would make something of a speciality of diagnosing crises: it is notable how frequently the term recurs throughout his writings and in the titles of articles, including the one just cited ('The Crisis of Music'). While the new conditions of musical life undoubtedly presented composers with challenges, another commentator might have discussed this issue in a calmer, more considered way, offering suggestions for how the gap between composer and public could best be bridged, and emphasizing that the solution would require, *inter alia*, material resources, improved educational opportunities and above all time and patience – especially after the social and political turmoil of the preceding years. Asafiev's deliberations, which deal mostly in nebulous abstractions and generalizations, are notably lacking in constructive proposals. His simplistic portrayal of the relationship between Soviet composers and their audiences as strained and inherently antagonistic was a defining moment in the development of Soviet music criticism. In characterizing the prevailing state of affairs as a crisis, he clearly implied that drastic measures were required for its alleviation. In due course, Soviet cultural bureaucrats would employ a similar terminology of crisis to justify their intervention in musical life in 1948, retrospectively praising Asafiev for the prescient awareness he had shown in the 1920s of the threat posed to Soviet composition by the influence of the 'decadent formalist art of the bourgeois West', which caused its leading practitioners to become 'ruinously alienated from the people'.[60]

These articles of 1924 were insidious in other respects. Asafiev presented the crisis as being principally created by composers themselves, and intimated that the onus was on them to remedy it by writing music that the masses would find appealing. He expressly repudiated the idea that the failure of working-class audiences to appreciate modern music had anything to do with lack of experience or education: 'Pedagogy and pedagogy alone will not help here. We need music that is vital and vivid.'[61] He had few concrete suggestions to make about how composers might achieve the elusive ideal of mass popularity, except vague injunctions that they should seek inspiration from urban 'parades, demonstrations, shows, processions, festivities' and transform them

[59] Glebov (Asafiev), 'Krizis muzïki', 106.
[60] 'B. V. Asaf'yev' (unsigned obituary), *Pravda* (*Truth*), 29 January 1949.
[61] Asafiev, 'Kompozitorï, pospeshite!', 146.

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into music 'using the primal elements of sound that are woven into the general fabric of the life of the city', seeing the street as a source of joy, 'a spring of fresh and sparkling living water'. In 'The Crisis of Personal Creativity', he declared that what Russia needed was the appearance of a composer 'who would grow in his work together with the masses and would lead them with him, whose music would be understood by each and every one, and whose songs would be sung on the street and in the fields':

> Italy knows of such composers. The last of them was Verdi. It seems to me that our life now needs a composer of this order. For the smaller the circle of people who are interested in the appearance of operas, symphonies, sonatas and art songs, the more undoubted is the crisis of music. A symphony or an opera may be composed in the study, but on being launched into the world, their fire should seize the hearts of the majority of people: the reason why 'individualistic' compositions do not survive is not because they are complex […] but because no one argues about them, no one gets excited by them. […] Indifference on the part of the majority of people to an artist's strivings is a sign of the extinction of his creative powers. A new era in Russian music will begin when the appearance of a new musical composition will seize and attract the attention of narrow circles, arousing the cold-blooded interests of specialists, but more and more of the mass of the population; when its performance will elicit a response from the people in its environment and, aroused by the power of the composer's imaginings, they will start to sing the melodies that he has created alongside their own native songs.[62]

Accordingly, he recommended that composers should direct their attention to writing operas, mass songs and music for popular festivities rather than symphonies and sonatas – anticipating the Socialist Realist emphasis on so-called 'democratic' text-based genres. Asafiev's effusions about a musical messiah who would heal the rift between the modern composer and the public, a Soviet Verdi whose tunes would be hummed in the factories and the fields, were patent nonsense, and his colleagues' reactions can well be imagined. Myaskovsky dispelled this cloud of Romantic *Schwärmerei* with a blunt summary of Asafiev's argument: 'Your consumer is a yokel (*muzhik*), so you must write yokel-music.'[63] Although Myaskovsky was no snob, the idea that composers should take the line of least resistance and confine themselves to writing simplistic works for uneducated audiences clearly appalled him. Asafiev claimed that Myaskovsky had misunderstood and misrepresented his position ('Just because there are thoughts that are comprehensible to the masses, must we burn Kant? Nowhere do I say that'[64]), but this was disingenuous. Once again, we find him voicing convictions that would become foundational for Socialist Realist aesthetics: the masses were the ultimate arbiters of artistic merit and all genuinely great art was universally

[62] Asafiev, 'Krizis lichnogo tvorchestva', 105–6.
[63] Myaskovsky to Asafiev, 5 December 1924, quoted in Ol′ga Lamm, *Stranitsï tvorcheskoy biografii Myaskovskogo* (*Pages from Myaskovsky's Creative Biography*; Moscow: Sovetskiy kompozitor, 1989), 166.
[64] Asafiev to Myaskovsky, 8 December 1924, *ibid.*, 167.

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accessible. In doing so, he contributed to the heavy burden of unrealistic expectation under which Soviet composers were fated to labour, which was highlighted during the anti-formalism campaign of 1948. (As Zhdanov declared in his speeches at the January forum, 'The [Soviet] people evaluate the talent demonstrated in a musical composition […] by the extent to which it reaches the broad masses. […] The greater the genius shown in a composition […] the more people recognize it.'[65])

In spite of his protestations to Myaskovsky, Asafiev's essays of 1924 played a significant role in constructing the image of the Soviet musical 'enemy within' who would be extensively reviled in the course of the 1948 campaign: composers who supposedly held themselves apart from the masses and wrote esoteric works for 'a small group of aestheticizing (*ėstestvuyushchikh*) gourmands', to quote Zhdanov once more.[66] Asafiev's ironic caricature of these 'individualistic' modernist composers adumbrated Zhdanov's sneering description: he attacked the 'high-priest-like ideology' and 'fear of the streets' that they supposedly exemplified – effete, snobbish intellectuals who were terrified of sullying themselves by coming into contact with ordinary people and preferred to shut themselves away in their ivory towers, clinging to the illusion that they could continue to write for a select few and adhere to an aesthetic of 'art for art's sake'. He warned that 'life would begin to dispense with' these composers if they did not 'advance with modernity' and renounce their 'proud state of alienation'; he exhorted them to 'create music for the sake of the life that surrounds us […] and not for the sake of insubstantial dreams'.[67]

