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A contextual study of Boris Asafiev's Musical form as a process and and application of concepts to his Sonata for solo viola

Kathryn Fiona McKay

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A Contextual Study of Boris Asafiev's
Musical Form as a Process and an Application of
Concepts to his *Sonata for Solo Viola*

Kathryn McKay

Western Australian Academy of Performing Arts

Edith Cowan University

This dissertation is submitted for the degree of Master of Arts

(Performing Arts)

2015

The declaration page
is not included in this version of the thesis

Abstract

This dissertation examines the work of Russian composer, critic, and musicologist, Boris Vladimirovich Asafiev (1884-1949) against contemporaneous systems of cultural activity associated with Soviet communism. Over the course of his lifetime, Asafiev designed and developed a unique aesthetic-philosophical theory on the process of musical formation and perception. This study examines the political and ideological forces that contributed to the appearance of socialist realism, and places Asafiev within this context, evaluating his life and works. Central to this dissertation are two musicological volumes taken from Asafiev's immense catalogue of works: *Musical Form as a Process* (1930), and *Musical Form as a Process: Intonations* (1947). The theories developed in these works are applied in an analysis and close reading of Asafiev's *Sonata for Solo Viola* (1938). This study includes insights gleaned from a recital performance of Asafiev's works (including the *Sonata for Solo Viola*). The recital—which took place on March 29th 2015—forms the creative/performance component of this research, and is attached as a DVD-Rom.

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Introduction

This dissertation examines the work of Russian composer, critic, and musicologist, Boris Vladimirovich Asafiev (1884-1949), against the emerging cultural systems associated with the ideological goals of communism. Over the course of his lifetime, Asafiev designed and developed a unique philosophico-aesthetic theory on the process of musical formation and perception. Moreover, Asafiev intended to explain the entire history of musical evolution using the guiding principle of ‘intonations’: a term that means, in short, the socially-assimilated building blocks of musical construction. It is an idea relatively unfamiliar to Western musicologists, and one that will be explored in greater detail at various points in this study. Over the course of his career, Asafiev appears to have accommodated the significant upheavals in Russian society following the Bolshevik Revolution, and managed to co-exist with the development and implementation of a totalitarian system under Lenin and Stalin. In particular, it appears that Asafiev operated relatively comfortably within the requirements of ‘socialist realism’, the official Soviet policy that guided artistic production from 1932 onwards.

Before the Bolshevik Revolutions of 1917 there existed two predominant cultural spheres: the art of the high-class bourgeois, and the art of the people—folk art. The vast division between the two demanded change, which, depending on one’s interpretation of Marxism-Leninism, should involve either a predominance of folk art—essentially wiping out the high-culture tradition—or an amalgamation of the two art forms, resulting in an accessible nationalism, without reducing culture to the lowest common denominator. Of course, this was also at a time when Western artists were producing work of an increasingly *avant-garde* nature. The inevitable filtering into Russia of these Western techniques and endeavours saw Soviet artists experimenting with progressive styles. Through this complicated web of world events, national politics, and individual, artistic endeavours, the notion of socialist realism emerged. Socialist realism was held as the ideal mode of creation, and gave new purpose to cultural activity: the building of the socialist state. The ideology behind socialist realism was applied to

all literary and artistic genres, however the application of socialist realism to musical composition was problematic; a problem that is examined in the course of this study.

To a man as passionately patriotic as Asafiev the propagation and incorporation of this emerging ideology was of utmost importance. He believed that establishing the role of music in the development of the communist nation was a key responsibility of the arts intelligentsia. Boris Schwarz's 1983 study indicates the leading role Asafiev took in guiding the development of Soviet musicology:

Asafiev preached the gospel of "living" musicology, of research related to contemporary life. He discouraged any retreat into an "ivory tower" by making his young musicology students aware of their social responsibilities. Research was important, but no less important was the popularization of music, the task of musical education in the schools. Asafiev shaped Soviet musicology in his own, wide-range image, and he established a tradition that balanced the study of the past with an awareness of the present. This—until today—is the profile of Soviet musicology, moulded through trial and error by one dynamic personality—Asafiev.¹

Although Asafiev is little known internationally, his musicological writings and some of his compositions—such as the ballets *Flames of Paris* (1932) and *The Fountain of Bakhchisarai* (1936)—were acclaimed by the Soviet regime as proud accomplishments of Russian culture. For a period during the rise of proletarian culture in the late 1920s and early 1930s, Asafiev was labelled 'formalist' and was publically attacked for his modernist tendencies. As such, he withdrew from the more public arena of music critic and musicologist, occupying himself more with composition. The 'dictatorship of the proletarians' in the late 1920s did not last long. However, the fact that he was pigeonholed as 'formalist' (albeit temporarily) poses complex problems, including the question of defining formalism. Answering such a question is problematic due to the multiple and conflicting definitions of the term. This dilemma, as with the similarly ambiguous term 'socialist realism,' reveals much about the system of cultural 'guidance' that was employed by Lenin, and in a similar way also by Stalin.

¹ Boris Schwarz, *Music and Musical Life in Soviet Russia* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1983), 90.

Chapter one of this dissertation gives the reader a broad summary of the historical events in Russia from the Bolshevik Revolutions of 1917 to the years following the Second World War. This chapter also addresses the impact of these events on the musical community of the time as well as offering an exposition of formalism and socialist realism. In chapter two, Asafiev is introduced by way of a biography that particularly focuses on how he navigated the historical and political climate of his homeland. The third chapter is a detailed examination of Asafiev's *Musical Form as a Process* (1930), and chapter four examines its follow-up volume, *Musical Form as a Process: Intonations* (1947)—from here on designated by the abbreviated title *Intonations*. Asafiev began writing *Musical Form as a Process* in 1925 and the first volume was ready for publishing in 1929. However, following its publication in 1930, it “fell under an ideological cloud, and was not re-issued till 1963,” when it was published together with the second volume.² *Intonations* was started in 1941 and published independently of its predecessor in 1947.

In chapter five, the reader is presented with a detailed discussion of Asafiev's *Sonata for Solo Viola*, composed in 1938. The analysis is conducted in light of Asafiev's theoretical ideas expressed in both *Musical Form as a Process* and *Intonations*, and seeks to relate Asafiev's theories to his creative practice. An integral part of this study is the practical understanding of Asafiev's compositional idiom. The process of learning and performing works composed by Asafiev, including his *Sonata for Solo Viola*, has contributed valuable insight. The program for this recital is attached in the Appendix to this dissertation, as is a recording of the entire recital on a DVD-Rom.

The purpose of this study is to comprehend the theoretical and ideological thought of this leading Soviet musicologist and to assess how this theory might manifest in his creative output. Asafiev's writing has strong roots in the reality of his circumstances: exposing entrenched Marxist/Leninist tendencies in its fundamental logic. It follows then that his compositional attempts might demonstrate, in some way, a realisation of these theories.

² James Robert Tull, "B. V. Asaf'ev's "Musical Form as a Process": Translation and Commentary. (Volumes I - I I I)" (Ph.D., The Ohio State University, 1977), 36.

1 Ideological and Political Context

1.1 Karl Marx

The ideas of Karl Heinrich Marx (1818-1883) and his close collaborator, Friedrich Engels (1820-1895), are fundamental in discussing the cultural design of Soviet Russia. Marxism was, at least nominally, the philosophical framework upon which the Soviet system stood, and an understanding of the ideological reasoning of these figures contributes much to contextualising and explaining Boris Asafiev's theoretical output.

Central to Marxism are discussions of 'dialectical materialism.' The dialectical philosophy of Karl Marx can be traced back to Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel (1770-1831), and both Marx and Engels were 'Young Hegelians' for a number of years.³ Most relevant to our current discussion is the way in which Hegel considered conflict and reconciliation as essential in evolution: the "inevitable progression from an original idea (thesis) to its opposite (antithesis), then to ultimate resolution of the contradiction in a higher unity (synthesis)."⁴ Similarly, Hegel postulated that through the exploration of dialectics emerged the transformation of quantity to quality. This transformative property is inherent in Asafiev's writings on music: in the conflict of musical material, what is initially presented as quantity (multiple musical ideas), through the dialectical process, is transformed into quality (the resolution of conflicting subjects).⁵ In direct opposition to Hegel's idealism, Marx and Engels developed their own system of materialism. Idealism rests on the idea that there is no reality other than our mentally constructed perception, whereas materialism regards matter or energy as reality.

Fundamental to the Marxist view of reality is the belief that all matter is in a state of perpetual change. Every aspect of existence is in an infinite condition of transformation through

³ Joseph Martin, *A Guide to Marxism* (St. Lucia, Q: University of Queensland Press, 1979), 13.

⁴ Tull, "B. V. Asaf'ev's "Musical Form as a Process": Translation and Commentary. (Volumes I - II I)," 111-12.

⁵ In both volumes of *Musical Form as a Process*, Asafiev's discussions assume an acceptance of the principles of dialectics, see chapters 3 and 4

the aforementioned dialectical process, in which the opposition of contrasting forces brings about a resolution that then, as a unity, succumbs to new conflict in constant evolution. With respect to human thought processes, the human consciousness can add to the process by applying forces of its own, affecting the outcome. Therefore, human thought could restructure the social system. This theory is directly applied to the evolution of music in section 4.4, where we discuss Asafiev's ideas on musical evolution.

Within this philosophical framework, Marx and Engels approached the consequential inefficiencies of class struggle within a capitalist society. The *Communist Manifesto* (first published, February 1848)—a rare example of a system of philosophical thought that was tangibly attempted, therefore actually changing the course of history—has been labelled “history's most important political document.”⁶ Designed as a clarification and justification of communism to the proletarian masses, it is noteworthy that the *Manifesto* did not have a significant impact initially. Though it did instigate a number of minor and generally unsuccessful uprisings at the outset, it became important due to the future impact of Marxism and communism in the twentieth century.

The Communist Manifesto describes a model of social organisation in which there are multiple classes vying for dominance. Marx and Engels depict the dialectic struggle of classes in ancient Rome, in the Middle Ages and in their current ‘modern’ capitalist society, “a fight that each time ended either in a revolutionary re-constitution of society at large, or in the common ruin of the contending class.”⁷

The transformation created by class antagonisms produced an overall gradual simplification into two distinct classes: bourgeoisie and proletariat. Much time is given to the historical interpretation of how bourgeois society came to surpass feudalism and how, with the rise of the bourgeoisie's economic might, came a corresponding increase in political power.

⁶ Karl Marx et al., “The Communist Manifesto: A Road Map to History's Most Important Political Document,” (Chicago, IL: Haymarket Books, 2005).

⁷ Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels, *The Communist Manifesto* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1967 (Translation by Samuel Moore, published 1888)), 79.

Marx and Engels believed that the bourgeoisie had “conquered for itself ... exclusive political sway. The executive of the modern state is but a committee for managing the common affairs of the whole bourgeoisie.”⁸ Marx and Engels demonise the bourgeois class: they are the oppressors, exploiting the oppressed proletariat. It is not hard to see how analogies are drawn between this view of the class system and man’s dominance over the animals in *Animal Farm* as attacked by Old Major (the pig who acts as the ‘leader’ of the animals):

Man is the only creature that consumes without producing. He does not give milk, he does not lay eggs, he is too weak to pull the plough, he cannot run fast enough to catch rabbits. Yet he is the lord of all the animals. He sets them to work, he gives back to them the bare minimum that will prevent them from starving, and the rest he keeps for himself. Our labour tills the soil, our dung fertilizes it, and yet there is not one of us that owns more than his bare skin.⁹

Whilst placing the blame for “naked shameless, direct, brutal exploitation”¹⁰ entirely in the hands of the bourgeoisie, Marx and Engels note what they see as the concurrent and positive advancement of globalisation. The globalisation they refer to is that of industry and, most importantly for our current discussion, globalisation of intellectual production. With this universal inter-dependence already in motion, Marx and Engels believed that it was only a matter of time before the necessary expansion of the market would result in a universal culture.

In the theoretical writings that this dissertation examines, especially the ideas presented in chapter 4, Marxism helps to explain Asafiev’s theory of *Intonations*. Asafiev sees mass society as a repository of the intonational meaning of music. Through this nuanced semiotic theory, the proletariat are elevated to a position of indispensable importance, and, arguably, music is in harmony with political theory.

⁸ *The Communist Manifesto* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1967 (Translation by Samuel Moore, published 1888)), 82.

⁹ George Orwell, *Animal Farm: A Fairy Story* (London: Penguin, 1987 (Originally published, London: Secker and Warburg, 1945)), 4.

¹⁰ Marx and Engels, *The Communist Manifesto*, 82.

1.2 Lenin's Russia (1917-1924)

In the shaping of the Soviet nation, it was Lenin who immediately recognised and endeavoured to harness the power of the cultural contributors of the nation: writers, artists and architects. This was not a new phenomenon. The Tsarist Empire had previously implemented the censorship they deemed necessary. However, in artistic repression, Lenin and Stalin reached unprecedented lengths, and Lenin phrased his rationalization as such:

Every artist, everyone who considers himself an artist, has the right to create freely according to his ideal, independently of everything. However, we are Communists and we must not stand with folded hands and let chaos develop as it pleases. We must systemically guide this process and form its result.¹¹

World War One, the October Revolution of 1917, and ensuing civil war in Russia left the country in devastating chaos. Millions died as a direct consequence of war, and many more were to succumb to widespread disease and famine. The October Revolution was a tightly organised overnight seizing of power by the Bolshevik Party headed by Lenin and Leon Trotsky (1879-1940) from the provisional Government that had been in place since the abdication of Tsar Nicholas II earlier that year (February, 1917). Here began the history of Soviet Russia, characterised by the attempt to persuade and educate the masses, and the systematic elimination of any major opposition.

The Red Terror of 1918 saw the mass arrest, torture and/or execution of tens of thousands¹² deemed to be counter-revolutionaries. This campaign of the Bolsheviks especially sought to repress and eliminate those of the former ruling class. In direct contrast to the extraordinary economic hardship—and the natural resentment of people who had their land, their money and their factories redistributed among the Soviets—was the astounding continuity of concert series and other artistic activities. Anatoly Vasilyevich Lunacharsky (1875-1933) was appointed as People's Commissar of Public Education in 1917, and until 1929 acted

¹¹ Vladimir Lenin: as quoted in James Bakst, *A History of Russian-Soviet Music* (Westport, Conn: Greenwood Press, 1977), 275.

¹² The number of killings has been estimated as between 50,000 and two million. Robert Conquest, *The Great Terror: Stalin's Purge of the Thirties* (London: Macmillan, 1968).

as mediator between mass society, the arts intelligentsia and the political leaders. Larry Sitsky describes him as “an extraordinary man, in many ways the single-handed architect of this whole period of musical creativity.”¹³ Lunacharsky had a vast knowledge base on a broad range of disciplines, and a special interest in music. He had far more progressive tastes than Lenin and encouraged the avant-garde in cultural activity. Lunacharsky also believed that Marxism called for the cultural achievements of the bourgeois to be accepted as valuable and built upon by future artists, a view that was supported by Lenin. Lunacharsky also stood strongly against the idea of cheapening cultural activity in the name of mass accessibility, insisting that the standards be maintained and the masses be educated.

Lenin had distinctly conservative tastes in cultural affairs, yet spoke of a patient approach in dealing with the desire of artists to experiment with contemporary Western culture and explorations such as expressionism and futurism:

Cultural problems cannot be solved as quickly as political and military problems...it is impossible to achieve a cultural victory in such a short time; by the very nature of the case a longer period is required, and we must adapt ourselves to this longer period, calculate our work accordingly, and display a maximum of perseverance, persistence, and system.¹⁴

The freedom afforded by this approach allowed for such remarkable creations as the *Theremin* in 1919, the conductor-less orchestra and experiments in micro-tones.¹⁵

War-torn Russia was pushed into a new era in 1921: civil war had devastated the country's economic resources and severely damaged the Communist Party's reputation. Lenin initiated the *New Economic Policy (NEP)* that, after an initial period of instability, was to revitalise the economic and social lives of Russians. According to American historian Ulam, “[at] the end of the NEP in 1927-28, the average Russian was probably better off than at any time

¹³ Larry Sitsky, *Music of the Repressed Russian Avant-Garde, 1900-1929* (Greenwood Press, 1994), 2.

¹⁴ Vladimir Lenin, as quoted in Schwarz, *Music and Musical Life in Soviet Russia*, 42-43.

¹⁵ *Music and Musical Life in Soviet Russia*.

since the beginning of the World War, and he was not again to enjoy the same standard of living until after Stalin's death."¹⁶

The musical atmosphere of the 1920s was still one of great adventure and innovation, with many visiting artists continuing cultural explorations. This excitement inspired Russian musicians in their exploration of modern music, aided by the tolerance of the Soviet government and very quickly led to foreign tours by Russian artists. European artists were also welcomed into Russia for tours. 1923 saw the formation of the *Association for Contemporary Music (ACM)* and the *Russian Association of Proletarian Musicians (RAPM)*. Numerous less influential groups and schools of thought also surfaced.

In the early to mid-1920s the various groups that formed bickered between themselves and there was minimal intervention or censorship by the government. Of course, the boundaries of proud nationalism still existed, but within these borders the various associations within the cultural and intellectual world could co-exist:

Art, literature, science and technology enjoyed considerable freedom to evolve. There was censorship, of course, but there was only one viewpoint which was inadmissible: rejection of the revolution.¹⁷

1.3 Lenin to Stalin (the Mid to Late 1920's)

The cultural dynamic in Russia was much affected by the death of Vladimir Lenin in January 1924, and the ensuing battle for power between Trotsky and Stalin. The lack of definitive leadership afforded artists greater freedom of expression and some groups welcomed early twentieth-century Western developments, significantly impacting Russian composers, musicologists and audiences.

In 1925 the Party's central committee published a resolution advocating free rivalry between various associations, in particular literary groups: "clearly, the Party did not wish to

¹⁶ Adam B. Ulam, *Lenin and the Bolsheviks: The Intellectual and Political History of the Triumph of Communism in Russia* (London: Collins, 1969), 625.

¹⁷ Martin McCauley, *The Rise and Fall of the Soviet Union* (New York: Longman/Pearson Education, 2008), 135.

permit any group, not even the proletarians, to speak on its behalf."¹⁸ During these years, the *ACM* and *RAPM* maintained their status as the two predominant musical associations. Formed in Moscow, the *ACM* was more adventurous: it welcomed the emerging links with European music and quickly grew to have more factions. Artistic freedom was of great importance to the *ACM*, and hence members ranged from conservative composers to the *avant-garde* (founded by Nikolai Roslavets, and including Dmitri Shostakovich, Boris Asafiev, and Nikolai Mayaskovsky, amongst many others). The *RAPM* was a group of conservative musicians, standing against the influence of Western experimentation, and advocating music for the people—mass-accessible, folk-based music. Tull succinctly describes the difference:

The aim of this faction [the *ACM*] was to raise the cultural level of the masses, rather than to lower the general level of culture to the point of universal accessibility.¹⁹

Separate from the *ACM* and *RAPM*, other smaller groups emerged such as the *Circle for New Music* (*Kruzhok novoi muzyki*), lead by Boris Asafiev as a breakaway group of the *ACM* (they later rejoined the common cause of the *ACM*); *PROKOLL* (*Production Collective of Student Composers*), a proletarian, student group aiming to establish a middle ground between the *ACM* and *RAPM*; *ORKIMD* (*Association of revolutionary composers and musical workers*), a group of *RAPM* origins but a more eclectic circle with a stronger propaganda agenda; and another group that guarded the traditional Russian heritage of music, primarily through academia. These groups all shared a common interest: creating art that served the objectives of the revolution. The groups formed as a reflection of the ideological conflict in the passionate expressions of methodology. Lenin's New Economic Policy ended in 1927, and with this came the gradual demise of the *ACM*. By the end of the 1920s the *RAPM* had become by far the most influential group, with the other associations dwindling in numbers or disbanding completely.

Stalin's ascent to power is strongly linked with the rise of the proletarian movement in cultural affairs, especially in literature. The first *Five Year Plan* (1928-1932) brought drastic

¹⁸ Schwarz, *Music and Musical Life in Soviet Russia*, 48.

¹⁹ Tull, "B. V. Asaf'ev's "Musical Form as a Process": Translation and Commentary. (Volumes I - I I I)," 44.

change to the many aspects of the country's economy and cultural ideology. This plan prescribed agricultural collectivisation and the rapid industrialisation of the nation. In 1928 the Party also officially confirmed its sanction of proletarian literature effectively granting full reign of power to all respective proletarian groups, such as the *RAPM*. In 1929, Lunacharsky's position of Commissar of Education and Culture was assumed by Andrei Sergeyevich Bubnov (1884-1938), a member of Stalin's circle with little or no creative impulse. The short-lived 'dictatorship of the proletarians' had enormous repercussions, effectively censoring all that was not immediately accessible to the common proletariat. All areas of the music profession, from the education system to the day-to-day lives of performers, were affected by the dominant ideologies of the *RAPM* and its insistence on mass songs and patriotic marches. The reaction of some important musicians, such as Asafiev (see section 2.3), was to alter their output completely—not merely for the few years that they risked the repression of the proletarian movement—but for many years to follow.

1.4 The Resolution of 23 April 1932

"On the Reconstruction of Literary and Artistic Organizations"

In April 1932 the Party's Central Committee issued a resolution to amalgamate all of the various artistic associations into single unions. Essentially, the proletarian factors had become too narrow in their approach and far too powerful. The dominant proletarian organisations (including the *RAPM*) had also started to consider themselves independent of the political cause. By directing the construction of unions for each art form, the Party brought the cultural matrix entirely within their control. The resolution was welcomed by most artists; compared to the 'dictatorship' of the proletarians this was constructive and promising change. This period however marked the beginning of a heavily censored regime of cultural influence. According to Boris Schwarz:

This Resolution...signified the end of an era of flexibility, and inaugurated one of regimentation. It transformed Soviet arts from multiformity to conformity and,

ultimately, to uniformity...To many artists, who were repelled by the proletarian arrogance of the previous leaders, the Resolution seemed a liberalizing step, and it was received with widespread approval. Little did they realize that they exchanged the dictatorship of a small clique for the control of a superpower—the Soviet government and the bureaucratic machinery of the Party.²⁰

The underlying purpose of this resolution has its origins in the Marxist ideology. As Schwarz identifies, the chain of events lead to ‘uniformity’ in the arts: this is but a step away from the ‘universality’ that was powerfully advocated in the *Communist Manifesto*.

Along with the organisation of cultural affairs into unions, such as the *Union of Soviet Composers (Soyuz Sovetskikh Kompozitorov)*, came the concurrent emergence of terminology for the rationalisation and explanation of the new principles of creation. ‘Socialist realism’ is one such term that appeared in 1932. In 1934, Stalin described the term, stating:

The development of cultures that are national in form and socialist in content is necessary for the purpose of their ultimate fusion into one General Culture, socialist both as to form and content, and expressed in one general language.²¹

Tull suggests a somewhat less elusive definition: art, reflecting reality in a positive light.²² In literature, this resolution called for a higher standard of craftsmanship, and a need for greater imagination. This was echoed in all art forms. The distinction was made between individualism and individuality: individualism was the negative alienation of an individual man from his society; individuality was the positive appreciation of one man’s place within the context of his society. The practical application of such a concept in musical composition was problematic. Tull describes this process:

The extensive Soviet writings on Socialist Realism in music resemble the voluminous musico-ethical treatises of ancient Greece which are long in philosophical theory, but shed little light on practical application. As in the sphere of literature, Socialist Realism demands from music the three basic elements: Party spirit..., Nationalism, and mass accessibility.²³

²⁰ Schwarz, *Music and Musical Life in Soviet Russia*, 110.

²¹ Joseph Stalin as quoted in M. Frolova-Walker, *Russian Music and Nationalism: From Glinka to Stalin* (Yale University Press, 2007), 301.

²² Tull, "B. V. Asaf'ev's "Musical Form as a Process": Translation and Commentary. (Volumes I - I I I)," 55.

²³ "B. V. Asaf'ev's "Musical Form as a Process": Translation and Commentary. (Volumes I - I I I)," 60.

In reality, the implementation of socialist realism in music led to trends such as a strengthened sense of purpose in programmatic music in portraying these three elements. In music, as well as in literature there appeared the 'obligatory happy ending' as a device to signify the resolution of conflict and of victory.

The *Union of Soviet Composers* distributed the first issue of its own journal, the *Sovetskaya Muzyka* in 1933. The journal essentially served as the mouthpiece of the Union, promoting the ideological framework in accordance with the Party's Central Committee. In the first publication of this magazine it was printed that the development of Marxist-Leninist musicology was to be the main task. The directive of creating according to Stalin's slogan, "national in form, socialist in content," was printed in this journal early in 1934.²⁴ The reason for producing music was now for the building of the new culture, serving a socialist nation. The arts were to reflect the current context from the viewpoint of an optimistic and victorious future. Martin McCauley wrote:

The cultural wars ended in 1932. The Party had won. Literature and art were now to serve the building of the new society. They were to educate the public in the spirit of the new socialist era. They were to depict heroic self-sacrifice and boundless dedication to the new world. Pessimism was banned...Stalin favoured the emergence of one leader in each discipline. Subdivisions of a discipline were also to be headed by one comrade. This made it easier to check on the implementation of directives. An unkind critic remarked that Stalin was attempting to produce myriads of little Stalins in every field of endeavour.²⁵

This idea of "little Stalins in every field" is not a new one; the entire political hierarchy under Stalin has been described as such. According to Geller, "Stalin delegated a small amount of his authority to each [Party secretary], and required complete subordination in return."²⁶ Within literature circles it was generally accepted that Alexei Maximovich Gorky²⁷ (1868-1936),

²⁴ Frolova-Walker, *Russian Music and Nationalism: From Glinka to Stalin*, 311.

²⁵ McCauley, *The Rise and Fall of the Soviet Union*, 135.

²⁶ Mikhail Geller, *Cogs in the Wheel: The Formation of Soviet Man* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, Inc., 1988), 70.

²⁷ Generally known as Maxim Gorky

a highly respected, dominant personality, was a leader in relation to socialist realism. In musical circles, as noted by Schwarz, there was no such composer to lead the charge.²⁸ Whether it was due to the lack of an effective leader, or the complexities of applying it to a non-semantic field, the application of socialist realism to music remained ill-defined and problematic.

The term 'formalism' arose in opposition to socialist realism, and was an equally ambiguous term that many interpreted as representing the modernist tendencies of bourgeois culture. This was not direct censorship of modernism in music. However, the term formalism became somewhat synonymous with the inclusion of Western modernist techniques. Soviet critics in fact promoted the musical compositions of socialist realism as progressive and modern, while formalism was regarded as the "separation of form from content."²⁹ This description highlights the emphasis on form and content as indicators of meaning in the arts, as already presented in Stalin's definition of socialist realism (national in form and socialist in content). A strong link to this emphasis may be found in the significance Asafiev's practical ideas about the formation of musical compositions. Asafiev effectively attempts to bridge the gap between form and content by asserting that form naturally emerges out of the intonationally-informed process of assembling content.

In an attempt to avoid the label of formalism, many composers of all genres turned to conservatism and conventional, inoffensive musical language. This was not limited to the musical culture of Russia. Shakespeare's works made a grand return to the theatre, due to the safety of producing such famed plays. As Worrall asserted, "the culmination of this period of passivity in the arts was the emergence of the so-called 'no-conflict' theory, both in drama and in the productions themselves."³⁰ In architecture, old buildings of a displeasing nature were

²⁸ Schwarz, *Music and Musical Life in Soviet Russia*, 111.

²⁹ *Music and Musical Life in Soviet Russia*, 129.

³⁰ Nick Worrall, *Modernism to Realism on the Soviet Stage: Tairov-Vakhtangov-Okhlopkov* (Cambridge [Cambridgeshire]: Cambridge University Press, 1989), 12.

destroyed and competitions were held, with substantial prizes, for new designs.³¹ Avant-garde art of the 1920s was removed and replaced by works glorifying Stalin and his country.

During the 1920s the dictatorship of Lenin had been justified as a wartime 'temporary' measure. In the years between the two World Wars, Stalin felt pressure from beneath to relax his dictatorial hold on government in favour of a more democratic structure. In response to this, the first major 'purge' of the Communist Party was held in 1921. This involved the systematic evaluation of Party members and the confiscation of membership for those who did not fit the criteria—which was mostly based on class origins and contributions to revolutionary activities. These purges were carried out every few years, contributing to the continuing power of Stalin's role.

In 1936 the term 'purge' took on a different meaning. The Great Purge was an effort by Stalin to annihilate any possibility of political opposition or uprising against him. Over the next two years, most scholars agree that more than 750,000 Soviet citizens were executed and over a million were sent to Gulag labour camps—where the conditions were so appalling that many Gulag prisoners died within a couple of years.³² This massive purge of alleged enemies was not limited to any particular category of people, affecting those from every walk of life, and instilling fear in all.

In 1936 Soviet music was dealt a devastating and now famous blow: Shostakovich's opera *Lady Macbeth of the Mtsensk District*, which had been premiered in 1934 to rave reviews, was publically denounced in an article in *Pravda* immediately casting a long shadow over its composer. The political atmosphere in a wider sense was one of such terror that many of Shostakovich's colleagues and supporters publicly apologised for their support for his music. At the forefront of everyone's minds was their own safety and livelihood, and the fate of *Lady Macbeth* was no doubt interpreted as a warning for the music community as a whole. The

³¹ William Craft Brumfield, *A History of Russian Architecture* (New York, NY, USA: Cambridge University Press, 1993), 485.

³² Robert Gellately, "The Anatomy of Terror: Political Violence under Stalin: Harris, James, Ed. Oxford: Oxford University Press 333 Pp. \$125.00 Isbn: 978-0-19-965566-3 Publication Date: June 2013," *History: Reviews of New Books* 43, no. 1 (2015): 31.

stranglehold of socialist realism became even more pronounced and the associated trends in musical composition accelerated. Clichéd nationalistic tropes via folk songs; major keys and triumphant rhythms in the final sections of concert works; easily digestible melodies (and the like), came to signify—with no possibility of doubt—a proactively optimistic view of the future of the State.

The intrinsic quality of music that escapes easy definition—that which allows non-programmatic music to be simultaneously meaningless and meaningful—worked to the advantage of some (as the literal interpretation of their creation was ambiguous), and at other times left the composer susceptible to attack. Nevertheless, the inventive creation of music continued, though there was no uncertainty that the endeavours of the arts intelligentsia were under constant Soviet surveillance. The Great Purge ended in 1938, though arrests and exiles continued for the rest of Stalin's life and the practice of executions remained, albeit on a far smaller scale.

1.5 World War II

In 1941, Nazi Germany abandoned its non-aggression pact with the USSR and invaded on the 22nd of June. The resulting conflict, known as the Great Patriotic War (Soviet Union) or the Eastern Front (Germany) lasted until 9 May 1945. The losses on battlefields were staggering on both sides as the Red Army held out against the enormous forces of the Nazi troops. Leningrad was surrounded on 8 September 1941 and her citizens suffered through desperate conditions and freezing temperatures, with little (or at times no) food and water. According to official figures, 632,000 people died during the eighteenth months of Leningrad siege, but unofficially, the number is closer to one million deaths, a third of the population of the city.³³

³³ Schwarz, *Music and Musical Life in Soviet Russia*, 177.

Nevertheless the creative spirit in Leningrad was still alive even though the struggle to survive, let alone put together an orchestra, was immense. As Schwarz discusses, cultural activity took on a whole new meaning:

The music of those days was meant to console and uplift, to encourage and exhort nothing else mattered. Composers did not think of eternal values, not even of tomorrow—only of today, of the moment, of the immediate impact on the listener. Gone were all the controversies, all the quarrels about epigonism and realism and formalism; forgotten was all aestheticizing. Only the survival of body and soul mattered, and the essential element of music was its morale-building force. In detached retrospect one finds occasional shallowness, posturing, hollow heroics; but under fire it all seemed real and very vital.³⁴

In this horrific and grim time, music and other creative endeavours were deemed necessary for survival—it is difficult to consider the music of this time without an awareness of the circumstances. The head of the Leningrad Union of Composers, Valerian Bogdanov-Berezovsky (1903-1971) wrote in his diary in January 1942:

The pulse of creative life in the Composers' Union weakens from day to day. It weakens but does not die. Many are no longer able to come in from out-lying districts...The streetcars have stopped altogether...³⁵

Bogdanov-Berezovsky's diary also mentions a meeting held at Asafiev's home to determine the winner of a song competition in late 1941. In August 1942 the city heard Shostakovich's Seventh Symphony, dedicated to the City of Leningrad. It was performed and heard as a monumentally significant work within the context of the struggle of the siege. The siege was officially lifted on 27 January 1943.

The German troops suffered a massive defeat in February 1943 at the Battle of Stalingrad (now Volgograd), one that is considered by many historians to be the turning point of World War II.³⁶ The Russian troops pushed back the Axis forces and recovered their land in 1944. With the invasion of Germany and the final defeat of Japan, the war ended in 1945 with the Soviet Union and the United States of America emerging as superpowers. The attitude of

³⁴ *Music and Musical Life in Soviet Russia*, 180.

³⁵ *Music and Musical Life in Soviet Russia*, 178.

³⁶ G. Roberts, *Victory at Stalingrad: The Battle That Changed History* (Taylor & Francis, 2013).

Soviet citizens changed; the atmosphere had changed to one of confidence and optimistic resolve.

1.6 Post-War Regimentation

The end of World War II saw a great transition period for all citizens of the Soviet Union. Instead of the victorious celebration and peaceful illusion of a liberal existence, the people soon realised that Cold War and the 'Iron Curtain' were imminent. Stalin was strengthened in his anti-capitalist ideology, in total opposition to the other Allied countries, and the anti-Western, proud Russian patriotism was fuelled by powerful propaganda.

Culturally, the pre-war activities of censorship and cultural repression swept back into full order, and in August 1946 a period began known as *Zhdanovshchina*. The role of Andrei Alexandrovich Zhdanov (1896-1948) was to directly control the cultural policy and shape the ideo-political 'weapon' that was socialist realism. The ensuing war on formalism was a frightening one for the intelligentsia; with the purges of 1936-38 still fresh in their minds, those criticised by name immediately and publicly apologised for any 'wrong-doing.'

Attacks on literature, theatre and film came in 1946, and the ultimate resolution on musical affairs came in 1948. Composers as respected as Shostakovich, Prokofiev, Miaskovsky, and Khatchaturian were attacked for 'formalistic tendencies' and a policy of complicated censorship and severe ideological manipulation was gradually implemented. Although Zhdanov himself died in August 1948, the policy in his name remained until Stalin's death in 1953.