The interesting question arises as to the intended targets of Asafiev's criticisms – especially as Soviet musical life was only beginning to emerge from a period of protracted quiescence at the time of writing. Rachmaninoff, Stravinsky and Prokofiev were living abroad, and the first generation of composers who came to maturity after the Revolution – Shostakovich, Popov, Shebalin and Kabalevsky – had yet to emerge on the scene. Unsurprisingly, the productivity of the most prominent composers who had remained in Russia declined sharply between 1917 and 1923 – Glazunov virtually stopped writing music altogether, and the diaries and correspondence of Myaskovsky and Maksimilian Shteynberg, for example, reveal that they struggled to find time to compose because of onerous professional duties and difficult living conditions. Moreover, as Myaskovsky explained to Prokofiev in a letter of January 1924, it was almost impossible to arrange performances of new works – and he was more fortunate than most in this respect.[68] The recent establishment of the Association for Contemporary Music would significantly ameliorate this dispiriting situation, but the organization had only just commenced its activities. Not only were Asafiev's

[65] *Soveshchaniye deyateley sovetskoy muzïki v TsK VKP(b)*, 143.

[66] *Ibid*.

[67] Asafiev, 'Krizis lichnogo tvorchestva', 101; 'Kompozitorï, pospeshite!', 149.

[68] Myaskovsky to Prokofiev, 12–16 January 1924, *S. S. Prokof′yev i N. Ya. Myaskovskiy: Perepiska* (*S. S. Prokofiev and N. Ya. Myaskovsky: Correspondence*), ed. Miral′da Kozlova and Nina Yatsenko (Moscow: Izdatel′stvo Sovetskiy kompozitor, 1977), 184.

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criticisms rather premature, but his analysis strikes one as curiously divorced from the reality of the obtaining circumstances: as yet, composers had scant opportunity to encounter their new audience or gauge its reactions to their work. When he alluded to composers who 'obstinately' persisted in writing sonatas and symphonies, oblivious that they were contributing to a growing crisis, his remarks could only have applied to a handful of figures. As far as symphonies were concerned, for instance, a grand total of ten works by Moscow and Leningrad composers are known to have been completed between 1917 and 1924.[69] Of these, only four were performed at the time: Andrey Pashchenko's Second Symphony (1922), Aleksandr Gedike's Third (1923) and Myaskovsky's Fifth and Sixth, completed respectively in 1918 and 1923.

All the evidence points to Myaskovsky being uppermost in Asafiev's mind when limning the lineaments of the 'individualistic', alienated composer in these articles of 1924 – in spite of his professions of friendship and admiration, his attitude to his old associate had grown increasingly ambivalent. As Asafiev would have been well aware, Myaskovsky's compositional interests lay primarily with the sonata and the symphony: his other major works from this period are the Third Piano Sonata (1920) and the Fourth and Seventh Symphonies, finished in 1918 and 1922 respectively, but as yet unperformed. Snide remarks about Myaskovsky that echo formulations employed in 'Composers, Make Haste!' can be found in Asafiev's correspondence from this period. Writing to the musicologist Aleksandr Vaulin (Waulin), for example, he dismissed Myaskovsky's work as 'growing more academic by the day': '[Myaskovsky] flees from life, he fears the street, and "inside" him – it's dark, he's afraid … Nothing will come of it.'[70] Notwithstanding Asafiev's dire diagnosis of a 'crisis', Myaskovsky's Fifth and Sixth Symphonies were very warmly received. The Sixth in particular, a symphonic requiem to those who had perished in the Revolution and ensuing civil war, made an overwhelming emotional impact at the première on 4 May 1924, leading notable musicians such as Georgy Katuar (Catoire) and Konstantin Igumnov to invoke comparisons with Tchaikovsky's 'Pathétique' Symphony.[71] Interestingly, however, Asafiev's reaction to the Sixth anticipated the negative evaluations customarily encountered in subsequent Soviet commentaries on the work, which severely criticized Myaskovsky for responding to the October Revolution in a 'subjective' fashion and dwelling on its tragic aspects, rather than depicting it 'realistically' as a joyous, liberating event of world-historical significance for humanity as a whole. Summarizing his impressions in a letter to their mutual acquaintance Vladimir Derzhanovsky, Asafiev averred that the symphony treated the Revolution 'from our [that is, the

[69] David Fanning, 'The Symphony in the Soviet Union (1917–91)', *A Companion to the Symphony*, ed. Robert Layton (London: Simon & Schuster, 1993), 292–326 (pp. 318–19). I have excluded Avraamov's *Symphony of Factory Sirens* (*Gudovskaya simfoniya*) from this figure, since it is not a symphony in the customary understanding of the term.

[70] Asafiev to Vaulin, 13 September 1925, VMOMK, f. 171, yed. khr. 144, l. 27.

[71] Ol′ga Lamm, 'Pavel Aleksandrovich Lamm: Opït biografii' ('Pavel Aleksandrovich Lamm: A Biographical Sketch'), VMOMK, f. 192, yed. khr. 361, l. 272.