2 Asafiev, Boris Vladimirovich

Boris Vladimirovich Asafiev (1884-1949) was a noted Soviet Russian musicologist, music critic, composer and teacher who commanded great respect from his contemporaries. His writings as musicologist and critic—frequently under the pen name Igor Glebov—were of fundamental importance in the development of a ‘socialist’ musical style. His remarkable anonymity in the Western world in comparison to the high esteem in which he was held in his homeland has been noted previously.³⁷ For the purposes of this study, it is not necessary to consider in detail Asafiev’s personal and professional life. James Tull has admirably undertaken that task in his meticulously compiled PhD dissertation.³⁸ Elina Viljanen has also compiled many details of Asafiev’s life in a masters thesis.³⁹ It is however beneficial to lay out an overview of his immense contribution to the creative cultural atmosphere of Soviet Russia, and to trace his place within its confines.

2.1 Early Years

Boris Asafiev was born in Saint Petersburg on 17 July 1884 to a poor, working class family. His musical talents presented themselves early, in the form of absolute pitch, and a great ability to sight-read and improvise at the piano. He also was particularly intelligent for a young boy from a humble family. He began to study history and philology before swaying towards a career in music. Two important influences on Asafiev’s early career were composer Nikolai Andreyevich Rimsky-Korsakov (1844-1908) and critic Vladimir Vasilievich Stasov (1824-1906). Finding favour with Rimsky-Korsakov was of great consequence in Asafiev’s initial steps into the Saint Petersburg Conservatory⁴⁰ and by extension the music profession. His relationship with Stasov

³⁷M. Montagu-Nathan, "The Strange Case of Professor Assafiev," *Music & Letters* 38, no. 4 (1957).

³⁸ Tull, "B. V. Asaf'ev's "Musical Form as a Process": Translation and Commentary. (Volumes I - II I)."

³⁹ Elina Viljanen, "Boris Asaf'ev and the Soviet Musicology" (University of Helsinki, Faculty of Arts, Institute for Art Research, 2005).

⁴⁰ Now the Rimsky-Korsakov St. Petersburg State Conservatory.

however, seemed to have a more lasting impression on his musical convictions. Stasov was a hugely influential figure in mid to late nineteenth-century developments in Russian culture. Through his close relationship with “The Five” he advocated the need for Russian culture to stand on its own, assertively avoiding the inclination to be subservient to the trends of Western Europe. Stasov’s infectious enthusiasm for the broad spectrum of Russian art forms and his particular interest in Russian nationalism and folk music made a clear impact on Asafiev’s future work.

During his time at the Conservatory, starting in 1904, Asafiev studied composition with Anatoly Konstantinovich Lyadov (1855-1914) and orchestration with Rimsky-Korsakov. He had every intention to study composition with the latter after his university studies were completed, however Rimsky-Korsakov passed away in that same year, 1908. Asafiev developed friendships with two fellow university students—Sergei Prokofiev (1891-1953) and Nicolai Miaskovsky (1881-1950). Although Asafiev professed he “sometimes felt himself to be an outsider in their presence,”⁴¹ it was nonetheless Miaskovsky that encouraged him to undertake his first critical writing. An important factor in his composition development was his employment as rehearsal pianist for the Mariinsky Theatre; accompanying the *corps de ballet* rehearsals provided him with the extensive education in both Russian and European ballet and opera repertoire. This fundamental understanding not only influenced his compositional language, but also underpins his theoretical writing. Asafiev’s understanding of Western European culture was enhanced by annual trips to countries such as France, Italy, Germany, Austria and Switzerland during the years 1911 to 1914.

As mentioned above, Asafiev approached music criticism with considerable hesitation, and only under the proviso that his writing be published under the pseudonym Igor Glebov, a *nome de plume* which, although at first prompted by a lack of conviction, later became a most

⁴¹ Tull, "B. V. Asaf'ev's "Musical Form as a Process": Translation and Commentary. (Volumes I - I I I)," 7.

useful and influential tool in later years. Other musicians did not necessarily welcome this as fair:

Just look at Asafyev's subtle tactics: first as the critic Igor Glebov he publishes a detailed article in the newspaper praising and advertising a new work, unknown to anyone; then as artistic consultant to both theatres and to the philharmonic, Asafyev makes sure it is performed. And finally, once again as critic Igor Glebov, he hails that performance in print, handing out medals and honours to absolutely everyone involved. Now, how could the conductors resist?⁴²

In the early years of 'Igor Glebov,' he regularly wrote articles for a few different journals, such as *Muzyka*, a Moscow-based journal, and *Muzykal'nyi sovremennik* (*Musical Contemporary*). His early writing already displayed signs of his later focus of balance between familiar 'classics' and the unfamiliar explorations of contemporary composers.

2.2 Academic Years

Asafyev was quick to acknowledge the importance of the politically motivated changes in Russia. Lunacharsky had an article published in *Pravda* (in December 1917) just over a month after he was appointed People's Commissar of Public Education, inviting:

...all comrades—painters, musicians, and artists—who wish to work towards the rapprochement of the broad popular masses with art in all its aspects, as well as the comrade-members of the Union of Proletarian Artists and Writers, to report to the office of the Commissar of Public Enlightenment in the Winter Palace.⁴³

Asafyev was one of few of the arts intelligentsia to heed this call, with most others taking a passive stance on the political affairs of the nation. He contributed to the effort to educate the masses in cultural ways—in 1919 he published a layman's *Dictionary of Musical Technical Terms*—and penned a large number of articles promoting the changing course of music, in the name of socialism. Together with Lunacharsky, he advocated the important role of opera in the education of the people in this new socialist state, asserting that within opera was held a rich resource of folk elements and national heritage. As mentioned in section 1.2, it was

⁴² S. Volkov, *St Petersburg: A Cultural History* (Free Press, 2010), 370.

⁴³ Schwarz, *Music and Musical Life in Soviet Russia*, 13.

Lunacharsky's opinion that the traditions inherited by the people of Russian should not be discarded just because of their previous bourgeois origins. To Lunacharsky and Asafiev, educating society in the operatic literature of Russian classical tradition was, in effect, returning the cultural property of the nation to the people.

From 1919 Asafiev was employed at the Russian Institute of Art History (he was head of the music division from either 1920 or 1921, depending on whichever account one believes⁴⁴) and in 1925, was appointed professor at the Leningrad Conservatory. Here he was charged with the task of designing the Conservatory's new musicology section—a task that he set upon with characteristic enthusiasm. During these years Asafiev was increasingly involved in the cause of Russian contemporary music and there is the sense that his previously hesitant persona was replaced with an ardent desire to convey and implement his opinions in his writing and activities. His views can, it seems, be divided fairly equally between a passionate desire to collect and preserve the music of Russia's heritage, and the exploration of new compositional directions. In two different chapters of *Music and Musical Life*, Schwarz states first that:

The intense activity of Asafiev and his circle on behalf of contemporary music brought about an artistic climate in Leningrad that made the city a centre of musical modernism, receptive to all kinds of experiments.⁴⁵

He then returns to the subject of Asafiev's efforts later, stating in chapter 5 that, "[a]s a historian, Asafiev was primarily interested in the exploration of Russia's musical past."⁴⁶ These contrasting areas of focus are surprisingly complementary, considering the direction that his theoretical work was to take in *Musical Form as a Process* (see chapter 3).

Not only was Asafiev passionately involved in the practical education of the next generation of musicians and musicologists, but he also was extraordinarily prolific in his literary publications. James Tull diligently assembled the details of this:

⁴⁴ Kabalevski and Lunacharsky give 1920 as the start of Asafiev's role as dean, whereas Orlova cites 1921 as the date of commencement: Tull, "B. V. Asaf'ev's "Musical Form as a Process": Translation and Commentary. (Volumes I - III)," 23.

⁴⁵ Schwarz, *Music and Musical Life in Soviet Russia*, 52.

⁴⁶ *Music and Musical Life in Soviet Russia*, 89.

Of his [Asafiev's] total lifetime catalog of 940 separate titles, more than half (489) date from the single decade, 1921-1930, and over 300 (almost one-third of his lifetime output) are listed for the four-year period from 1925 to 1928. Included in the writings of this decade are several of his more significant works, in particular the controversial *Book on Stravinsky, Russian Music from the Beginning of the Nineteenth Century*, and *Musical Form as a Process*.⁴⁷

His *Book About Stravinsky*⁴⁸ was first published in 1929, as *Kinga o Stravinskom*, under the *nome de plume*, Igor Glebov. As Stravinsky was denounced, Asafiev's book was consequently banned and was not republished until the 1960s. As the proletarian associations rose to full power under Stalin in the late 1920s, Asafiev was increasingly criticised for his activity in contemporary music. He was attacked by many of his former rivals and, feeling increasingly frustrated by the cultural direction, allowed his musicological/ideological output to slow to a trickle by the end of 1931. Asafiev redirected his focus to composition, and his first significant ballet, *Flames of Paris*, was premiered on November 7th, 1932.

2.3 Role after 1932: Composition Years

Instead of allowing the Resolution of 1932 to sweep him back into a position of leadership,⁴⁹ Asafiev chose to take a more passive approach to contemporary political developments. After facing the brunt of the proletarian backlash, and remaining in a somewhat compromised position with regard to his past involvement with the Western/modernist persuasions of the *ACM*, his decision to avoid immediate spotlight appears well calculated.

Regardless, upon hearing Shostakovich's ill-fated opera, *Lady Macbeth*, Asafiev had praised the work. The condemning *Pravda* article however, had not charged Shostakovich with a lack of talent or ability, rather it criticised his 'formalistic' tendencies as exposed in *Lady*

⁴⁷ Tull, "B. V. Asaf'ev's "Musical Form as a Process": Translation and Commentary. (Volumes I - I I I)," 35.

⁴⁸ B. V. Asaf'ev, *A Book About Stravinsky* (Ann Arbor, Mich: UMI Research Press, 1982).

⁴⁹ Tull and Schwarz suggest that this would have been a natural step for Asafiev.

Macbeth. Asafiev took advantage of this 'loophole' in his written apology in *Sovetskaya Muzyka*, as noted by Schwarz:

Asafiev's apologia is cleverly written. He admits past errors of judgment....His final sentence is rather limp, "The problem of the improvement of the idiom and creative method of Shostakovich as well as of a number of other composers—this, in sum, is the problem of the evolution of Soviet music, stated brilliantly in the timely articles of *Pravda*." ...

Here he [Asafiev] stated simply that he was blinded by the brilliant talent of Shostakovich: the mirage of the "quality of talent" obscured the quality of the utterance...."We must not fail to preserve the exceptional talent of Shostakovich," warned Asafiev....

All in all, Asafiev's essay was a dialectic masterpiece. Without undue submissiveness, he extracted himself from a vulnerable position; it was a dignified retreat.⁵⁰

Shostakovich's opinion of Asafiev bears some light on the negative reputation of the musicologist. It seems that an early mutual respect between the two deteriorated after Asafiev refused to attend the première of Shostakovich's *First Symphony* in 1926⁵¹. In later years Shostakovich is quoted to have described Asafiev as a "very gifted man who loved music, [with whom] I severed all relations immediately after I became convinced of his careerism and lack of principles."⁵²

Undoubtedly, the "problem of the evolution of Soviet music" was at the forefront of Asafiev's mind and, as we shall see in his work *Intonations* (see chapter 4), he had much to say on the matter. For the time being however, he occupied himself as a Soviet composer rather than musicologist. He was highly respected within the Soviet Union, primarily as a ballet composer. Outside of Russia, his music has not received such a favourable reaction—much of it has been characterised as academic and scientifically methodical.

⁵⁰ Schwarz, *Music and Musical Life in Soviet Russia*, 125-26.

⁵¹ Shostakovich believed this was because the première was sponsored by the *ACM* at a time when Asafiev disagreed with some principles of the organisation.

⁵² A.B. Ho and D. Feofanov, *The Shostakovich Wars* (Ho and Feofanov), 99-100. (My addition)

2.4 The Siege of Leningrad (1941-1944)

Asafiev remained in Leningrad for the entire duration of the siege with his wife and sister-in-law. They were finally evacuated at the end of February 1943, with Asafiev being in very poor health (he recuperated in hospital in Moscow for a number of months). Under the desperate conditions of hunger and cold, and regular German shelling and air raids, Asafiev's creative work became even more productive and he resumed his musicological endeavours. Asafiev formulated his creative work mentally, putting it to paper in the few daylight hours available. He composed many patriotic songs, sketched out numerous larger works and wrote many scholarly works, including the second volume of *Musical Form as a Process*, subtitled *Intonations*. He also applied his 'theory of intonations' to specific musical compositions in his works on Tchaikovsky's *Eugene Onegin*, and Glinka's *Ruslan and Lyudmila*. It has been noted that, "Asafiev's innate patriotism became more fervent during the war."⁵³ Beside his own creative work, he called for all Soviet artists to unite and stressed the importance of Russian nationalism in wartime music.

2.5 Later Years

Asafiev recovered from his illness and for his dedication and immense contribution as musicologist was elected to full membership of the Academy of Sciences in Moscow, an unprecedented occurrence for a musicologist. However, his health declined and he was unable to attend in person any of the assemblages regarding the Zhdanov resolution. A speech was read out in his name endorsing the resolution and denouncing the work of composers including Prokofiev and Miaskovsky. There has been discussion as to the authenticity of this speech. Valjanen describes Asafiev's involvement in the cultural purges:

His last years were somewhat mysterious. In the years of the cultural purges žhdanovščina, the party attacked furiously on the cultural spheres. Asaf'ev's name decorated many official papers as a sign of approval. He had remained silent even though many of his old friends such as Prokof'ev and Mjaskovskij, had been charged

⁵³ Schwarz, *Music and Musical Life in Soviet Russia*, 186.

with formalism. Many things that he had fought for the 1920s were now illegalized. The 1948 resolution of the Central Committee was crushing and after a short while accompanied by "self-critical" statements which took place in the General Assembly of Soviet Composers. The new directorate was elected to place the ORGKOMITET in the First All-Union Congress of Soviet Composers and it consisted of party disciplinarians excluding Asaf'ev who was designated as its chairman.⁵⁴

Asafiev died on 27 January 1949. He was awarded a great many honours posthumously and his family members were given financial support by the State. Toward to the end of his life and after his passing, Asafiev was regarded with high esteem in Soviet musicology. His unwavering patriotism and support of the Soviet cause, especially during World War II, made him a most useful role model in the future development of Soviet culture. His ideological work on the development of socialist realism was particularly valued by the State, and it has been suggested that his ideas and terminology were drawn upon to build and substantiate documents such as the central committee resolution of 1948.⁵⁵

⁵⁴ Viljanen, "Boris Asaf'ev and the Soviet Musicology," 41-42.

⁵⁵ Tull, "B. V. Asaf'ev's "Musical Form as a Process": Translation and Commentary. (Volumes I - I I I)."]"

3 Musical Form as a Process

3.1 Musical Form as a Process

The first volume of *Musical Form as a Process* was written during Asafiev's extraordinarily prolific four-year period from 1925 to 1928. As discussed in section 1.3, this was a time of exciting experiments in various musical schools of thought in Soviet Russia. *Musical Form as a Process* was intended to communicate Asafiev's theory of how music runs its course: how music starts, travels and concludes.

This chapter aims to organise Asafiev's often dense and complicated ideas into a digestible exposition. In turn these ideas will form the basis of my reading and analysis of the *Sonata for Solo Viola* in chapter 5. In *Russian Theoretical Thought in Music*, Gordon McQuere provides a concise chapter-by-chapter summary of both *Musical Form as a Process* and *Intonations*. By contrast, the current study attempts to identify the primary ideas relevant to the contextual assessment of Asafiev's composition for solo viola. Asafiev's volume is divided into three parts: 'How Musical Formation Occurs'; 'Stimuli and Factors of Musical Formation'; and 'Principles of Identity and Contrast: Their Exposure in Crystallized Forms'. There is a great deal of repetition of ideas through parts one and two, and as such, this study has attempted to condense and clarify as much as possible. Nevertheless, the overall structure has been loosely duplicated. Part three is mostly an expression of how Asafiev's principles of composition are exposed in socially assimilated forms such as the symphony. Because of the limited relevance to this study it will not be granted a great deal of space.

It is appropriate to mention the style of writing and the terminology employed in *Musical Form as a Process*. The task of translating both volumes from Russian to English was undertaken by James Robert Tull and published as his PhD dissertation in 1977. In the introductory commentary, Tull notes the lack of clarity in Asafiev's writing. Asafiev's frequently vague means of expression have been discussed by a number of scholars (including Asafiev

himself⁵⁶) in varying levels of frustration. It is possible that Asafiev's ambiguity of language might be an attempt to avoid censorship through employing obscure terminology. Beyond this, arguably, it is more likely that Asafiev's mode of writing is a manifestation of his theoretical ideas about composition. On many occasions his writing has improvisatory, poetic and organic qualities. In his discussion of the process of forming music (or rather, *Musical Form as a Process*) Asafiev inadvertently (or perhaps consciously?) embodies his theory of dialectical formation in his literary style. It quickly becomes obvious that Asafiev was a passionately opinionated man, prone to 'going off on a tangent' to supplement his theory. In discussing examples he regularly jumps from examples of medieval origin to recent compositions. This works to his advantage, serving to demonstrate the way in which his theories are applicable to all epochs.

Asafiev introduces the reader to many concepts in the opening section of *Musical Form as a Process*, most of which are the primary points of enquiry for his second volume, *Intonations*. A number of unusual terms are employed in the expression of his ideas (James Tull has translated these terms from the original Russian). For the purposes of this study some of these terms have been used in the same context, as they most effectively communicate Asafiev's meaning. Two main instances are 'sound conjugation' and 'brakings'. Taken in the most literal sense, these terms require little explanation. When referring to a 'sound conjugation' or sometimes 'sound complex,' Asafiev is describing a combination of tones. As we will see, this term is somewhat synonymous with 'intonation,' however the use of 'intonation' has further implications beyond the existence of the musical configuration, involving society's perception and understanding. In the dynamic formation of music (see section 3.4), Asafiev believes that the energy slows or 'brakes' when decelerating at the end of a phrase or to a cadence point. Asafiev regularly discusses the 'tonal centre' and 'tonal sphere' of a passage or work rather than a specific key. This is partially due to the heavy influence of modes in the Russian idiom, but also somewhat due to his ideas about the organic construction of music.

⁵⁶ Asafiev writes in *Intonations*, "I very much suffer from the inability to present this book in a literarily blameless manner, and I acknowledge the viscosity of its language." "B. V. Asaf'ev's "Musical Form as a Process": Translation and Commentary. (Volumes I - III)," 607.

A fundamental connection can be found between Asafiev and contemporary Russian theorist Boleslav Leopoldovich Yavorsky (1877-1942). Yavorsky had a great impact on many Soviet musical personalities through teaching, much more so than in his limited publications. Yavorsky's speculations were not limited to music theory and he considered "art as an expression of life."⁵⁷ It also seems that broad sociological ideas of this nature are at the centre of his more specific musical theories: a distinct link between him and Asafiev is perceivable here.

Yavorsky was responsible for initiating the idea of a universal theory of music in Soviet musicology. His most crucial contribution to Soviet musical thought, and that which is most often cited, is his theory of modal rhythm described by McQuere as underscoring the "relationship between pitch functions and temporal functions ... found in the motion of the tritone towards resolution" or more succinctly, the "unfolding of modes in time."⁵⁸ In his writings and teachings Yavorsky depicted the relationship between unstable and stable tones. It is through the tendency of the unstable tritone to resolve to a stable consonance that he perceived an 'auditory gravitation' that was applicable to all musical expression. In comparing this model with Asafiev's principles in *Musical Form as a Process*, a discernable link emerges between Yavorsky's treatment of the tritone and Asafiev's handling of the leading tone (see section 3.4).

McQuere quotes the hierarchical structure of forming creative expression as presented in Yavorsky's *The Construction of the Melodic Process*:

Construction [konstruktsiia] ...is the basic principle of creative work, which consists of the mastery and harmonious agreement of the forces of gravity for realizing a creative act.

Modal rhythm is the unfolding in time of the construction of a musical work.

Composition [kompozitsiia] ...is the articulation of the construction of a work of art with a view to disclosing the creative goal.

Formation [ofornlenie] ...is the embodiment...of the composition of this construction by means of material standardized for a given art with a view to *expression beyond* the creative goal.⁵⁹

⁵⁷ Gordon D. McQuere, *Russian Theoretical Thought in Music* (UMI Research Press, 1983), 112.

⁵⁸ *Russian Theoretical Thought in Music* (UMI Research Press, 1983), 123.

⁵⁹ *Russian Theoretical Thought in Music*, 129.

Within this structure can be found the origins of Asafiev's investigations. Much of Asafiev's theorising focuses on the 'means of material standardised for a given art' and the process of how material is standardised.

One of Yavorsky's other important contributions to Soviet musicological theory, and one of considerable importance in this study, was his introduction of the term 'intonation.' The 'theory of intonations,' as developed by Asafiev, is one of the most significant concepts used in the building of Soviet musicology. The term 'intonation' as used in Soviet musicology is unfamiliar to Western theory, and does not yield to a simple explanation. According to McQuere:

The application of intonation, a linguistic concept, to music theory is Yavorsky's own contribution. The concept of intonation in Soviet music is generally associated with the work of eminent musicologist, Boris Asafiev, who investigated it in detail.⁶⁰

Yavorsky's 'intonation' is concerned with the linear unfolding of related pitches according to the resolution of the tritone. Asafiev developed the definition of intonation much further, and away from any link with the tritone, but the basic premise remains that analytically, intonational theory is a means to an end: the intonational quality of art is a symbolic representation of motivation and meaning.

The conventional Western definitions of 'intonation' are loosely related but not applicable in this context. Asafiev provides a complex description of 'intonation' at the beginning of *Intonations*, that says more about what intonation is *not* rather than what it *is*:

As regards the definition of intonation as the last phase of tuning of instruments, it is simply naive. To "smooth out," to "smooth over" correlations of sounds on instruments, i.e., to achieve purity of pitch, is actually important for intonation, because false pitch disturbs the meaning, the qualitative tonus of music as intonation, in just the same way as careless pronunciation in language cripples the meaning of speech, even if one is generally understood.⁶¹

In Soviet musicology, and in both volumes of *Musical Form as a Process*, the term 'intonation' is used as a noun to describe socially selected building blocks of music: that which is intoned. As McQuere explains, "musical intonations are particular to a given era and culture, and

⁶⁰ *Russian Theoretical Thought in Music*, 130.

⁶¹ Tull, "B. V. Asaf'ev's "Musical Form as a Process": Translation and Commentary. (Volumes I - I I I)," 605fn.

may be anything from the simplest musical materials to the largest complex forms.”⁶² In theory, the sounding of elements as consciously organised by the composer are the bearers of intonational meaning.

3.2 Exposition of Underlying Principles

Asafiev discusses the process by which certain musical intonations come to be used and accepted as the means of communication between composer and society. By way of explaining the use of ‘form’ in the title of this volume, Asafiev’s speaks of the socially determined system of organising musical motion—“musical motion, for, generally speaking, there is not stationary musical material”⁶³—and its evolution. He deliberates on the importance of society in the selection of musical aspects characteristic of an epoch:

...no aspect of music survives if it is not socially assimilated—if the means of expression inherent in this aspect do not represent the results of social selection and further variants of these essential qualities.⁶⁴

His writing thus immediately brings into light the influence of Marx and the dialectics of Hegel when discussing the process of musical formation: form of the whole, and the form of the elements that constitute the whole, reveal that music is organised by the human consciousness.

Asafiev outlines his perception of the selection process of lasting intonations. This ‘survival of the fittest’ process is centred on memorisation and the recognition of subsequent repetitions or similarities:

...the ear crystallizes in the consciousness sound complexes or correlations of sound which are typological for a given musical formation (or, repeated irritations evoke repeated reflexes).⁶⁵

⁶² McQuere, *Russian Theoretical Thought in Music*, 225.

⁶³ Tull, "B. V. Asaf'ev's "Musical Form as a Process": Translation and Commentary. (Volumes I - I I I)," 185-86.

⁶⁴ "B. V. Asaf'ev's "Musical Form as a Process": Translation and Commentary. (Volumes I - I I I)," 186.

⁶⁵ "B. V. Asaf'ev's "Musical Form as a Process": Translation and Commentary. (Volumes I - I I I)," 189.

Unfamiliar sound conjugations are in direct contrast to this: held in isolation by the consciousness. Asafiev asserts that there is at any given time an 'intonational reserve' in which society, united by their epoch, hold familiar intonations in their shared conscious memory, with the ability to draw on this reserve when presented with a composition. Hence, the process of hearing and familiarisation with a new work can be regarded as a process of comparison. Upon hearing a composition for the first time, Asafiev supposes that it is the interaction and dominance of familiar intonations that provides an audience with a more pleasing auditory experience than if unfamiliar complexes were to dominate. Audience perception is an essential part of the process in the assimilation of music by society. The individual perceives music as originally organised by the composer and 'translates' it in their comparison to what is familiar. As a society, the collective consciousness perceives musical works in relation to their intonational reserve.

The principles of Hegelian dialectics are paramount to Asafiev's theories. Intonations are always unstable, ever-changing as the meaning transitions; a necessity for the evolution of music:

Concerning the aforementioned dialectical quality in the process of the musical formation, it is felt always as a condition of unstable equilibrium; no single aspect of intoning is evaluated as self-contained, but always as a stage of transition into the following one.⁶⁶

Asafiev strongly establishes his belief that no single element of musical creation, intoning or perception is stable. As such, the meaning of each element of music is in a constant state of change. In stating that the process of musical formation is a dialectical process the idea of inheritance is approached. Asafiev speaks of being able to trace the development of intonations in their evolution and that no intonation is a self-contained phenomenon. This alludes to the point, discussed at length in chapter 4 that, in the dialectic process of musical evolution, nothing new is created; unfamiliar intonations are born out of familiar ones. If

⁶⁶ "B. V. Asafiev's "Musical Form as a Process": Translation and Commentary. (Volumes I - III)," 195.

Asafiev's fundamental premise is accepted that the formation of music is the logical motion of sound, then to understand form is to understand the rationality of the flow of sound, i.e., why motion continues in the way it does. A composer's choice of sound combinations is a reflection of the intonations that appear rational to him or her.

Asafiev favours the term 'inertia' in his evaluations and conclusions on the crystallisation of certain sound conjugations in society's consciousness. Tull, in his commentary on *Musical Form as a Process*, describes the way in which Asafiev employs the term as implying "an analogy with the physical principle of inertia of a moving body (the tendency of a body to continue moving until force is exerted to stop it)" and "suggesting mechanical momentum or unrestrained, unrestricted motion."⁶⁷ The term is frequently employed in the context of 'social inertia': motion of the evolution of intonations prior to the influence of societal change.

The most primitive form of creative process is described as that in which the invention or intoning of new and unfamiliar sound complexes is neglected completely and thus the audience is presented with repetitions of familiar and fully socially assimilated formations—examples provided of this include popular music, common marches and dance music.⁶⁸ Asafiev suggests that there is and always will be a conflict between the desire for familiar and need for evolution:

Thus, in the assimilation of music there occurs a constant battle between sound combinations which are crystallized in the memory (usually such sound combinations are perceived as forms, and from them constructive schemes are derived by which the teaching of "forms" occurs) and the equally continuous process of organization, i.e., the reduction to some rational unity of a variety of sound relations inspired by creative instinct in the search for new stimuli.⁶⁹

⁶⁷ "B. V. Asaf'ev's "Musical Form as a Process": Translation and Commentary. (Volumes I - III)," 566 & 69 (Commentary).

⁶⁸ This is not only a controversial statement in itself, but considering the artistic climate of Soviet Russia in the late 1920s, also a rather dangerous one. The dominance of 'mass-audience' marches as the most desirable and politically acceptable compositional genre had only subsided recently and was to again take supremacy in later years. It is possible that this train of thought contributed to this volume not being re-issued until 1963.

⁶⁹ Tull, "B. V. Asaf'ev's "Musical Form as a Process": Translation and Commentary. (Volumes I - III)," 214.

Interestingly, what Asafiev here describes as a battle, implying that one force is vying for dominance over the other, he later speaks in terms of looking to find a balance. From here on in the presentation of principles is realised through the demonstration of that which causes inertness, and that which instigates inertia. In approaching the central concept of *Musical Form as Process* he announces two basic laws: (1) motion (the succession of sounds one after another as the interrelation of pitches); and (2) the conditions of memorization of music or the means which our consciousness has worked out for the retention of consonances in motion.⁷⁰

“Consonances in motion” refers to the successive sounding of tones in a horizontal manner as opposed to vertical or simultaneous. This appears to be a parallel model to Yavorsky’s use of the term ‘intonations.’ The two phenomena of motion and memorisation are the fundamental concepts that underpin all of Asafiev’s theorising. However, Asafiev refrains from attempting to define the laws of musical motion as he sees them, insisting rather that everything is in a constant state of transformation. Hence, society’s repository of memorised intonations is always changing.

3.3 Principles of Identity or Repetition

Asafiev considers the logic and effect of using repetition for the continuation of musical motion. He asserts that repeating material twice or several times is the simplest and easiest way to carry on an established system of sound relations. In order to classify the more prevalent examples of repetition, Asafiev presents his analysis in two categories: the exact repetition of music and repetition of a varied formation. Once again, Asafiev is careful to qualify all his remarks with a preface on how complications may arise due to the possibility of complexities, in this case the concurrent presence of different methods of repetition in polyphonic textures.

The more similar the musical repetition is, the less interest there is in perception. Asafiev ascribes this to the lowered mental engagement required to compare and memorise the

⁷⁰ "B. V. Asaf'ev's "Musical Form as a Process": Translation and Commentary. (Volumes I - III)," 200.

repeated material. However, repetition is an important component in memorisation and assimilation of intonations by the consciousness. According to Asafiev, “repetition is less significant as an agent of motion, than as the medium for the firmer reinforcement in the memory of a given correlation of sounds.”⁷¹ By contrast, as more complex systems involving repetition are utilised in formation, more interest is sparked. Literal repetition (the example given is the repeated octaves in the bassoons and timpani in the finale of Beethoven’s *Eighth Symphony*) can serve to organise motion, as it is a strong intonational element that compels the ear to recognise comparison as a progression in the music.

Different methods of varying repetition evoke different levels of interest in the listener. Asafiev also observes that the same formula, when considered in a different context—with respect to a given epoch’s repository of socially assimilated intonations—may be judged as serving a very different purpose. Asafiev works his way from simplest to more complex forms of non-identical repetition when presenting examples: repetition that is altered only superficially, such as in the appearance of ornamentation, or by changing the disclosure of a subject rhythmically, or even by transposing the repeated conjugation into a different tonality. All of these devices can be employed without changing the fundamental structure of the given material. More complex forms of non-identical repetition create stronger impetus for motion: the sharper the contrast, the greater the need for memorisation and comparison by the listener. In the case of a transposed example, “the more intensive is the perception of tonal difference in identical material as a stimulus to movement and, consequently, as a formative factor.”⁷²

Asafiev addresses the history of the ‘theme and variation’ form, arriving at three systems in the evolution of the form: the use of an identically repeated ground bass, such as the passacaglia and chaconne; forms in which the repetitive bass line is modified—such as the French *doubles*; and the gradual departure of variations from the theme in a decorative sense.

⁷¹ "B. V. Asaf'ev's "Musical Form as a Process": Translation and Commentary. (Volumes I - III)," 219.

⁷² "B. V. Asaf'ev's "Musical Form as a Process": Translation and Commentary. (Volumes I - III)," 221.

This is significant in the analysis of the final movement of Asafiev's *Sonata for Solo Viola* (section 5.2.1). Symmetrical repetition and other devices such as augmentation, diminution, inversion, and retrograde motion are also acknowledged. His fundamental approach to a theme is stated in a footnote:

The concept of a *theme* is profoundly dialectical. A theme is simultaneously both a self-sufficing, clear-cut formation and a dynamically "explosive" element. A theme is both impetus and affirmation. A theme concentrates within itself the energy of motion and defines its character and direction. However, in spite of its chief property—a clear-cut outline—a theme possesses the capacity for the most diverse metamorphoses. Its functions are contrasting. By its formation, a theme evokes new formations which negate it, and, by opposing them, affirms itself. A theme is a striking, resourceful, creative thought, an idea rich in implications, in which opposition is the motive force.⁷³

Combining dialectics with his theory of intonations, Asafiev importantly exposes his reasoning behind the significance of recognising both principles of identity and contrast, as will be discussed further in section 3.7. Asafiev defines the difference between repetition and imitation, thus qualifying all his following remarks on the subject—imitation is "not a single continuation (repetition) in another voice, but rather the *insertion* of the second line before the motion of the first line is completed."⁷⁴ As suggested by this definition, imitation is held as bestowing an impulsive character due to the interruption of the initial motion.

Canon is introduced as an exact and definitive form of imitation—one that has precise laws and therefore immediately recognisable limits in its formation. The evolution of the canon led to the development of the fugue, held by Asafiev as the "most perfect form of the imitative style."⁷⁵ Themes that are useful in the construction of a canonic form must be of neutral character, however those that are most relevant in the creation of an effective and stimulating fugue possess within them the impetus and potential for development.

⁷³ "B. V. Asaf'ev's "Musical Form as a Process": Translation and Commentary. (Volumes I - III)," 388-89. (original emphasis)

⁷⁴ "B. V. Asaf'ev's "Musical Form as a Process": Translation and Commentary. (Volumes I - III)," 230-31. (original emphasis)

⁷⁵ "B. V. Asaf'ev's "Musical Form as a Process": Translation and Commentary. (Volumes I - III)," 233.

The motion of music is considered by Asafiev a journey of energy—the creation of sound energy or thematic energy through the use of devices and the expenditure of sound energy. He often keeps separate the use of ‘inertia’ for social assimilation of intonations and ‘energy’ for motion within musical formation.

3.4 Motive Forces, Energy & Impetus

Asafiev examines sound relations that trigger energy and impetus in a given musical system. He considers these the motivating forces that govern musical motion. An important factor is the introduction of equilibrium as the state of a composition in its entirety, or as the totality of a composition’s complex of sound conjugations. Music can firstly be recognised as a collection of tones, however through the observation of motion in music, or ‘musical dynamics,’ Asafiev perceives music as a gathering of intonations, or organisations of tones based on socially crystallised sound complexes. The term ‘musical dynamics,’ like intonations, is not meant in the literal sense (volume); rather, he refers to the physics of motion and equilibrium, “the study of the *forces* which serve as causes or stimuli of motion.”⁷⁶ Asafiev hence assesses the way in which a composer achieves or postpones the moment of equilibrium through the use of musical dynamics. According to Asafiev, throughout the evolution of music, one factor can be acknowledged as constant: the tendency of composers to strive for maximum extension of musical motion, or rather, to delay the arrival of musical equilibrium for as long as possible. Alongside the evolution of socially acceptable and assimilated tendencies, this is an aim that has continued for centuries.