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Russian] eternal mystical vantage-point', viewing it through the prism of traditional imagery of the Apocalypse. Significantly, he also questioned whether Myaskovsky's work could ever 'shift onto the level of collective consciousness' – in other words, affirm and embody the Marxist–Leninist worldview.[72]

Asafiev's characterization of Myaskovsky as isolated from 'collective consciousness' is significant. He did not voice this opinion of Myaskovsky explicitly in a public forum, but it continued to inform his evolving portrayal of the musical 'enemy within', as is clear from another opinion piece that he published eight years later in 1932, this time on the future of Soviet symphonic composition. Affirming the symphony's exalted role in Soviet musical culture as 'bearer of the emotional and ideological content of modernity' (in other words, the 'progressive' ideology of Marxism–Leninism and concomitant joy in 'socialist construction'), Asafiev warned of the dangers presented by 'the egotistical individualism of the intelligentsia with its mournful spirit and pessimistic petit bourgeois worldview'. Once again, as the foremost Soviet symphonist of the period, Myaskovsky was the obvious target of this diatribe: the psychological worlds evoked in his mutedly lyrical, introspective Ninth Symphony and his turbulent expressionistic Tenth, both composed in 1927, were far removed from the spirit of Stalinist 'modernity'. The 'individualistic' composer is now indicted as an enemy of the working class who resists the party's demands and stands in need of correction and ideological re-education:

> Only through overcoming such emanations of the past will the composer find the path to the Soviet symphony as the optimistic and virile musical art of the victorious [working] class. The excitement of collective construction – this is the fundamental content that should replace lyrical individualistic symphonism […] All the plenitude of feelings and emotions that move us as participants in the great task of socialist construction, its joys and sorrows (in a word, everything that imbues the consciousness of the masses who are reconstructing our life), should become the new content of symphonic works.[73]

Although the aesthetic doctrine of Socialist Realism was still nascent at the time when this article was written, it is noteworthy that Asafiev was quick to affirm as fundamental necessities composers' ideological commitment to Marxism–Leninism and their willingness to adhere to its instrumentalized view of art. Moreover, in their tone and general tenor, his criticisms of the 'egotistical individualism' displayed by contemporary Soviet symphonists and their failure to treat ideologically appropriate themes clearly anticipate allegations that would be made again in 1948. Compare, for example, the following remarks on Soviet symphonism in Khrennikov's keynote address at the first Composers' Union congress:

[72] Asafiev to Derzhanovsky, 28 January 1925, VMOMK, f. 3, yed. khr. 772, ll. 1–1ob.
[73] Asafiev, 'Simfoniya Oktabrya'.

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> We need to create an authentic Soviet symphonism – democratic, ethically exalted, founded on folk *melos* and addressed to the people. We need to return to the symphony its organizing, socially directed function. Enough of symphonic diaries, pseudo-philosophical symphonies, whose apparent profundity conceals the tedious soul-searching of the intelligentsia![74]

Asafiev not only became an important theoretical exponent of Socialist Realism, but also attempted to realize its tenets in his own creative practice. His compositions after 1932 were models of Socialist Realist orthodoxy, invariably based on carefully chosen national, historical or contemporary subjects whose ideological relevance he dutifully explained in elaborate programme notes.

In addition to propounding proto-Socialist Realist views on the social function of the composer and the need for contemporary art music to be accessible to the masses, Asafiev made notable contributions to Soviet discourse that stressed the ongoing relevance of Russian musical traditions to the Soviet composer, and which sought to define essentialized notions of musical 'Russianness' through contrast with the productions of the musical 'enemy without' – Western musical modernists. As has previously been mentioned, Asafiev held one of the fundamental distinguishing traits of Russian music to reside in its unique 'songfulness' (*pesennost'*). This conviction seems to have formed at a very early stage of his career: a conspectus for a series of seminars that he drafted in 1918 includes plans for talks exploring his contention that the future of Russian composition lay in taking the melodic features of Russian Orthodox liturgical chant and Russian folk song as creative points of departure.[75] In a book on Tchaikovsky published in 1922, we find him positing the existence of a special quality of 'Petersburg songfulness' that first manifested itself in the mid-eighteenth century and supposedly spread from the capital to the rest of Russia, forming the basis of the styles of Aleksandr Alyab'yev and Aleksandr Varlamov, and subsequently of Glinka and Tchaikovsky.[76] He returned to the subject of melody in the chapter surveying the development of the Russian art song in his *Russian Music from the Beginning of the Nineteenth Century* (1930), but now felt it necessary to warn that 'individualistic' compositional tendencies were threatening to destroy this unique quality in Russian vocal music and to repel proletarian listeners:

[74] Tikhon Khrennikov, 'Doklad general'nogo sekretarya Soyuza sovetskikh kompozitorov T. Khrennikova: "Tridtsat' let sovetskoy muzïki i zadachi sovetskikh kompozitorov"' ('Lecture by the General Secretary of the Union of Soviet Composers Tikhon Khrennikov: "Thirty Years of Soviet Music and the Tasks of Soviet Composers"'), *Pervïy vsesoyuzniy s"ezd sovetskikh kompozitorov*, ed. Gorodinsky *et al.*, 24–60 (p. 45).

[75] Boris Asafiev, 'Russkaya muzïka, yeyo psikhologicheskiye osnovï, formï voploshcheniya i osnovnïye momentï razvitiya' ('Russian Music: Its Psychological Bases, Forms of Embodiment, and the Main Junctures in its Development'), Central State Archive for Literature and Art, St Petersburg, f. 337, op. 8, d. 2, l. 2.

[76] Boris Asafiev, *P. I. Chaykovskiy: Yego zhizn' i tvorchestva* (*P. I. Tchaikovsky: His Life and Work*; Moscow: Mïsl', 1922), 52–3.

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> The further individualistic lyricism departs from the street behind thick walls and drapes, into the stillness of lonely contemplation, the more dangerous becomes the dissociation between artistic creation and the tastes of the majority of listeners, for then they will start to be influenced by vulgar and coarse music from the lower strata of life.[77]

This passage would not be out of place in 'The Loss of Melody', written 17 years later, where he reiterated concerns about the 'barbarizing' effects of modernist compositional styles on the hearing of Soviet listeners.[78]

Asafiev even introduced a special term for what he described as 'the ruling element' of this Russian 'songfulness'[79] – the ancient Greek word for song, *melos* (μέλος), as he believed it to derive from Byzantine culture.[80] Needless to say, this elusive quality originated entirely from wishful thinking and fanciful speculation: without offering a shred of proof, he claimed that in '[ancient] Mediterranean culture and especially in Greece' *melos* had developed as a concept analogous to *logos* to designate 'the auditory apprehension of musical phenomena conditioned by the unique criteria of Greek chants – modal ethos'.[81] Asafiev's considerations of *melos* in relation to the work of the leading émigré composers Prokofiev and Stravinsky during the 1920s are of particular interest, because they afford noteworthy examples of his employment of it as a basic criterion to demarcate 'healthy' Russian musical traits from 'decadent' Western ones.

In an article of 1925 on Prokofiev's Third Piano Concerto, he observed:

> Prokofiev's concerto is a profoundly Russian composition and its essence can only be divined if one casts aside the customary textbook norms inculcated into us by Western European musical scholasticism. […] The Third Concerto's *facture* rests on an intuitive prerequisite – *melos* […] Not crude melopoeia (*melodika*) based on tonic-and-dominant formulas, but the song-saturated melodic basis from which the entire great musical culture of the East derives – a culture which has nourished both the Mediterranean shore and the plains of eastern Europe. Has the time come when Western European musical art must once again, as at the dawn of its history, be restored to health by the founts of *melos*? […] However completely European Prokofiev might feel himself to be, he undeviatingly and reliably, albeit instinctually, makes his way through the jungle of deviations (*debri otkloneniy*) towards the affirmation in his work of the primordial basis of form-building – *melos*. His stubborn gravitation towards the affirmation and glorification of C major […] is already striking. […] Most important of all is the originality of the diatonic harmonic language […] and devices recalling the vocal portamenti and glissandi which can be observed in

[77] Boris Asafiev, *Russkaya muzïka ot nachala XIX stoletiya* (Moscow and Leningrad: Akademiya, 1930), 104.

[78] Asafiev, 'Poterya melodii', 148–9.

[79] Asafiev to Nikolay Kashkin, undated letter, quoted in Orlova, *B. V. Asaf'yev*, 49.

[80] For a discussion of the evolution of this concept in Asafiev's writings, see Yelena Orlova, *Intonatsionnaya teoriya Asaf'yeva kak ucheniye o spetsifike muzïkal'nogo mïshleniya: Istoriya, stanovleniye, sushchnost'* (*Asafiev's Intonational Theory as a Teaching Concerning the Specificity of Musical Thinking: History, Evolution, Essence*; Moscow: Muzïka, 1984), 161–73.

[81] Asafiev, 'O sebe', 504.

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> [Russian] folk song […] This sincerely and simply written composition is deeply in tune with modernity. Prokofiev is alien to the West. And if the concerto in question is accepted there all the same, then it is, of course, without understanding its essence; but they cleave (*l'nut*) nonetheless to such music just as they cleave to the music of Musorgsky, sensing a 'fountain of the water of life'.[82]

Asafiev's claims are striking – and not merely because of the patent absurdity of these windy pronouncements. Asafiev declared Prokofiev's concerto to be 'profoundly Russian' because it was imbued with *melos* – the mythical quality he believed to constitute not only the essence of Russian folk song, but also the universal basis of melody, harmony and form across the civilized world. In writing this concerto, therefore, Prokofiev had returned both to the *fons et origo* of Russian national musical traditions and to the primordial origins of the 'great musical culture of the East' from which Western music emerged. As Western music had long ago lost contact with this ultimate source, however, his concerto would remain a fundamentally alien cultural product for Western audiences on account of its non-conformity to 'scholastic' Western compositional models and its musical content being intrinsically incomprehensible to Western listeners. It could only be understood completely by Russians, whose ears were still attuned to *melos*. Prokofiev's healthy 'Russian' instincts, rather than 'Western' ratiocination, enable him to find his way unhesitatingly through contemporary Western musical modernism's 'jungle of deviations' back to songfulness and C major. And using language that distinctly recalls Slavophile imaginings of Russia's predestined soteriological role in world history, Asafiev intimates that the etiolated musical culture of the West will be revivified through a return to its Eastern source. Towards the close, he draws an unfavourable contrast between the 'purity', 'strength' and 'freshness' of Prokofiev's concerto, based on 'diatonicism and *melos*', and Stravinsky's 'unanchored chromaticism and gravitation towards mechanical, soulless sound combinations' – but warns that a similar impoverishment of Prokofiev's art could result if he proved unable to resist fashionable Western tendencies: 'It seems as though the element of sunniness (*solnechnost'*) will conquer the spell cast by the West in Prokofiev's music if only what was intuitively manifested in the Third Concerto comes to the fore.'[83] Asafiev's metaphor likens Prokofiev's struggle to overcome Western influences to the contest of the Russian fairy-tale hero Ivan Tsarevich against the evil wizard Kashchey: he expresses the pious hope that Prokofiev's Russian 'sunniness'

[82] Boris Asafiev, 'Tretiy kontsert Sergeya Prokof'yeva' ('Sergey Prokofiev's Third [Piano] Concerto'), *Akademik B. V. Asaf'yev: Izbranniye trudi*, ed. Kabalevsky *et al.*, v, 109–12 (pp. 110–12). The closing words of the last sentence (*istochnik zhivoy vodi*) allude to the Russian Synodal Bible translation of the Book of Revelation, chapter 21, verse 6 (in the King James rendering: 'I will give unto him that is athirst of the fountain of the water of life freely'). Translating Asafiev's turgid prose presents considerable challenges: here and elsewhere, I have not sought to meliorate the syntactical and stylistic awkwardness of the original texts.

[83] *Ibid.*, 112.

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will triumph over the 'spell' of Western decadence, just as Ivan Tsarevich succeeds in breaking Kashchey's spell and liberates the captive denizens of his kingdom from perpetual gloom into warm sunlight.