The first part of Asafiev’s analysis of music as a dynamic creation is in the examination of those forces that organise the formation and stimulation of motion. Harmonic consonance and dissonance are treated as forces: factors that hinder or promote motion, demonstrating the evocation and subsequent expenditure of musical energy. Asafiev regards the leading note as a

⁷⁶ "B. V. Asaf'ev's "Musical Form as a Process": Translation and Commentary. (Volumes I - III)," 241. (original emphasis)

(possibly *the*) motive force in European music. He demonstrates the idea of energy as a force within music with the example of the energy of leading note to tonic as a stimulus. He also draws parallels between physical energy that creates physical sound and sound energy that creates music: only sound combinations that draw the listener into a system of musical organisation are significant, not merely sounds with no relation to each other.

A given tone can function as a motive force in a horizontal sense, or as part of a vertical structure:

...any given conjugation of tones can be regarded in two coordinates, that is, in the scheme of interaction both of the rhythmic-tectonic (or constructive) principles and of the intonational-dynamic principles of formation.⁷⁷

The social demands of a given environment determine whether a tone's role in the horizontal conjugation or its function within the vertical complex is regarded as more important by composer and/or listener. An intonationally-informed analysis must therefore take place concurrently with a study of these systems of socially recognised musical organisation. Music is thus perceived as a work of unstable equilibrium between the initial impetus from which motion departs, and the concluding intonation (cadence) that brings a composition into equilibrium. Between these points the organisation of sound conjugations is composed to delay the restoration of equilibrium through the manipulation of musical motion.

3.5 Impetus and Close of Motion (Cadence)

Asafiev identifies the beginning and the conclusion of a composition as stabilising aural landmarks that support the audience's memorisation. He chooses to assess them together; a notion that the current study has chosen to adhere to. The commencing device employed has significant influence on the direction that a composition will take. The 'impetus' discussed by Asafiev refers not necessarily to the first tone or series of tones but to the formation of a sound

⁷⁷ "B. V. Asaf'ev's "Musical Form as a Process": Translation and Commentary. (Volumes I - III)," 254.

conjugation that establishes motion. As with all intonations, certain devices for initiating and closing motion become characteristic of a certain time, and the effects of these intonations differ according to stylistic traditions of the epoch.

Figure 1 is a simple medieval example that Asafiev presents in his fourth chapter to illustrate structural factors in a composition. He identifies *Initium*, the initial impetus; *Tenor*, the main body of recitative; *Metrum*, half cadence, or braking before motion continues; return to *Tenor*; and *Punctum*, closing of motion, or cadence.

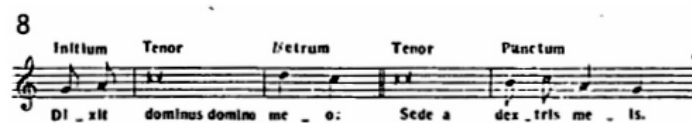


Figure 1: Example taken from G. Adler, *Handbuch der Musikgeschichte* (1924)⁷⁸

This simple example demonstrates that the *Initium* leads the ear to expect some kind of continuation; there is an accumulation of energy that demands further motion.

Asafiev distinguishes between the different forms of initial impetuses and their respective roles in formation: “the first sound, then the first conjugation of sounds characteristic for all further motion, which determines both rhythm and tonality, and finally, the enlarged introduction (for example, the slow introduction of a symphony).”⁷⁹ An initial impetus can be defined by whether it is characterised as an approach that leads the listener in its journey to an intonation, or whether the initial impetus is a clearly stated intonation within itself. The tonal colouring—how the tonal setting of the impetus relates to tonal sphere of the work—is a principal factor in this analysis. A device that provides a powerful sense of forthcoming motion is the ‘preparatory run’ from a seemingly detached slow introduction into the main body of a movement.

⁷⁸ Guido Adler, *Handbuch Der Musikgeschichte* (Frankfurt am Main: Frankfurter Verlagsanstalt, 1924), as quoted in Tull, “B. V. Asaf’ev’s “Musical Form as a Process”: Translation and Commentary. (Volumes I - III),” 267.

⁷⁹ “B. V. Asaf’ev’s “Musical Form as a Process”: Translation and Commentary. (Volumes I - III),” 266.

The situation of an impetus is not limited to the beginning of a composition, rather, a work is seen as a series of intonations that initiate and expend energy. Impetuses should be recognised throughout the main body of any given work, in the process of delaying the moment of equilibrium and accumulating sound energy and tension. Particularly unstable intonations have a similar effect, serving to motivate and stimulate motion, as further motion is required to explain the presence of an intonation that is not initially understood fully. Asafiev notes that the same predominant stimuli in the broader understanding of the role of impetus in musical motion through to the finer details of specific intonations. In every theme or phrase there exists the basic principle that an impetus starts the motion, inertia continues it until a force impacts on the motion, braking the motion. In short intonations, this is relatively easy to observe, however when compositions are longer and intonations and melodies become more complex and interrelated, the analytical process becomes much more complicated.

Although it is possible to identify an impetus in isolation (especially shorter motifs), Asafiev stresses the importance of considering an impetus within the context of the entire work, particularly its relationship to the closing of motion, due to the gravitational pull of tonal stability and intonational equilibrium. He proposes that the evolution of the *cantus firmus*—a familiar landmark that was replaced by familiar secular intonations—is fundamental in the assessment of the role of the cadence. The *cantus firmus* is treated as an organising factor and an aural landmark, as it was transformed from melodic, linear element (as illustrated in the *punctum* of Figure 1) into a harmonic fundamental, the *basso continuo*, which lead to the crystallisation of the melodic cadence as the device used for slowing and concluding motion. However, as with all sound conjugations, the function will evade permanent definition due to the dialectical nature of musical evolution.

A cadence that appears to function as closing motion may in fact be concurrently working as impetus for that which follows. The most widely accepted occurrence of this is the ‘interrupted’ cadence. Therefore, the cadence can be recognised as both a stabilising factor—aiding the memorisation of aural landmarks—and as a medium for prolonging the motion.

3.6 Development of Motion

Asafiev outlines the contributing factors in the continuation of motion within a work (between the beginning impetus and the conclusion). The *Tenor* in the example given previously (Figure 1) is a rare settling on one pitch. A melodic line that projects a more complex progression of motion is described in terms of the accumulation and expenditure of energy. Asafiev compares the simple setting above with the main theme of the Overture from Beethoven's *Prometheus*, observing the same primary elements of construction. In considering an example taken from Wagner's *Siegfried*, Asafiev demonstrates a momentous ascent and subsequent descent, one that has great significance in the transferral of energy and tension. He takes great care not to exclude any detail from his analysis, examining every tone that could divulge insight into the process:

I have consciously entered into the smallest details of this intonational formation, not for formalistic statistics, but in order to show how organic is the process of formation of a developed melody, and how, at the same time, this process has the same stages as the primitive intonational formula of psalmodizing and the formula of the perfect cadence in the tempered, twelve-degree, tonal system, for a musical formation always occurs as follows: an impetus, or starting point of sound, and a displacement; the motion or condition of unstable equilibrium; a return to the source, to the condition of equilibrium (to the basis), or the closing of motion—i.e., the correlation i (initium – beginning): m (movere – to move): t (terminus – close, ending).⁸⁰

Within this structural abbreviation, *i : m : t* (*initium : movere : terminus*), Asafiev asserts the interchangeability of the functional significance of each part of the whole:

...the first member of the formula, *i*, the point of departure, can prove to be simultaneously an *impulse* which activates the motion of the immediately following intonations through their contrast with the preceding, and a *concluding link* (a *terminus*) also, in relation to the preceding intonations, if we perceive this “moment” only as the next link in turn, apart from its connection with further progression.⁸¹

⁸⁰ "B. V. Asaf'ev's "Musical Form as a Process": Translation and Commentary. (Volumes I - III)," 309-10.

⁸¹ "B. V. Asaf'ev's "Musical Form as a Process": Translation and Commentary. (Volumes I - III)," 406-07. (original emphasis)

This formula (i : m : t) remains constant even if an intonation is 'broken.'⁸² In fact, this is one of the factors that Asafiev identifies as intensifying motion and creating tension in the European system of intoning. Another such factor is the instability created by departing from the original tonal sphere (as mentioned in section 3.3). By transposing an intonation there arises the urgency of conflict by comparison to the original, demanding resolution. The further away the ear is drawn the more intense the feeling of instability, until a certain point is reached—Asafiev refers to this as a sort of threshold—after which the ear loses track of the original tonic and therefore has no point of comparison.

Asafiev documents the effect of certain devices on motion and how this effect can be lost or diminished: for example in a run of pitches towards a 'base' the effect is lessened if the base is reached on a weak beat or is a short note; or the intensity created by a tone that is changed if it concomitantly belongs to more than one tonal sphere. Motion can be affected adversely by the overuse of techniques such as sequences. This mode of continuing music can cause tension to dissipate rather than accrue, as the music receives no new stimuli and becomes inert. Sequence can be treated as a method of 'filling space' and in the evolution of this technique transformed from being a stimulus within itself to a mechanical device. As with all devices, the relationship that determines the degree of gravitation of any given complex to another is altered in different epochs, however the principle remains.

In approaching the formation of larger compositions the principles remain, and new motive forces emerge. The primary exploration is the 'breathing' quality of music, the ability of a musical phrase to expand and contract organically:

In the perception of a musical formation by the ear as organized, *intoned* motion all of the stages occur as essential qualities of a unified dynamic process in which, on the one hand, there is a continuous interaction of tones and sound complexes and, on the other, each moment of sounding is determined by the entire tonality of the given correlations of tones; *i.e.*, it is not merely an adding together of bar units, but rather the product of elements of different degrees of tension.⁸³

⁸² Asafiev gives an example of a rondo where a repetition of the original theme is cut short or 'broken'

⁸³ Tull, "B. V. Asaf'ev's "Musical Form as a Process": Translation and Commentary. (Volumes I - I I I)," 317-18. (original emphasis)

Expressive devices stimulate this contraction and expansion of musical motion. In the formation of melody, Asafiev states that 'shifts' from one intonation to another and 'opevanie.' According to Tull, "the term *opevanie* conveys an idea of decoration or embellishment of individual tones."⁸⁴ are the two fundamental techniques. In a further simplification of his assessment of musical motion, Asafiev begins a thread of discussion that continues throughout the remainder of *Musical Form as a Process*, and *Intonations*, that melody is formed by the alternation of steps and leaps: an recurring statement is his belief is that a leap should be followed by stepwise motion in the opposite direction.

Asafiev considers the effect of dissonance and consonance in the formation of music, rather than specific dissonant or consonant sound combinations. As a rule, dissonance implies continuation. This can be observed in horizontal (melodic lines), or in vertical combinations (chords). In every historical period, there are certain correlations that generate a feeling of instability and contrast, if this dissonance is used frequently enough it loses its expressive value and becomes less effective in its intention. Consonance and dissonance within a particular mode can also be treated colouristically as each other's opposite. In practice, the evolution of the cadence embodies the changes in the social status of particular dissonances and consonances. Asafiev portrays this as the 'decomposition' of the cadence in favour of the continuation of melody. Furthermore, he recognises that composers at the start of the nineteenth century started to consider dissonance as a possibility for the initial stimulus of a work.

Sequences are useful in the organisation of musical material as a means of continuation. However, as previously stated, they cause tension to dissipate as they are repeating familiar material. Asafiev supposes that the classical era found sequences much less significant than

⁸⁴ "B. V. Asaf'ev's "Musical Form as a Process": Translation and Commentary. (Volumes I - III)," 582 (Commentary).

Asafiev later describes *opevanie* as, "the rotation around a certain point or harmonic sphere." "B. V. Asaf'ev's "Musical Form as a Process": Translation and Commentary. (Volumes I - III)," 329.

later periods, and the use of sequence in the second half of the nineteenth century was essential in the expansive structures that emerged in the formation of music.

On a larger scale, a similar technique for continuation or expansion of musical forms is the repetition of larger segments in a different tonal sphere. This is referred to as “parallel executions”⁸⁵ of material. This technique has its advantages in the expansion of structure, but also its clear limits when considering the stimuli of motion. The degree to which modulation—whether intensively executed through the use of sequence, or less so in the construction of parallel sections of music—is felt as stimulus to motion by the listener is reliant on how accustomed the ear is to this phenomena.

3.7 Principles of Identity and Contrast

Asafiev introduces and defines two important conceptual elements of analysis that have been alluded to previously: the principle of identity, and the principle of contrast. Simply put, the principle of identity refers to the identifying factors that become apparent through the repetition of material, and the principle of contrast emerges when considering the comparison of dissimilar material. Asafiev defines them:

Principle of identity: “the succession or periodic recurrence of similar, or even completely identical combinations”

Principle of contrast: “the succession of intonations which are opposed to the preceding sound complexes”⁸⁶

One principle naturally evokes the other. However, one principle will generally be more important than the other in a given work, leading to the possibility of categorisation of forms by principle.

⁸⁵ "B. V. Asaf'ev's "Musical Form as a Process": Translation and Commentary. (Volumes I - III)," 393.

⁸⁶ "B. V. Asaf'ev's "Musical Form as a Process": Translation and Commentary. (Volumes I - III)," 353.

3.7.1 Forms Based on the Principle of Identity

This section is in many ways a continuation of section 3.3. It is separated for the same reason that Asafiev approaches these forms separately to the exposition of his theories on motion and memorisation in part one: in his discussion he makes it clear that the forms or ‘schemes’ that have become crystallised traditions over the course of music history have emerged as a result of the principles of the *formation* of music. Asafiev impresses upon the reader the need to recognise the existence of both the principle of identity and the principle of contrast in all musical formation, explaining that neither principle can be autonomous in existence, but one will naturally prevail as the stronger force. Forms that chiefly evoke elements of identity are by no means simple, or even simply distinguishable—the principle of identity in any given network of sound combinations can be quickly complicated by elements of contrast.

Forms lying within the category of ‘principle of identity’ can be divided into two basic groups. The first group is variation forms and the second is imitative and canonic forms. Asafiev describes the rise of imitation as a device of formation as a very logical and rational process occurring over a long period of time. Imitation is established as the repetition and use of identical elements, whereas canon and fugue develop similar elements in formation. Asafiev asserts that through the development of the canon, the more complex form of the fugue evolved. The peak in the development of fugue as an independent form is identified as the *Well Tempered Clavier* (Bach, 1722/1742) before the fugue was assimilated into part of sonata form. The balance between the principle of identity and the principle of contrast changed in the evolution of the fugue, as complexities established a more prevalent component of contrast in motion. As recognised throughout *Musical Form as a Process*, the evolution of imitative and fugal forms did not cease when they reached their peak, rather were incorporated into the next forms that were to emerge, once again displaying Asafiev’s dialectical theory of the evolution of musical formation (the sub current of evolutionary dialectics initially discussed in section 1.1, is continued in section 4.4).

When discussing the principle of identity, Asafiev draws parallels between the early *cantus firmus* and the *leitmotifs* of Wagner, referencing the fundamental idea of memory requiring repetition of elements to provide constructive unity. In theory, there exists a threshold for the retention of an intonation in the listener's memory, based on the regularity and distance between repetitions, amongst other factors.

It is possible to pinpoint a number of features of identity such as tempos in cyclic compositions, timbre (especially in the Romantics and Impressionists), dynamics, rhythm, cadence, and texture.

3.7.2 Forms Based on the Principle of Contrast

Asafiev dedicates his entire eighth chapter⁸⁷ to scrutinising the elements of contrast in sonata form as, "the highest expression of this principle [the principle of contrast] is the form of the sonata (symphonic) allegro."⁸⁸ He asserts that the components identified previously—impetus, breaking of equilibrium, restoration of equilibrium—are apparent in all the elements of sonata form, individually and as a whole. In chapter eight, Asafiev takes the reader through the various components of the socially accepted scheme of sonata form, noting points of identity and contrast.

The contrasting first and second subjects (commonly in the tonic and dominant keys, respectively) are connected by transitional material, constructed in a way that joins, but does not diminish the contrast. This contrast, and inevitable comparison, compels further motion, given the socially assimilated understanding of the 'tonic-to-dominant' complex. The cadence that brings the exposition to a close serves not only as the purposeful braking of musical energy, but also the impetus for continuation of motion. The features in this initial group of themes naturally determine much about the consequential development of the sonata movement.

⁸⁷ "B. V. Asaf'ev's "Musical Form as a Process": Translation and Commentary. (Volumes I - III)," 384-95.

⁸⁸ "B. V. Asaf'ev's "Musical Form as a Process": Translation and Commentary. (Volumes I - III)," 384. (original brackets)

During the dissection of elements of contrast present in the form of the sonata allegro, Asafiev reminds the reader in his footnotes to the previously mentioned concept of a 'theme' within the context of a theme and variations (section 3.3). Asafiev's treatment of the first subject in sonata form is equivalent to his treatment of the theme in any other scheme (such as a theme and variations movement). This approach to the idea of a 'theme' is essential in the underlying understanding of the principle of contrast in sonata form. The theme is the central focus of the entire work and all other parts are contrasting, and thus, subsidiary to it.

The features of the theme/first subject are magnified if preceded by a slow introduction—the more contrasting the introduction, the more intense the accumulative build-up of musical energy, and by extension, the discharge of this energy. Through the conceptual understanding of the perception of contrast and the process of formation, the constant fluctuations of musical energy are exposed, and can be acknowledged as 'dynamic' (see section 3.4). Asafiev addresses this important crux of his theoretical outlook:

Thus we approach what is most difficult in the analysis of the process of musical formation—the disclosure of correlations of consecutiveness and simultaneity [sic] in a musical composition which exists both as a dynamically mobile formation, saturated with contrasts, and as the unity which is the result of this formation....The dialectic of consecutiveness and simultaneity, from the point of view of form, becomes the dialectic of formation and crystallization.⁸⁹

Asafiev pursues this line of inquiry and refines his discussion of the dialectic of crystallisation in volume two, *Intonations* (chapter 4). As addressed previously, the dialectic of formation is constructed through interplay of both the principle of identity and the principle of contrast. The majority of Classical and Romantic sonatas repeat the exposition, clearly relying on the principle of identity to assimilate the already introduced sound complexes in the memory. The repeated instability of the final cadence of the exposition leads to further breaking of equilibrium in the 'development' section. As Asafiev puts it:

⁸⁹ "B. V. Asaf'ev's "Musical Form as a Process": Translation and Commentary. (Volumes I - III)," 404.

The opposition of thematic schemes at a distance is transformed into the collision of contrasting elements in direct encounter, in contiguity and interchange.⁹⁰

It is possible in each case to assess how a composer transforms the elements that he presents in the exposition, into the dynamic display of contrasting fragments. In this way Asafiev approaches the sonata form as a purposeful 'working out' of the unbalance achieved in the initial parts. As such, the final chapter of this study will attempt to identify the contrasting building blocks of Asafiev's own composition and the resulting forms that come about from his efforts to restore equilibrium.

3.8 **Motoric Motion**

Asafiev speaks of the rational development of motion through progressions, characteristic and accessible to a given intonational environment. The fundamental logic underpinning this notion is that music is perceivable as motoric motion, but not as uniform motion. To illustrate, Asafiev returns to the idea of sequences (previously discussed in section 3.6). Asafiev asserts that sequence is the only time when uniform motion is present in comprehensible music (where motion is continued either up or down, without any original material exerting external influence on the motion, giving a feeling of inertia). This is not to say that sequential motion cannot be an effective expressive medium, rather that whilst a sequence is transpiring, development of the musical fabric is suspended. At the other end of the spectrum from sequential motion is the purposeful pursuit of new sound combinations. Between these points lies the creation of accessible, yet innovative correlations.

Returning to the overall 'motor' quality of music, the duration of the braking of musical motion is directly proportionate to the length and intensity of the preceding material. The forward momentum of sound combinations is created through the exchange of contrasting elements, perceived as rational only due to the presence of identical or similar elements. Hence,

⁹⁰ "B. V. Asaf'ev's "Musical Form as a Process": Translation and Commentary. (Volumes I - III)," 392.

a composition may be assessed in a purely dialectical manner: with all parts and features designated as thesis and antithesis, the synthesis becomes the new point of departure in its exposure.

In chapter eight of *Musical Form as a Process*, Asafiev discusses the expanded symphonic sonata form of the nineteenth century.⁹¹ He asserts his belief that the 'working out' of ideas in the development section of sonata form had expanded so greatly in size and intensity that the coda (after the reprise) was necessarily expanded also, so as to organically bring motion to a halt. The motoric symmetry of the expansion and contraction of motion is therefore reflected in the four sections of the sonata form. Asafiev juxtaposes this idea with the previously announced three-part construction of impetus, development, conclusion; or thesis, antithesis, synthesis. His resounding theory is therefore that the forms themselves, the constructed schemes that evolve are not permanent, nor even stable: if a form cannot sufficiently accommodate the synthesis of contrasting thesis and antithesis (achieving quality from quantity), it must change. Asafiev states in his final paragraph:

[My] principle endeavour was to formulate, in the most general way, the premises of the dialectic of musical formation, as they emerge from a dynamic study of musical form, a study rejecting the self-sufficing evolution of "mute" form-schemes, and examining form as an intonational process of organizing, which is to say, as a medium and an aspect of the public exposure of music.⁹²

Through his employment of these principles, an obvious subcurrent of Marxist dialectics and his own theory of intonations, he presents the reader with his ideas on the process of the formation of music—how he believes music successfully starts, continues, and concludes—and how these ideas can be employed in the analysis of musical motion.

Within the lineage of music semioticians, Asafiev in many ways pre-empted the major semiotic developments of the twentieth century (Monelle refers to him as a 'proto-

⁹¹ "B. V. Asaf'ev's "Musical Form as a Process": Translation and Commentary. (Volumes I - III)," 428.

⁹² "B. V. Asaf'ev's "Musical Form as a Process": Translation and Commentary. (Volumes I - III)," 503.

semiotician'⁹³). It might be argued that Asafiev's possible political agenda detracts from his authority, however there is no denying the similarities between his philosophical stance and that of Leonard B. Meyer and Malcolm Budd, a notion propagated by Raymond Monelle in *Linguistics and Semiotics in Music*.⁹⁴ Meyer is concerned with the link between emotions and musical expectation. In the unfolding of music there are stylistic norms; the alteration of which triggers emotional response. Asafiev does not go so far as to explicitly relate musical expectation to emotion, as Meyer does. He does, however, speak of familiar and unfamiliar musical constructions. Meaning—in Meyer's case the meaning of emotional response, and in Asafiev's the meaning of comprehension by a society—is a tangible force in music.

⁹³ Raymond Monelle, *Linguistics and Semiotics in Music* (London: Routledge, 1992).

⁹⁴ *Ibid.*

4 Intonations

4.1 Musical Form as a Process, Volume II: Intonations

Intonations—as Asafiev explains in his opening statement—is not so much a continuation, but a development of *Musical Form as a Process*; a volume that delivers a number of hypotheses on the reasons why music comes to be expressed in one way and not another. In his previous work, Asafiev limited himself to matters concerning the construction of music: “a study of *how* music runs its course, how, having arisen, it continues, and how its motion is brought to a stop.”⁹⁵ In *Intonations* he turns his attention to other concerns, and central to these is an exploration of how the evolution of music is linked with the expression of human thought.

Before addressing the main themes of the work, Asafiev takes the opportunity, “In Lieu of an Introduction,”⁹⁶ to set out some of his fundamental beliefs. In this way, he makes sure that the reader clearly understands that when he approaches the subject of the development of musical elements and the strengthening of musical phenomena as distinct from speech, the process he alludes to is one that never loses its links to origins in word, dance or physical mimicry. This is important to his construction of the “protracted liberation of music from the “temporal arts.”⁹⁷ He also acknowledges the scientific study of pitch and asserts its irrelevance in this particular study. It is interesting therefore, to note that he goes on to use the development of equal temperament, and its acceptance by society, as an example later. Asafiev chooses this moment to reiterate the origins of intervals in the voice, a point that he closely considered in *Musical Form as a Process*.

Asafiev insists that the history of European music began with the interval, and that this was the first purely musical element to be understood by the European public consciousness. Rhythmic intonation developed in several different directions. Much of the rest of the opening

⁹⁵ Tull, “B. V. Asafiev’s “Musical Form as a Process”: Translation and Commentary. (Volumes I - I I I),” 600. (original emphasis)

⁹⁶ The opening statement of *Intonations* is titled In Lieu of an Introduction.

⁹⁷ Tull, “B. V. Asafiev’s “Musical Form as a Process”: Translation and Commentary. (Volumes I - I I I),” 601.

statement is taken to explain, or excuse, his own inability to articulate his arguments and opinions in an easily understood manner. He also addresses the necessity for the reader to not merely read, but to *hear* the book. The way in which he asks listeners to hear ‘intonationally’ is evaluated in section 4.3.

Around the same time that Asafiev was working on *Intonations*, American philosopher Susanne Langer (1895-1985) was working on her first significant work: *Philosophy in a New Key* (published in 1942)⁹⁸. This important work on the human process of symbolic interpretation, shares a number of ideas with Asafiev’s *Intonations*. Although Langer’s study is much more focussed on the broader ideas of the unconscious abstraction of meaning from symbols, and Asafiev’s is more concerned with the idea that a composition can be symbolic of reality, there are remarkable similarities, not least the idea of a shared vocabulary of symbols (Langer) or intonations (Asafiev) within a given society or community. It is possible that similarities arose from a mutual source of inspiration: French philosopher, Henri Bergson (1859-1941). The link between Asafiev and Bergson is discussed in Elina Viljanen’s masters dissertation⁹⁹, however warrants further exploration in future research.

4.2 Specific Intonational Elements

Asafiev views any composition as the collective sounding of intonational elements. These elements may be acknowledged separately as intonationally expressive and thus meaningful. The composition of a work is not the pouring of these elements into a given mould—‘form as a scheme’—rather it is the sounding of these elements from the initial sound through to the concluding sound that creates the form—‘form as a process’. This is, as the title suggests, much more thoroughly explained in the first volume—*Musical Form as a Process*—however it is

⁹⁸ Susanne Katherina Knauth Langer, *Philosophy in a New Key: A Study in the Symbolism of Reason, Rite, and Art* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1957).

⁹⁹ Viljanen, "Boris Asaf'ev and the Soviet Musicology."

important to bear this approach in mind as we individually address compositional elements: intervals, tonalities, etc.

4.2.1 Intervals

As with every intonational element, Asafiev believes that meaning of each interval and the degree of tension has been established and consolidated in the consciousness of society as they evolved. Therefore, intonational significance belongs to and owes its existence to society. Asafiev speaks of intervals as an expressive musical element having “precise degrees of tension.” He further states that, “the prevalence of any given interval in the music of any time period or genre, within a given epoch, is a consequence of *intonational selection*, occurring under the influence of the public consciousness, and becomes a manifestation of *style*.”¹⁰⁰ Different intervals have different implications of tension; they are meaningful in this way. For example, the interval of a perfect fifth is identified as lending itself to vocal surmountability, more so than the tritone.

4.2.2 Tonalities

As with intervals, tonalities can be seen as determinants of intonational tension. Asafiev approaches the tonality of a given work or section of music as a sphere to which the elements contribute. Modulations are viewed as a transference of the centre of the sphere to a new point and as a transference of intonational tension. The way in which tonalities relate to each other within a work is intonationally significant (as discussed in chapter 3.6).

¹⁰⁰ Tull, "B. V. Asaf'ev's "Musical Form as a Process": Translation and Commentary. (Volumes I - I I I)," 616. (original emphasis)

4.2.3 Rhythm

Asafiev asserts that rhythm is a fundamental building block of music; for without duration, sound does not exist. Asafiev often refers to rhythm as a 'governing' force in a given composition; "[the] interval, governed (organized) by rhythm, forms the simplest, shortest, and most persistently expressive rhythmic intonational form."¹⁰¹ In many instances, rhythm is the first element to be mentioned in the adaptation of folk intonations into contemporary compositions. Rhythms are often drawn from traditional dances and form the organisation of Western harmonies; this is one of the simplest examples of nationalism in music.

4.2.4 Organisation of Elements

The intonational elements of a composition are inextricably linked to each other. The approach that Asafiev takes is to acknowledge that one aspect of music is always 'governed' by another. Asafiev leads the reader to an understanding of how intonations can be organised, without resorting to formalistic means, through examples of composers whom he admires:

Hindemith does not ask himself whether this [writing for orchestra in chamber style] is harmony or polyphony. It is always intonation, the statement of thoughts *in voice-leading* governed by rhythm, not formally, but so that the rhythm helps to interpret the developmental course of ideas. There are no dead or passive voices. There is no self-loving virtuosity, but rather, the *concertante* quality is often present as dialogue, competition, or aphoristic statements of the voices, and is shaped with technical brilliance.¹⁰²

In music composed in this way, nothing is created without purpose. The link between voice leading and rhythm illuminated in the above passage refers to the motivation of Hindemith in writing in one way and not another. Asafiev reasons for the way in which sound complexes are, or should be, presented.

¹⁰¹ "B. V. Asafiev's "Musical Form as a Process": Translation and Commentary. (Volumes I - I I I)," 618-19.

¹⁰² "B. V. Asafiev's "Musical Form as a Process": Translation and Commentary. (Volumes I - I I I)," 688. (original emphasis)

4.2.5 Conflicts between elements

Elements of sound complexes are not always congruent, and tension can arise between intonations. Asafiev asserts the possibility of such a conflict between the rhythmic of mute intonation (steps, metric rhythm) and the rhythmic of expressive breathing. However, awareness of this often yields understanding of the composer's intention.

4.3 Intonational Hearing

Asafiev frequently returns to the concept of 'intonational hearing.' He asserts that there are different ways to listen to music, and that it is common to listen to instrumental music without perception of meaning. Intonational hearing requires much more mental activity, it requires strained attention. To hear in this way, is to hear and perceive all intonational elements, and grasp the meaning simultaneously:

...in such a way as to understand each moment of the movement of sound in its connection with those preceding and following it, and instantly to determine whether this connection is logical or illogical, making a determination by spontaneous feeling, without resorting to technical analysis.¹⁰³

This emphasis on understanding meaning rather than cursorily consuming music leads to Asafiev's focus on perspective. To hear intonationally is to directly comprehend an intonation within its musical context; it is connected to every other intonation that sounds. This interconnected complex of sounds is not limited to that which immediately precedes or follows in a composition, but extends beyond this to incorporate the entire work.

The logical unfolding of music *attracts* the ear, and thus, any unexpectedness, obstacle, or simply technical awkwardness is perceived as a breach of meaning. But if this unexpectedness is calculated, occurring with the full consciousness of the composer, is only unexpected in the context of immediate succession, and is justified in further motion by some logical development, peculiar to music, the attentive ear reacts sensitively to such a "leap of thought." A sort of "arched system" of sound complexes is

¹⁰³ "B. V. Asafiev's "Musical Form as a Process": Translation and Commentary. (Volumes I - III)," 651.

formed, in which a response to any of them may arise at a distance, but not immediately. This is a phenomenon of extraordinary significance.¹⁰⁴

It is a higher level of concentration and attention to both the finer details of a composition and the broader understanding of a work as a whole that Asafiev is calling for here. It should be noted here that this stance is neither new nor particularly original. However, in the creation and perception of musical meaning (as it relates to socialism and realism) there are significant repercussions.

4.3.1 Intonational Hearing: Composers

Asafiev does not indicate that there is a problem, or that something should or could be changed in the reception of compositions. Nor does he indulge in the pretence that he could influence society. Rather, his aim is to address an audience of readers, whom he assumes to be either composers or musicologists. He urges the composer to develop the ability to hear, and therefore compose, intonationally. In Asafiev's opinion, this is essential and will result in these compositions (those created intonationally) being inevitably assimilated by the public and gaining popularity. Asafiev believes that intonational hearing in composers will ensure the production of music accessible to the proletariat and therefore acceptably socialist.

4.3.2 Intonational Hearing: Critics/Musicologists

As the composer must be able to hear intonationally, and create music in a fundamentally intonational capacity, so must the one analysing the composition be aware of the process:

[Asafiev] would wish to be understood by those musicologists who, first of all, are musicians, and who know that hearing and its refinement are not the least concern of music, and that the hearing, guided by the intellect, is necessary for musicologists no less than for composers.¹⁰⁵

¹⁰⁴ "B. V. Asafiev's "Musical Form as a Process": Translation and Commentary. (Volumes I - I I I)," 652-53. (original emphasis)

¹⁰⁵ "B. V. Asafiev's "Musical Form as a Process": Translation and Commentary. (Volumes I - I I I)," 623.

Again, Asafiev does not expect audiences to necessarily hear intonationally, this is not his point. For composers, to hear intonationally and to compose intonationally is to contribute a work to society, so the audience may perceive and understand the meaning of a given work. The critic without the ability to hear intonationally may misconstrue the motivation for composing in such a way. Asafiev, most laboriously, urges those who take it upon themselves to comment on and criticise musical works to first develop their aptitude in comprehending intonational meaning.

4.4 Intonational Evolution

At the heart of Asafiev's discussion is his view of the history of music, not as a chain of events, or as a sequence of compositions or composers, but as the evolution of intonations as received and assimilated by society. The discussion is suggestive of social Darwinism. He describes the popularity of a given interval in any epoch as thus:

But the prevalence of any interval in the music of any given time period or genre, with a given epoch, is the consequence of *intonational selection*, occurring under the influence of the public consciousness, and becomes a manifestation of *style*.¹⁰⁶

The term 'intonational selection' is particularly evocative of Darwin's 'natural selection,' and the terms have similar functions. Where Darwin defines natural selection as the "preservation of favourable variations and the rejection of injurious variations,"¹⁰⁷ he is of course referring to the evolution of animals in a way that accounts for the tendency for those with advantageous characteristics to survive and reproduce. Asafiev applies this notion to the evolution of musical style—the intonations that survive (and 'reproduce' so to speak) are those selected by society as the fittest. There is an inevitable naturalness, a naturally occurring evolution of intonations, that relies on popularity—this late nineteenth-century way of thinking

¹⁰⁶ "B. V. Asafiev's "Musical Form as a Process": Translation and Commentary. (Volumes I - I I I)," 616. (original emphasis)

¹⁰⁷ Charles Darwin, *Origin of Species* (University of Pennsylvania Press, 1859), 164.

has heavy Marxist undertones in the view that intonational evolution relies on the choices of the people, for the people.

In *Musical Form as a Process*, Asafiev links Antoine Meillet's (1866-1936) theory on the development of linguistics, and the socially conditioned structure of the evolution of language, with the corresponding relationship between music and the structure of society. Meillet describes his theory of causality in linguistics (as quoted by Asafiev):

The laws of phonetics or the general history of morphology in themselves cannot suffice to give an explanation of a single fact....But there is such a factor as the structure of society, the conditions of development of which evoke uninterrupted changes in language, sometimes sudden, sometimes gradual, but never completely discontinued.