As this passage demonstrates, more than two decades before 1948, Asafiev had already formulated what would become standard tropes in the discourse of Soviet music criticism: the barrenness of Western musical modernism and the danger that its influence posed to native composers. The last chapter of Asafiev's monograph *A Book about Stravinsky* (1929) furnishes a further case in point. Added to the manuscript three years after the earlier chapters, this focuses on the works that Stravinsky had completed during the intervening period – *Oedipus Rex* (1927), *Apollon musagète* (1928) and *Le baiser de la fée* (1928). With regard to the last two scores especially, Asafiev was severely critical of the growing 'denationalization' of Stravinsky's compositional idiom, which he argued had degenerated into 'a lifeless eclectic Esperantic (*èsperantski-èklektichnïy*) *melos*' displaying 'all the negative traits of Esperanto, an artificial invented language'.[84] Unsurprisingly, he declared Stravinsky to be in the grip of a crisis (the word recurs repeatedly throughout his discussion) that called the validity of his creative endeavours fundamentally into question:

> The abandonment of a plot in *Apollon* destroys the link between the composer and those who expect from the theatre some ethically valuable influence. Here Stravinsky has embarked on the dangerous path of recreating an opulent court balletic entertainment for an aristocratic theatre that does not exist in reality. With *Apollon* and *Le baiser de la fée* […] the linkage is broken between the composer and listeners who do not belong to the aestheticizing (*èstestvuyushchey*) public in large cities.[85]

There is no mistaking his import: the 'lifelessness' and 'artificiality' of Stravinsky's recent music resulted from his abjuration of Russian *melos* and reflected his state of rootless cosmopolitanism. The embrace of a decadent ideology of 'art for art's sake' had rendered his work shallow and trivial, devoid of worthy content.

Read in the context of the other writings cited above, Asafiev's account of Stravinsky's 'crisis' adds the finishing touches to his portrayal of the dangers to Soviet composition from Western influences: the loss of its distinctive age-old national quality of 'songfulness' arising from *melos*; the debasement of music into a 'mechanical and soulless' play of dissonant sounds; its degeneration from a noble instrument of ethical instruction into meretricious entertainment of interest only to pretentious 'arty' types and rightly scorned by the man in the street. In essence, these were the accusations that would be levelled at the 'formalist' composers in 1948, couched in similar, if coarser language. While it is probably unlikely that Zhdanov ever read Asafiev's book on Stravinsky, it is nonetheless striking to find him echoing the pejorative employment of the epithet 'aestheticizing' 19 years later, as we have already seen. Nor does it seem

[84] Igor′ Glebov (Boris Asafiev), *Kniga o Stravinskom* (Leningrad: Triton, 1929), 387.
[85] *Ibid*., 386.

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unwarranted to suggest that it is precisely here, in Asafiev's writings from the 1920s, that we find the antecedents of the Russian ethnic nationalist, xenophobic strain in Soviet musicological writing which intensified in the late Stalinist period, with its hyperbolic claims for the supremacy and uniqueness of Russian musical culture and corresponding misprision of anything emanating from the West.

If these views are presented piecemeal in Asafiev's earlier publications, and are less in evidence through being obscured by his apparent enthusiastic advocacy of Western musical modernism, they are articulated in increasingly unequivocal fashion after 1932, when he proclaimed his conversion from fellow traveller to committed Marxist–Leninist. Although he ventured into print less frequently during the 1930s, having embarked on a new career as a full-time composer, the opinion pieces on Soviet music that he contributed occasionally to newspapers and periodicals unfailingly endorsed Socialist Realism with fervent enthusiasm. In 1933, he published four different versions of a text hailing the party's 'historic' directive of the previous year, 'On the Reorganization of Literary and Artistic Organizations', as signalling the 'rebirth of musical creativity'.[86] An autobiographical sketch contributed the following year to *Sovetskaya muzïka* affirmed his commitment to overcoming 'individualistic aesthetic lawlessness' and finding ways to realize Socialist Realism's tenets in creative practice.[87] In an article for *Leningradskaya pravda* (*Leningrad Truth*) of 1935, he exhorted his fellow composers to 'dare more boldly' in their struggle to assure 'the victory of socialist culture' and in their work on ideological subjects, hymning the 'great happiness and pride' of living in 'the era of gigantic socialist construction in a country where every artist enjoys hitherto unprecedented conditions and opportunities for the most productive creative work'.[88]

'Burning Issues', published in *Sovetskaya muzïka* in response to the condemnation in *Pravda* of Shostakovich's *Lady Macbeth of the Mtsensk District* in 1936, makes for particularly painful reading. The essay represents a landmark contribution to the discourse of Soviet music criticism and its evolving constructions of the musical enemy within and without, restating the themes of Asafiev's previous writings on the subject with greater explicitness and force. Using the *Pravda* article's criticisms of Shostakovich's opera as his starting point, Asafiev took the opportunity to review his

[86] Asafiev, 'Istoricheskiy god', 107. The three other versions of this text are (1) 'K raskrepleniyu kompozitorskogo soznaniya' ('Towards the Liberation of Composers' Consciousness'), *Itogi pervoy godovshchinï postanovleniya TsVKP(b) o perestroyke literaturno-khudozhestvennïkh organizatsii* (*Results on the First Anniversary of the Resolution of the Central Committee of the All-Union Communist Party (Bolshevik) on the Restructuring of Literary and Artistic Organizations*), ed. V. Tobol′kevich (Leningrad: Gosudarstvennoye muzïkal′noye izdatel′stvo, 1933), 14–16; (2) 'I radost′ i ėntuziazm' ('Both Joy and Enthusiasm'), *Krasnaya gazeta* (evening edition), 23 April 1933; and (3) 'K raskrepleniyu kompozitorskogo soznaniya' ('Towards the Liberation of Composers' Consciousness'), *Rabochiy i teatr*, 11 (1933), 11 (an abridged version of (1)).

[87] Asafiev, 'Moy put′', 50.

[88] Boris Asafiev, 'Smeleye derzat′' ('Dare More Boldly'), *Leningradskaya pravda*, 9 January 1935.

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engagement with Western musical modernism during the 1920s and condemn it as profoundly misguided – an act of public 'self-criticism' (*samokritika*) characteristic of the period. He opened by praising the *Pravda* article for its 'exhaustive and just exposure' of 'unhealthy tendencies' in modern Soviet music and especially its 'alienation from folk musical creativity', adding: 'In an era when the greatest mass socialist culture in the world is being created, the composer should view folk music […] as a living speech, which emotionally reflects in a sensitive and excited manner the masses' […] reactions to the joyous impressions of the new world to which they are giving birth.' He went on to explain how his admiration for Shostakovich's musical gifts had blinded him to the ideological unsoundness of *Lady Macbeth*'s content:

> Most often, we are excited and pleased or indignant not on account of the ideological qualities of a composition, but on account of its composer's talent and how it is made manifest. The mirage of the 'quality of a talent' conceals *the quality of expression* and hinders the exposure of the contradictions characteristic of a particular composition – contradictions which are explicable not only as personal blunders. Of course, enthusiasm for the fact of a great talent is a natural thing, but when it becomes a factor that swallows up an objective process of evaluation, it leads to the most harmful errors – above all, the substitution of the evaluation of the social significance of a given composition by an evaluation of the talentedness of its author. […] The problems of *melos* […] and the crisis of individualism (my articles 'Composers, Make Haste!' and 'The Crisis of Personal Creativity') – problems, the exploration of which, it would seem, should have directed my awareness away from aesthetic-hedonistic views concerning the self-sufficient significance of the quality of musical talent and its vividness, and the strength of the manifestation of these qualities – nonetheless did not safeguard me from the temptation of the substitution mentioned above.[89]

It is noteworthy that Asafiev here makes explicit reference to his articles of 1924 as the first expressions of his mounting scepticism about modernist compositional trends, and as adumbrating views that were essentially identical to those articulated in *Pravda*.

The middle section of the article describes his growing disenchantment with Western music, prompted partly by his renewed study of Musorgsky and partly by his encounter with *Wozzeck*, which 'revealed not only the crisis of the personal creativity of the bourgeois Western European composer, but also the crisis of all of Western European musical culture in all its acuteness':

> After *Wozzeck*, it was difficult to expect a return to health. And so it proved, and therefore any kind of 'modernist craze', in the sense of taking the extremes of Western European technique and the invention of 'new words' as the starting point for creativity, in the conditions of Soviet reality, in conditions where the masses were creating a new world

[89] Boris Asafiev, 'Volnuyushchiye voprosï', *Akademik B. V. Asaf'yev: Izbranniye trudi*, ed. Kabalevsky *et al.*, v, 116–19 (p. 117; emphasis original). First published in *Sovetskaya muzïka*, 5 (1936), 24–7.

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> which precludes the exploitation of man by man, has long seemed absurd to me. From that time, even a purely professional curiosity about craftsmanship could not conceal from me the danger that lies in wait for every excessively enthusiastic observer, musicologist and composer: passing from the study of the evolution of modern bourgeois musical-creative experimentation to the employment of a musical language *that is fundamentally inimical to our entire way of thinking and feeling*.[90]

In the closing section, he deplored the baneful effects of Western stylistic influences on Shostakovich's artistic development, which had led him to employ in *Lady Macbeth* 'a method that is alien to Soviet musical creativity'. Shostakovich's problem, he declared, was not simply a personal matter of overcoming his 'individual aberrations', but was bound up with the larger problem of 'the restoration to health (*ozdorovleniye*) of musical speech' that confronted other Soviet composers too, and which had been formulated 'in a profoundly opportune and correct manner by the brilliantly timely admonitory articles in *Pravda*'.[91]

By this point, Asafiev's opinion pieces had become essentially indistinguishable in tone and tenor from official statements of cultural policy. His subsequent publications on Soviet music are tedious to the point of being unreadable, monotonously labouring the same clichés and banalities in torturously convoluted prose. Asafiev's literary output increased dramatically after the outbreak of war in 1941: motivated by what he saw as his patriotic duty, he planned an extensive series of monographs and other writings with the general title *Mïsli i dumï* (*Thoughts and Meditations*), which he described as 'a cycle of works about my life's labours in art'. Commenced in Leningrad, where Asafiev chose to remain for 18 months after the onset of the German siege before being evacuated in February 1943, this grandiose undertaking was supposed to comprise ambitious historical, theoretical and philosophical studies, autobiographical reminiscences and much else besides.[92] Many components of the project remained unrealized, but among the items that he managed to complete are a number of substantial opinion pieces on aspects of Soviet music and musical life. A detailed consideration of them all would serve little purpose, since they merely reiterate and elaborate ideas that have already been discussed. I shall consequently confine myself to commenting on a few representative examples.

An essay entitled 'Soviet Music and Musical Culture' (1942) was his attempt to 'deduce fundamental principles' on which these should be based. It will come as no surprise to the reader to learn that Asafiev saw the eschewal of unhealthy individualistic tendencies and recourse to folk music as being among the most important of these principles, in addition to the indispensable 'guiding ideological foundation of Leninist cultural policy'. Extolling the 'highly honoured position' enjoyed by Soviet composers

[90] *Ibid*. (emphasis added).

[91] *Ibid*., 119.

[92] Asafiev's outline summary of the project is reproduced in *Akademik B. V. Asaf'yev: Izbranniye trudï*, ed. Kabalevsky *et al.*, v, 330–1.