Thus, language is an eminently social phenomenon....[Proceeding from the position that] language is a social institution, it is possible to draw the conclusion that linguistics is a social science, and that only social changes can evoke changes in language and clarify them for us. These changes sometimes occur quickly and directly, but more often they are mediate and indirect....[Further,] historical facts themselves never directly determine linguistic changes, and only changes of the structure of society can change the conditions of existence of a language. It is necessary to determine to which social structure any linguistic structure relates and in what way, in general, changes in the social structure find their reflection in changes in the structure of linguistics.¹⁰⁸

In combining this approach with his constructivist theory on musical formation, Asafiev strongly asserts his rationale of the constant development of musical intonations (again supported by the Marxist theory that all matter is in a state of constant change). Furthermore, he claims that the evolution of music is affected by changes in society—a claim parallel to that of Meillet.

Asafiev treats the history of music as a rising and falling in popularity of musical elements or intonations. New elements of music are born out of a declining style, rise to prominence and are assimilated into common usage and widely accepted by the mass audience. This leads to an identifiable peak in usage. At this point the intonation takes on a different meaning as it declines in popularity. As it is used and overused it becomes mechanised or ossified, leaving the way clear for the birth and propagation of a new intonation.

¹⁰⁸ Antoine Meillet quoted in Tull, "B. V. Asaf'ev's "Musical Form as a Process": Translation and Commentary. (Volumes I - III)," 331-32. (original additions)

This process of evolution is one of constant change. It strongly reflects dialecticism in the conflict of 'thesis' and 'antithesis' producing a new unity. In Asafiev's view, it is not fruitful to simply find a method of composing that reflects the current reality and continue to compose in this way. Rather, he encourages composers to include both familiar and unfamiliar elements in order for their music to engage and challenge their audience. Intonations will inevitably decline in popularity and change in meaning. Therefore, what is familiar to one audience can appear ossified to another. It is possible to gauge tension between Asafiev's desire for constant change (and progress) and the Soviet predilection for replicating popular songs for the immediate gratification of a mass audience. Although this work (*Intonations*) was written well after the reign of proletarian mass songs in the late 1920's (see chapter 1.3) there still existed the practice of sending musicians to the front line to provide immediately accessible and uplifting, patriotic songs.

As part of his theory of musical evolution, Asafiev is particularly dismissive of individualism. It is very suggestive of his fundamentally Marxist approach that compositions should be in service to the evolution of music. This attitude served him well under the scrutiny of Stalin, and in direct advice to composers, Asafiev warns against the development of a personally unique style of instrumentation:

There are profoundly personal instrumentations (a subjective instrumental style), and to draw from them is especially dangerous, for the more sharply "one's own face" occurs in instrumentation, the less chance there is that it will become generally significant. Very few works, even by great masters, turned out well as the result of prolonged efforts to achieve an instrumental style in which "their own" and the "universally significant" were mutually and organically interlaced. Glinka is one of the fortunate ones. Even Berlioz, in much of his work, is only "for himself."¹⁰⁹

This fascinating approach illuminates two major ideas. The first is that composers are obliged to compose in a way that is 'universally significant.' To achieve this one should look to the previous accomplishments in the path of musical evolution and dialectically oppose new intonations in the creation of a generally significant work. The second point is that in this

¹⁰⁹ "B. V. Asafiev's "Musical Form as a Process": Translation and Commentary. (Volumes I - I I I)," 645.

selection of previous accomplishments, one should only consider those intonations of evolutionary significance, rather than those of personal expressive value.

The composition of music is the rational selection of sound combinations. In the process of selection Asafiev asserts that the creative thought should be directed by the greater cause of musical evolution. This is not a smooth development of ideas out of proceeding ones, but a conflict of elements resolving for the benefit of society.

4.5 Intonational Crises

To reason why the musical vocabulary evolved in the way that it has, Asafiev advances his hypothesis of “intonational crises”:

...I have advanced the hypothesis of the “crises of musical intonations.” In linguistics, the processes of intonational changes of *vocabulary* in connection with social movements have long been observed, in music—hardly at all. It is not a matter of analogy, but of similar causes, which evoke, not only a renovation of the intonational vocabulary, but also more profound reconstructions of sound-thought, to the point of the decisive *rejection* of the “peaks of refined expressiveness,” just achieved, in favor of a sound “language” which is simple, clear, and realistic. At this point, the preceding forms of expression are declared to be forced, formal, etc., and continue to sound interestingly for only a few strata of listeners, while gradually dying away.¹¹⁰

Fundamental to his hypothesis is the belief that the vocabulary of music is a reflection of society, and that an explanation of change in musical practice may be found by observing the concurrent historical changes. Importantly, Asafiev asserts that composers need not be conscious of this theory or the implications of ‘intonational crises’ to be able to provide society with the music that it wants or needs:

Consciously or not, each sensitive, intelligent composer keenly senses the smallest nuances, interruptions and, even more, the changes in the intonational structure of his time, in the way in which people state their thoughts and feelings.¹¹¹

¹¹⁰ "B. V. Asafiev's "Musical Form as a Process": Translation and Commentary. (Volumes I - I I I)," 937-38.

¹¹¹ "B. V. Asafiev's "Musical Form as a Process": Translation and Commentary. (Volumes I - I I I)," 706-07.

During an intonational crisis many musical intonations become suddenly mechanised or ossified: these intonations lose their meaning for the people. Asafiev sees this as closely linked with historical crises and hereby he again stresses the link between societal development and the history of music. A symptom of intonational crisis is that numerous intonational developments and ideational directions are abandoned. Asafiev laments those composers who are not aware of these changes and continue to write in the 'old style' ('old' in the sense that he considers the developments immediately prior to an intonational crisis to be out-of-date). In place of these discarded intonations, new ideas, or re-interpretations of old elements, blossom.

The notion of a 'crisis' naturally leads one to consider the negative ramifications associated with change. However, Asafiev sees the demise of intonations as natural and is ever mindful of accentuating the positives associated with any intonational crises. This was an essential part of his approach and it served to lessen any tensions perceived between his ideas and the ideas of the stable socialist state.

Asafiev identifies and closely examines those periods in history that he believes to have instigated intonational crises. While it is not necessary to recount these here, it is important to note that Asafiev points towards the possibility of a current intonational (and therefore historical) crisis. Again, it is essential to bear in mind that Asafiev does not consider this assertion to have any negative implications. However, he does recognise that it would be most controversial to directly state that he believed he was living in a time of intonational crisis (and therefore by extension a broader crisis of Soviet society) in his writing, hence he paves the way for the reader to come to his or her own conclusions about the possibility of such a reality.

Asafiev also examines the social motivations underpinning the various periods of intonational crisis. At times of social or economical uncertainty (and hence change) any unnecessary or excessive intonation would be discarded, and instigate a return to fundamental principles. This theory places enormous responsibility on society in the shaping of musical evolution. Asafiev believed that listeners' perceptions change drastically in these 'period of crises,' so much so that an entirely new vocabulary of intonations emerges:

In a period of intonational *crises*, not only individual compositions, but also the “intonational accumulations” lying at the root of the music of the epoch, which determine both the listeners’ requirements from musical art and the prevailing tastes, either fall into decay or seem artificial to the new social strata of listeners. At such a time, music seemingly discards everything superfluous, formally complex, or excessively subjective or abstract, in the name of “truth of sounds,” and the battle for new intonations, for new expressiveness, begins. This battle is accomplished by a re-evaluation of the prevailing musical values in light of the new listeners’ ideology. It is so much sharper if it coincides with political upheavals and a reconstruction of the state and social structures.¹¹²

The inclination of the reader to link intonational crises with a return to primitive art would be dangerous territory for Asafiev and he goes to great lengths to promote the “qualitatively different treatment of the “elements of primitive mastery”” that are the result of an intonational crisis.¹¹³

4.6 Role of Mass Society

Asafiev’s notion that the public consciousness is responsible for the evolution of intonations is clearly in line with Marxist ideology. The people, as a collective, select intonations by way of popularity and therefore control the development of musical expression.

Asafiev provides commentary on a most delicate subject—the assimilation of Western elements into the Russian musical language. As discussed in section 1.4, the influence of contemporary Western experimentation was often classed as formalism. This is perhaps why Asafiev restricts his discussion of assimilation of intonations to a period over a century prior. Asafiev speaks with great pride in his national heritage, and his work is consistently evocative of Russian nationalism (at times, one could even suggest this may be heavy-handed and slightly strained). Regardless, this patriotic undercurrent is present in his discussion of the ideal balance between Russian and ‘Western’ elements that can be achieved only through an active awareness of society’s intonational vocabulary and intonational desires. Russian society by

¹¹² "B. V. Asaf'ev's "Musical Form as a Process": Translation and Commentary. (Volumes I - I I I)," 746. (original emphasis)

¹¹³ "B. V. Asaf'ev's "Musical Form as a Process": Translation and Commentary. (Volumes I - I I I)," 747.

means of its 'popularity contest' decided, in the 17th and 18th centuries, which elements of Western musical culture should be assimilated into the Russian system of composition. The mass society also had the power to discard those intonations that do not resonate as meaningful:

...systems of music (intervals, scales, modes) which are rationally invented or brought forth with proud subjectivity as "my language,"¹¹⁴ however perfect and precise they may be, will not become viable if they do not find support in a given stage of intonation as stipulated by the public consciousness.

The people, the culture, and the historical epoch define the stages of intonation, and through intonation are determined both the means of musical expression, and the selection and interconnection of musical elements.¹¹⁵

The composer then must be attentive to the intonational needs of the public. The public generates musical meaning: if the composer is aware of the intonational vocabulary of the receiving public, he can write works in a way that they will be understood. Asafiev believes that the relationship of composer to society is one of provider and auditor. A successful Soviet composer gives the society what it wants. Asafiev praises Gluck:

He [Gluck] well understood, just what people thirst to hear in music, and how, and why, and he created a series of most expressive, lyric tragedies, saturating them with the intonations desired by the epoch and—through these intonations—with contemporary content.¹¹⁶

This example exposes clear parallels with Marxism and, more specifically, with socialist realism—the ideal culture answering the needs and desires of the masses providing a universality of music that directly speaks to the people.

An interesting by-product of this emphasis on society's importance is that 'with great power comes great responsibility.' By placing responsibility in the hands of society, this theory gives a basis on which to 'blame' society. It is, in Asafiev's opinion, of great importance to give society what it desires. If this ruling by popularity is coupled with the fundamentally dialectical

¹¹⁴ This is not a reference to nationalism, rather a comment on a composer's individual language.

¹¹⁵ Tull, "B. V. Asaf'ev's "Musical Form as a Process": Translation and Commentary. (Volumes I - I I)," 613.

¹¹⁶ "B. V. Asaf'ev's "Musical Form as a Process": Translation and Commentary. (Volumes I - I I I)," 705.

philosophy of continuous, qualitative change then any number of approaches to musical composition can be argued within this framework. It is possible to view *Intonations* as a guidebook for substantiating musical conformity and/or exploration as well as, or perhaps even rather than, the intended commentary on why music is composed in one way and not another.

By discussing the history of development in juxtaposition with society's reluctance to comprehend complexities, Asafiev illuminates an interesting tension between the needs of the perceiving mass and the inevitable experiments of composers:

...beyond the complexities of perception, there are in operation even more obstacles of a cultural-historical order; professional hearing ... too much outstrips the hearing of the perceiving mass. From this results the inevitability of the formal "refinement" and "solitude" of innovators, if they choose the path of subjective searchings, creating their own sound language, avoiding universally recognized intonations which convey comprehensible meaning to everyone. These solitary experiments sometimes, therefore, are swallowed up by oblivion and no one returns to them, but sometimes they are picked up and become "audible" (people are amazed by them!), because the process of auditory perception from other positions has led to the same discoveries by listeners now better prepared by their historical and cultural development.¹¹⁷

Society is always changing and evolving and as society's repository of meaningful intonations changes, some compositions will become more or less accessible. Asafiev also discusses how compositions can have different meaning to different people due to the same phenomenon. This is, for example, how a generation may consume a given composition as pleasant background music, where it once was decidedly humorous and attention grabbing.

Marxist and Leninist ideology underlies the discussion of the relationship between mass society and music. The role of society is of great importance, not just as consumer and critic, but much more—the public holds the repository of musical style, as such it decides and controls musical meaning. A socialist composer is one that composes *for* mass society: there is an inherent obligation to the people.

¹¹⁷ "B. V. Asaf'ev's "Musical Form as a Process": Translation and Commentary. (Volumes I - I I I)," 656-57.

4.7 Importance of Balance between Familiar and Unfamiliar Elements

The idea of assimilating new intonations through new compositions that consist of both familiar and unfamiliar intonations has been introduced in *Musical Form as a Process*, and is re-introduced in *Intonations*. The selection of commonplace intonations as a bridge to the new intonations is a founding principle in this work. One of the most significant factors that come from Asafiev's approach is the importance he places on establishing balance between familiar and unfamiliar intonations in new compositions. This is directly related to the role of society. In order for the audience to perceive meaning in a given composition, there needs to be the presence of meaningful, and therefore familiar, elements:

All great, as well as less great, but still "firmly established," musical compositions inevitably have within them "commonplace intonations" of the epoch which engendered them. That is why contemporaries, recognizing in these intonations "native," "familiar," "beloved" elements, accept the given composition through them, first "on faith"; then gradually, with the help of familiar intonations as "guides," the hearing builds a bridge to the comprehension of the remaining "components" of the composition. After a time, the new intonations enter into "everyday use," and judgements about subsequent compositions are formed in relation to them.¹¹⁸

To illustrate the point, let us consider the perceived tension between the Soviet practice of providing mass songs to quench the public's thirst for the familiar. These songs give the public what it most desires: "[by] whatever intonations an epoch has been saturated, that is what it has wished to hear in music."¹¹⁹ Asafiev acknowledges this strong force many times throughout his writing. The familiar intonations are the means by which an audience may come to understand the full meaning of a work. An intonationally aware composer is one who understands the intonational vocabulary of the society he is creating for, and is not afraid—or ashamed—to count common intonations in his inventory. Asafiev often refers to these standard intonations as the 'small change' of compositional language, and submits that composers such as Mozart and Beethoven are prime examples of the successful incorporation of such tools.

¹¹⁸ "B. V. Asafiev's "Musical Form as a Process": Translation and Commentary. (Volumes I - I I I)," 632.

¹¹⁹ "B. V. Asafiev's "Musical Form as a Process": Translation and Commentary. (Volumes I - I I I)," 703.

In direct opposition to this is the dialectical process of evolution in music. Out of the remains of intonations that have passed their peak and no longer hold the same meaning, composers fashion new, unfamiliar elements—they are foreign to audiences, and although they may hold great meaning in the language of the composer, they are meaningless to the public until they can be understood. They are also essential in holding the attention of an audience. New intonations find their way into society's repository of commonly understood intonations by pairing with the familiar and accessible.

In Asafiev's opinion, it is of utmost importance for a composer to find a balance between the necessary familiar elements that are signposts for comprehension of a new work and the exploration of new sound complexes. If the familiar intonations outweigh the unfamiliar there is no progress; and if no new elements are introduced the familiar intonations will lose their meaning (and the listener will consequently lose interest). On the other hand, if unfamiliar elements proliferate, the audience will be unable to grasp the meaning of the music, and consequently such works are unlikely to receive wide distribution—even if the new intonations are deserving of attention.

4.8 **Socialist Realism**

As discussed in chapter 1, the guiding principle for composition following the resolution of 1932 was socialist realism. In *Intonations*, Asafiev attempts a compelling aesthetic theory that could ultimately allow composers, critics, and musicologists to align their creativity with the goals of the State. In his assessment, the ideal composition of socialist realism would have a balance between intonations familiar and unfamiliar. In the eyes of the Party, socialism was the perfect and stable system. Therefore, it follows that the reflection of this reality would be through perfect and stable art. Asafiev speaks of the stability of intonations:

In the penetration into the public consciousness of intonations characteristic of the epoch, in the seizing upon them by the hearing, in their stability in the consciousness, lies a fundamental, most important quality—the feeling of the close, inseparable link of music with reality, and consequently, that “Ariadne's thread” which leads the listener

into the state of consciousness of the composer and into the meaning of his conceptions.¹²⁰

The link of communication between musical creation and its audience is through the selection of intonations that have been assimilated into the intonational vocabulary and therefore may be understood and evaluated in perception. Asafiev uses Beethoven as his prime example of a 'realistic' composer throughout *Intonations*. Initially, this appears hypocritical considering his previously mentioned approach to musical evolution as a whole, rather than a chain of individual compositions or composers. However, the treatment that Beethoven receives is consistently that of one who has selected intonations from his epoch and exposed them in authentic conjugations, as a reflection of his surrounding reality. In this way, the 'genius' of Beethoven is used as a supporting device for Asafiev's theories, rather than a contradiction:

Beethoven, the genius of European music,...is still indebted for what he became, in terms of the content of his art ... to a profound recognition of the effective intonations of his epoch as the foundation of his creation, and in this lies the essence of his contact with realism....

But Beethoven is the most convincing example, to me, of the exposure of European music as the reflection of reality through intonation, and in this lies the force and persuasiveness of his art as an art well-grounded in reality.¹²¹

The interconnectedness of Asafiev's theoretical writing is perhaps the most convincing aspect of his argument. In these few sentences, he links the responsibility to compose realistically to the societal context and the intonational repository from which new creation is born. It is understandable that this kind of substantiated logic would be used by the Soviet Party to further the cause of socialist realism (see section 2.5).

In addressing the issues associated with intonational analysis, Asafiev uses the principles of materialism to clarify his point:

For we are not concerned with an auditory game of "hide and seek" (to find a sound complex corresponding to the one intoned), nor the wandering of the ear in a labyrinth

¹²⁰ "B. V. Asafiev's "Musical Form as a Process": Translation and Commentary. (Volumes I - I I I)," 726.