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and the 'sympathetic, solicitous and attentive' attitudes of the government towards them, he outlined the exhilarating creative prospects afforded by Socialist Realism:

> [The Soviet composer] has the most important tool to hand: the method of Marxism–Leninism, the method of perceiving reality for evaluating the musical phenomena of the past and present. The state, the Bolshevik Party, all of Soviet society acts on the foundations and basis constituting this method. This means that in his thinking, in his artistic criteria, in his searches for an adequate method to attain mastery, the composer's intellect is nurtured by the unity of a gigantic concentrated collective thought.[93]

'The Patriotic Idea in Soviet Music', published in *Literatura i iskusstvo* (*Literature and Art*) in 1943, advocated that composers should emulate *Prince Igor* and the *1812 Overture* – and write operas, symphonies and cantatas treating patriotic themes such as the defence of the motherland and national leaders. In language recalling his essays of 1924, he expressed satisfaction that 'the high-priestly arrogance concerning the "cult of art-for-art's sake" and the "neutral intellectualism" of the higher forms of music' had been cut down to size.[94] 'The Paths of Development of Soviet Music', written in 1943 and published in 1947 after being updated to include references to recent Central Committee resolutions on the arts, presents a further discussion of the same themes – the tireless concern of the party for Soviet musical life; the obligation of the composer to engage with lofty ideological subject matter; the supremacy of melody in the best contemporary Soviet composition; the conviction that the styles of Soviet music should be rooted in folk music, mass song and the nineteenth-century Russian classics. The article concludes by praising the beneficent effects of the 'historic' resolution of 23 April 1932 and the party's subsequent interventions in musical affairs:

> The significance of this resolution was also felt in the confirmation of the full value of the great democratic traditions of Russian classical art, which is authentically of the people, and reflects in its best works the life-affirming, bright aspirations of the people that have been triumphantly realized in our time.
>
> Of these traditions, which have been renovated and borne joyful fruits, we have also all been reminded by the articles that appeared in *Pravda* at the start of 1936 in connection with Shostakovich's opera *Lady Macbeth of the Mtsensk District* and his ballet *The Limpid Stream*. And the most remarkable thing was that these articles did not contain attacks on Shostakovich (as some of our enemies tried to make out), but were a defence of this extremely talented composer from what were in principle profoundly alien – to both him and Soviet art as a whole – errors of aestheticizing (*èstetstvuyushchego*) formalism and naturalism.

[93] Boris Asafiev, 'Sovetskaya muzïka i muzïkal′naya kul′tura (opït vïvedeniya osnovnïkh printsipov)' ('Soviet Music and Musical Culture: An Attempt to Deduce Fundamental Principles'), *Akademik B. V. Asaf′yev: Izbranniye trudi*, ed. Kabalevsky *et al.*, v, 25–38 (p. 34). Originally published in *Sovetskaya muzïka*, 5 (1946), 3–20.

[94] Boris Asafiev, 'Patrioticheskaya ideya v sovetskoy muzïke', *Akademik B. V. Asaf′yev: Izbranniye trudi*, ed. Kabalevsky *et al.*, v, 39–43 (p. 42). Originally published in *Literatura i iskusstvo*, 1 January 1943.

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> And if the Bolshevik Party with paternal straightforwardness and solicitude had not pointed out these errors to Shostakovich, then would his most profoundly human symphonies, which are renowned all over the world, ever have been written?
>
> And is it really not clear that these articles in *Pravda* struck a crushing blow to all of those alien foreign influences of bourgeois culture of the era of the post-war crisis, which hindered the development of Soviet art and obscured its highly progressive questings and upsurges (*iskaniya i poriv*ï)?
>
> This is understood to be a summons to Soviet master musicians to uncover in their creativity images of modernity and to respond fully to its highest strivings, which are wise, audacious and humane.
>
> And in 1946 […] new party documents resound with a similar summons: the historic verdicts of the Central Committee concerning literary and artistic questions, verdicts that make an unprecedentedly high evaluation of the meaning of art in constructing the life of humanity.
>
> These verdicts are a new stimulus to the development of the artistic culture of our people and a new testament to the great concern for it and for its master practitioners, who are called on to accomplish in their work grandiose tasks and to justify the nationwide trust and that love with which art is surrounded in our country.[95]

Here, Asafiev goes far beyond dutiful lip service to official cultural policy and displays a disturbing eagerness not merely to collude in the regime's falsehoods and egregious actions, but to serve as its apologist and ideological propagandist. His description of the harassment and humiliations visited on the artistic intelligentsia as a manifestation of the party's 'love' can only be described as obscene, and brings to mind the semantic perversions of Newspeak in George Orwell's *1984*. With the publication of this essay, Asafiev abandoned the last vestiges of whatever personal integrity he might once have possessed. He would be duly rewarded for his loyalty to the party in 1948.

A dispassionate re-examination of the circumstances reveals that the evidence of Asafiev's willing complicity in the anti-formalism campaign of 1948 is overwhelming. Irrespective of the extent to which others may have helped to craft the keynote address delivered in his name at the first Composers' Union congress, the text contains nothing at variance with views that he had expressed many times previously. Indeed, a close reading of Asafiev's pronouncements on Soviet music since his essays of 1924, among them 'Composers, Make Haste!' and 'The Crisis of Personal Creativity', suggests that he was instrumental in shaping the central preoccupations of Soviet musical criticism of the later Stalinist period. Not only was he a notable early advocate of mass stylistic accessibility, but he also helped to define what would come to be regarded as 'authentic' Soviet composition – ideologically committed, melodious, drawing on Russian folk music and continuing nineteenth-century Russian musical traditions. The criteria of musical 'Sovietness' that he proposed in his publications

[95] Asafiev, 'Puti razvitiya sovetkoy muzïki', 61–2.

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of the 1920s could justly be described as Socialist Realist *avant la lettre*. After the imposition of Socialist Realism as an official creative aesthetic, he played an active role in constructing a vision of contemporary Soviet musical culture that was heavily conditioned by ethnic nationalism, the conviction of Russian cultural supremacy, an attitude of suspicion and hostility towards the West and a rejection of Western musical modernism. By the time of his death, his position statements and opinion pieces on Soviet music had come to constitute a compendium of canonical texts enshrining the fundamental tenets of Socialist Realism in its application to musical creativity – as is attested by their republication in the last volume of the selected works issued by the Soviet Academy of Sciences between 1952 and 1957.

Asafiev's behaviour raises disturbing questions, and it is not surprising that admirers such as Olkhovsky and Vasina-Grossman should have sought extenuating explanations for his actions in 1948. Even Boris Schwarz attempted to defend the inexcusable in his pioneering study *Music and Musical Life in Soviet Russia* (1972). He described Asafiev's 'Burning Issues' of 1936 as 'a dialectic masterpiece' that enabled the author to make a 'dignified retreat' from a vulnerable position, insisting that the essay 'must not be viewed as a clear-cut capitulation'.[96] And although he had to acknowledge that the views presented in an essay such as 'Music for the Millions' were hardly innocuous, Schwarz claimed – seemingly on no firmer basis than personal conviction – that Asafiev 'certainly did not envisage the spiteful language of the 1948 resolution, the crude speeches of Zhdanov and Khrennikov, the niggardly persecution of great composers who were his friends'.[97] This claim is implausible and attributes to Asafiev a degree of naivety that is scarcely credible.

The reluctance of notable commentators to accept that Asafiev's motives may have been anything but pure is an interesting phenomenon, and deserves a separate discussion. The notion that he was coerced or manipulated into cooperation can be more readily accommodated within the familiar narrative of a 'regimented' Soviet musical culture (to recall Schwarz's characterization) in which composers and musicologists were forced to choose between the bleak alternatives of abject compliance or draconian punishment. This simplistic view was not shared by contemporary Soviet observers who lived through these events: while not denying that many questionable actions were motivated by fear (as Vasina-Grossman believed to be the case with Asafiev), they did not regard it as a universal explanation. Sometimes, it was simply a question of all-too-human failings – such as opportunism, envy and overweening ambition. Zhitomirsky concluded that vanity and a desire to avenge himself on colleagues who had refused to take him seriously as a composer were among the factors that led Asafiev to accept the chairmanship of the Composers' Union under circumstances

[96] Boris Schwarz, *Music and Musical Life in Soviet Russia* (London: Barrie & Jenkins, 1972; expanded edn, Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 1983), 125.

[97] *Ibid.*, 227.

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when it would have been more appropriate for him to decline.[98] If he took pleasure in the humiliation of his more successful contemporaries, he was by no means alone: Aleksandr Gol′denveyzer, another prominent figure of the period who similarly resented the lack of recognition accorded his compositions, reacted with unconcealed delight to the promulgation of the 1948 resolution, believing that it would assure the 'triumph' of what he held to be 'real art'.[99]

It is not impossible, of course, that fear played a part – Prokofiev apparently believed that it did, and attributed Asafiev's actions in 1948 to his timorousness and weakness of character.[100] But if fear does not explain everything, it does not excuse everything either – a point made by another contemporary observer, the composer Yevgeniy Golubev, in an autobiographical memoir completed in the late 1980s. In an interesting discussion of the pressures to moral compromise universally experienced during the Stalinist era, Golubev strongly resists the idea that we should regard Soviet citizens as lacking ethical agency in any meaningful sense. While he does not deny that there were sometimes genuine grounds to experience extreme fear (he evokes the anxiety caused by the mysterious disappearances of several of his classmates at the Moscow Conservatoire during the Great Terror, for example), he also insists on the reality of moral choice even in such difficult circumstances. He points to the remarkable behaviour of his teacher Myaskovsky, who abstained from all involvement in the anti-formalist campaign, refusing to appear at the Composers' Union congress or make a public statement about the resolution.[101] Asafiev, too, had choices – as we have seen. There is not a shred of evidence to suggest that he was coerced into behaving as he did: ultimately, there are more plausible grounds for believing that he cooperated because he wished to do so and because it suited him. In trying to determine his motivations, we also cannot discount the possibility that he was largely or even wholly in agreement with official cultural policy and saw it as safeguarding Russian music from decadent Western influences. Whatever the explanation for his acquiescence, it is highly questionable that it can be attributed merely to fear. A comprehensive reassessment of the career of this major figure is long overdue and could shed further light on the ways in which leading Soviet musicians actively and willingly helped to shape the musical culture of which they were a part, rather than merely being passive pusillanimous enactors of bureaucratic directives.[102]

[98] Zhitomirsky, 'Na puti k istoricheskoy pravde', 4–5.

[99] Ol′ga Lamm, 'Vospominaniya (fragment: 1948–1951 godï)' ('Reminiscences (Fragment: 1948–51)'), *Sergey Prokof′yev: Vospominaniya, pis′ma, stat′i* (*Sergey Prokofiev: Reminiscences, Letters, Articles*), ed. Marina Rakhmanova (Moscow: Izdatel′stvo 'Deka-VS', 2004), 227–73 (p. 242).

[100] *Ibid*., 255.

[101] Yevgeniy Golubev, *Alogizmï* (*Alogisms*), RGALI, f. 2798, op. 2, yed. khr. 23, ll. 31–2. For a discussion of Myaskovsky's response to the resolution, see Zuk, 'Nikolay Myaskovsky and the Events of 1948'.

[102] For a discussion of recent scholarship with regard to this issue, see Patrick Zuk, 'Soviet Music Studies Outside Russia: *Glasnost′* and After', *Russian Music since 1917*, ed. Zuk and Frolova-Walker, 51–74.

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ABSTRACT

The venerable founder of Soviet musicology Boris Asafiev aroused widespread dismay by his actions in 1948 after the promulgation of a Central Committee resolution condemning the USSR's leading composers: he not only acquiesced in his appointment as chairman of the Composers' Union, but agreed to give a keynote address endorsing the resolution at its first national congress. His admirers have claimed that he must have been coerced into collaboration and that his address did not reflect his real views. The present essay re-examines the circumstances, arguing that the evidence of Asafiev's willing complicity is overwhelming. A close analysis of his keynote address reveals its contents to be wholly consistent with views that he had regularly expressed throughout his career, as one of the principal progenitors of an anti-modernist, ethnic nationalist and xenophobic strain in Soviet writing on music that was given forceful expression in the 1948 resolution.

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