¹²¹ "B. V. Asafiev's "Musical Form as a Process": Translation and Commentary. (Volumes I - I I I)," 744-45.

of sound combinations, nor the solution of problems of sound perspective, but rather, with the fact that, in the highest stages of its development, music, as *meaning*, becomes a *reflection* of its surrounding reality, perceived and transformed or reorganized by man, and is equal to all other manifestations of human consciousness.¹²²

According to materialistic principles, matter is the only reality, and that which is perceived is a reflection of the surrounding reality. Therefore the perception of music, including in analysis, should be through the acceptance of the connection between the human consciousness and reality. The representation of reality is through the selection of musical intonations appropriate to the epoch. According to Asafiev, if a work is analysed as such, it may be ascertained whether the composition is of realistic merit.

Asafiev brings into question other methods for deriving meaning from a composition; pointing to superficial interpretation of a composer's intention by critics concerned with the search for realism in music:

In recent times, evaluation, both positive and negative of realistic musical compositions from the "viewpoint of the feeling of the critic" is more and more finding a place for itself in our criticism. Some compositions, according to some kinds of indicators (most often plot or program indicators) are declared to be unconditionally realistic, others, absolutely not, and this is in the face of a very superficial treatments of the composer's intention, and of the "obstacles" to musical-creative work in the searches for a new style in an epoch of the most complex "crisis of intonations." In place of realism, either condensed emotionalism, or "this pleases me" or sometimes even the promising title of a composition is [sufficient].¹²³

In this rare commentary on his epoch, Asafiev argues for the need for a far greater understanding on behalf of those assessing musical creation. He calls for the critic to look beyond the superficial wrapping of a work and to instead endeavour to understand the intonational intention of a composition—which (for Asafiev) can only be achieved if the critic exercises intonational hearing (see section 4.3). Asafiev also asserts the possibility of having a realistic method for the selection of intonations in a given composition, yet not necessarily arriving at a realistic essence in the work. Furthermore, he suggests that the opposite may be

¹²² "B. V. Asaf'ev's "Musical Form as a Process": Translation and Commentary. (Volumes I - I I I)," 654. (original emphasis)

¹²³ "B. V. Asaf'ev's "Musical Form as a Process": Translation and Commentary. (Volumes I - I I I)," 729-30. (Tull's addition)

true: a complex of unfamiliar intonations may gain acceptance and recognition through the authentic, realistic essence of the composition itself. This added layer of complexity raises the distinct possibility of a misunderstanding that Asafiev might be providing some 'formula for composition.' He is providing hypothetical and theoretical paths for further enquiry, but any notion that he is proposing his theory of intonations as a method for achieving realism in music would be overly simplistic.

5 An Assessment of the *Sonata for Solo Viola*

As discussed in section 2.3, for a number of years following 1932, Asafiev withdrew from the academic spotlight to redirect his focus to composition. It was during this time that he composed many notable works, including two of his most famous ballets: *The Fountain of Bakhchisarai* (1933) and *The Prisoner of the Caucasus* (1936). During this period Asafiev also composed the *Sonata for Solo Viola* (1938), dedicated to Aleksandr Mikhailovich Ryvkin (1893-1951), violist of the Glazunov Quartet.

As a violist, it cannot be ignored that until very recently it has been rare to stumble across solo viola works. Hence, it would be remiss not to mention J.S. Bach's *Six Suites for Unaccompanied Cello* (circa 1717-1723) that are regularly performed on viola, the *3 Suites for Solo Viola* (1916) by Max Reger, and of course, the numerous sonatas composed by Hindemith throughout his lifetime. Asafiev's *Sonata* in fact bears many links to its ancestors, especially the Bach Suites, and this relationship is explored at various points in this chapter.

As the *Sonata* was composed between the two volumes of *Musical Form as a Process*, this chapter aims to determine how it relates to the first volume of *Musical Form as a Process*, and to what extent it anticipates the second volume, *Intonations*. It does not intend to attempt a complete 'intonational analysis' of Asafiev's *Sonata*. Rather, it is an assessment of Asafiev's music in terms of his evolving theory: the discussion seeks to identify elements in the work that relate to Asafiev's musicological theories and whether this work might be understood within the expectations of socialist realism. Socialist realism, and the obligation of Soviet composers not to indulge in 'formalism,' must have been near the forefront of Asafiev's mind when writing the *Sonata*, given that it was composed only two years after his involvement with the official denunciation of Shostakovich's *Lady Macbeth of the Mtsensk District*, and especially considering his carefully worded response, referred to in section 2.3. This discussion will evaluate the way in which the *Sonata* potentially embodies Asafiev's requirements for a balance between the familiar and the unfamiliar, which, as we have seen in earlier chapters, was key (in his view) to the creation of successful socialist realist music.

5.1 Musical Form as a Process

The first volume of Asafiev's *Musical Form as a Process* was written during the period in the late 1920s when Asafiev was associated with the more progressive *ACM*. However, it was also as a time when the influence of the *ACM* was declining, and the conservative *RAPM* was increasing in power and influence. It is likely that the volume would have been ill-favoured amongst the proletarian factions due to Asafiev's conflicting opinion that music must evolve beyond the basic, and even primitive, mass music that the *RAPM* promoted. The viola *Sonata*, on the other hand, was composed eighteen years later. One question of great interest to this study is to what extent this work complies with Asafiev's prescribed process for musical creation. Asafiev elaborates in great detail the process of musical meaning emerging from the individual phrases, motives, chords or melodies—that is, the intonations that are perceived by the audience. However, the 1932 Resolution and the subsequent *Lady Macbeth* incident changed many aspects of the musical profession. It is intriguing to consider the *Sonata* in terms of the theories expressed in *Musical Form as a Process* to elucidate to what extent it conforms to the composer's earlier views.

5.1.1 Impetus and Terminus

We might consider the *Sonata* in terms of the 'impetus, motion and terminus' that was so rigorously explored in *Musical Form as Process*. At its broadest level, Asafiev's *Sonata for Solo Viola* is motion from the first point of intoning (the first note, D3) to the concluding sound of D5 (final note of the fourth movement). Within this form, one can simultaneously recognise the impetuses and brakings that occur. The clearest of these occur at the end-point cadence of each movement, and the subsequent commencing impetus of the following one. The following discussion, therefore, aims to demonstrate the way in which the initial impetus does not find its ultimate terminus (equilibrium is not restored) until the final cadence of the last movement.

The *Sonata* is in four movements, following a classically conventional succession of movements and keys:

- I. Allegro (D minor)
- II. Aria: Adagio (A minor)
- III. Scherzo: Allegro (A major)
- IV. Finale: Andante mosso (D minor)

The opening bars of the first movement yield to the basic components of musical organization as stated in the opening of chapter one of *Musical Form as a Process*: motion and memorization. The motion originates from the note D, the tonal centre of this movement and the final movement. The music moves in stepwise motion up to F before leaping down to a tone below the starting note, C \flat , then returns to rest on the original D.



Figure 2: *Sonata for Viola Solo* (1938), by Boris Asafiev, Mvt. 1: Allegro, bars 1-8

The opening rotation around the tone D is a prime example of some of Asafiev's principles of musical motion, as well as form emerging from localised musical events. Asafiev neatly fills in the leap down from F to C by stepping back up to the D obeying his 'laws of causality'. This motion serves to enhance smoothness: smoothness ensures the energy of the phrase is not broken, increasing accessibility. The phrase does not come to a conclusion on its return to the D, rather takes a step to E and jumps to A, foreshadowing the important role the dominant will subsequently play. This motion to A also gives the phrase impetus for continuation as it alludes to an imperfect cadence (chord i, bar 1 and first beat of bar 2; chord V, second beat of bar 2). The continuation of motion takes the form of an identical repetition of this initial sound conjugation, reiterating the purpose of this intonation, and crystallising in the

memory of the listener this combination of tones. The motion continues for a third time from the original D, starting at bar 5 as if to repeat the initial two bar motif, however instead of falling a fourth as the first two iterations did, the stepwise motion is continued up to A, and further by leap up to D, before coming to rest on C# a semitone below. The energy for this ascent is accumulated in the rotation around the D in the initial four bars. By returning to the initial combination of tones for a third time, the familiar motif solidifies in the listener's consciousness, and the continuation of the line and the subsequent emphasis of the leading note (C#) emerge from this: unfamiliar evolving from the familiar. Holding the C# implies a strong sense of instability and again demands continuation of the motion. In *Musical Form as a Process*, Asafiev speaks of the energy of the leading tone with regard to its gravitation to the tonic. By not only sounding, but by holding the leading note (C#) the motion accumulates a sense of energy building around the leading note. The leading tone is a force of propulsion: this is the principal impetus from which the motion proceeds. The organic flow of energy as demonstrated in the opening continues: form emerging from the surface motion, moving from the impetus, through motion to cadence, rather than meeting the requirements of a super-imposed sonata 'mould'.

After a rigorous journey through many contrasting tonal spheres, the coda (marked *più allegro* at bar 131) begins by returning to a variation of the initial figure: the first half of the opening intonation is played an octave higher without the slurs and faster, all factors creating a great sense of urgency that gravitates to the final cadence of the movement. The tonal centre is explicit and continues that way for eight bars, until it is once again compromised. The final twelve bars become progressively more ambiguous with regard to whether the movement will conclude in major or minor, oscillating between the two (bars 149-150) before the final cadence with open fifths: A and E, followed by D and A. Essentially, Asafiev provides a cadential gesture clearly evocative of the V-I cadence, but avoids the question of whether the resolution is major or minor: an unsatisfactory ending, indicating that although the first movement has reached its 'terminus,' it is but a part of the whole.



Figure 3: *Sonata for Viola Solo* (1938), by Boris Asafiev, Mvt. 1: Allegro, bars 148-152

The opening of the second movement establishes the tones A and E as tonally significant (this sits comfortably within the tonal sphere that the first movement has established). The long phrase has a plaintive quality, and at no point seems to resolve. Asafiev discussed the evolutionary expansion of phrases in *Musical Form as a Process* (as mentioned in section 3.4). This initial phrase appears to be an application of the principle of prolonging the point of equilibrium.



Figure 4: *Sonata for Viola Solo* (1938), by Boris Asafiev, Mvt. 2: Aria, bars 1-10

The opening phrase has the potential to resolve at points such as the first beat of bar 4 and the first beat of bar 8, however he diverts the melodic line quickly to continue the phrase. The motion accumulates energy and tension by becoming more chromatic and by increasing the dynamic range. Rather than resolving this opening phrase by cadence, he redirects the motion with a change of character at bar 12.

The coda at the end of the second movement (bar 41, Figure 5) is an augmentation of the opening theme, bringing the motion organically to a close. This movement ends on a high A harmonic, effectively ending the second movement. While it may bring the second movement to an end, as the dominant of the first movement, it cannot function as the full terminus of both the first and second movements.



Figure 5: *Sonata for Viola Solo* (1938), by Boris Asafiev, Mvt. 2: Aria, bars 40-50

The two-slurred, semiquaver motion—as introduced in the first movement—gains a new purpose in the third movement. This movement, in a similar way to the first movement, begins with an intonation created from groups of semiquavers slurred in twos, where the pitch of the second semiquaver of each group is repeated as the first of the next group. This impetus however, is a much stronger statement in itself, as it consists entirely of tonic and leading note pitches. In this way, Asafiev starts his *Scherzo* with two bars, oscillating between A and G# - the second bar is a repetition of the first an octave lower.



Figure 6: *Sonata for Viola Solo* (1938), by Boris Asafiev, Mvt. 3: Scherzo, bars 1-4

The following two bars have distinctly contrasting material. An important device once again is the change of articulation; here he slurs three semiquavers followed by separate semiquavers. Bars 5 to 8 repeat this opening material a third lower. The beginning eight bars give the listener a clear statement—repeated to ensure mnemonic engagement—of two dialectically opposed musical ideas. The first notion is a static oscillation of bars 1 and 2, and the following two bars represent the idea of movement/motion. From bar 9 it is evident that conflict of thesis and anti-thesis is in progress. The structure of the third movement is centred on the conflict and resolution of these two notions (see section 5.1.2).

A synthesis is achieved in the arrival of a new intonation at bar 65: one that combines elements of both intonations by fusing the motion from tonic to leading note and back again (A, G#, A) with the articulation of three slurred semiquavers and one separate, repeated an octave below on the second beat, and again, an octave below that on the third. In case there might be any doubt that this is the important moment of dialectical significance that the listener has been prepared for, Asafiev emphasises each beat with accents, and indicates that this passage should be played *fortissimo* for the first time in the movement. As in the second movement, the tonality of this cadence prevents the possible resolution of the motion: the *Sonata* must continue to a fourth movement.



Figure 7: *Sonata for Viola Solo* (1938), by Boris Asafiev, Mvt. 3: Scherzo, bars 65-67

The impetus that opens the fourth and final movement strongly resembles a ground bass ostinato. These first eight bars (four bars repeated) emphatically fit the definition of a theme that Asafiev provides in *Intonations*:

A theme is an intonation, which, throughout the extended course of monumental forms, does not lose its expressiveness, and is always recognized and “greeted” by the hearing as the source and basis of symphonic development.¹²⁴

Regardless of the instrumentation (symphony or a solo viola), a theme according to Asafiev should essentially be capable of development, and be intonationally familiar in nature so it may be “greeted.” The theme we are presented with in this fourth and final movement is set in the lowest register of the viola—a register that significantly resembles the timbre of a bass instrument such as the violoncello (starting on D3 in scientific pitch notation)—and is rhythmically consistent with that of a bass line. It is also indicated that it should be played *forte, pesante assai*. Asafiev has taken every opportunity to ensure that the violist will present a heavy and bass-like sound in this initial impetus. It consists of five main notes (the four minims—D, F, D, G, plus A) with three ancillary notes (C, C, F), thus presenting an intonationally familiar motive, reminiscent of much Baroque repertoire. The initial impetus is the note D, the motion is carried with the aid of the subsidiary notes, and the theme’s ‘terminus’ appears a fifth higher than the initial impetus: the dominant leading the listener to anticipate a return to the tonal centre, D. Hence, this is an unsatisfactory terminus, as it seems to demand a return to the D.

As far as repetition is concerned (see Figure 14) it is quite unnecessary for the initial theme to be repeated due to its simplicity—it is easily memorised and held in the consciousness by the audience. Asafiev does however repeat the theme, at *piano*, for the sake of consistency and to introduce the structure: every future four-bar variation is also repeated. The theme establishes the tonal centre of D and only uses notes from the D minor pentatonic scale—D, F, G, A and C. It is important to note the simplicity of the original theme and its tonality as this clearly exhibits just how accessible and memorisable the theme is to the audience. This theme, therefore, can be seen as an example of the familiar ‘small change’ that is described in *Intonations*.

¹²⁴ "B. V. Asafiev's "Musical Form as a Process": Translation and Commentary. (Volumes I - III)," 626.

Asafiev follows the climax of the final movement (variation 19) with an immediate return to the fundamental notes of the theme, interspersed with bell-like harmonics sounding on D, three octaves higher than the theme (see Figure 8, bar 85-88). Of all the variations, this penultimate variation is the most similar to the original theme. The final variation (marked *Maestoso*, bar 89-92) is decisive and conclusive. It mostly consists of down-bow, three-note chords. Intonationally, chords such as these are socially accepted as the ‘terminus.’ It might be suggested therefore, that the two final variations are the braking and concluding of motion with respect to the fourth movement.

Figure 8: *Sonata for Viola Solo* (1938), by Boris Asafiev, Mvt. 4: Finale, bars 84-100

The coda of the final movement (bar 93, Figure 8) is then left to serve as the closing of motion from the first movement to the last. This theory is substantiated by the use of the opening musical material from the first movement (circled in purple). As an entire structure, the initial impetus of the first movement is, in a sense, not resolved until these final bars of the fourth movement. This again demonstrates the organic process Asafiev has employed to

construct large-scale form from small-scale events. In this way, the *Sonata* operates as a textbook application of the principles of *Musical Form as a Process*.

5.1.2 Development of Motion

Using the same logic that Asafiev presents in *Musical Form as a Process*, we can assess the manner in which he treats the development of musical motion throughout the *Sonata*. Asafiev uses many techniques to initiate, continue and brake the motion. This discussion attempts to assess the question of motion in light of Asafiev's ideas on dynamic energy in music. Throughout this evaluation of the development of motion, the extent to which Asafiev attempts to balance the principles of identity and contrast is also examined. Importantly, this section aims to ascertain how the process of forming music, "the intoning or committing to sound of the conceivable space between the initial sound and final sound,"¹²⁵ results in the overall formation of this *Sonata*.

One technique Asafiev frequently employs to accumulate energy is the use of rising figures. He often uses sequential motion to move higher and further away from the established and familiar tonal sphere, creating aural tension, for example the ascent in bar 9 to 11 of the first movement (see Figure 9). Although the tension from this ascent is dissipated in the following bar, it comes in the form of a descending arpeggio in A \flat minor: a tritone away from the original D minor, representing a surprising tonal shift that requires continuation. The unusual ascent is facilitated using common tones (a given tone that is common to both the key that precedes it and the key that follows). The first example of this occurs in bar 6 (see Figure 18): the C# that is held is transformed in its role from leading note (in D minor) to the major third as the music gravitates to A major. Asafiev regularly employs common tones within sequential motion to transition from one section to another, and to move organically from one tonal sphere to another. Similarly, Asafiev alludes to many keys in this transitional material

¹²⁵ "B. V. Asafiev's "Musical Form as a Process": Translation and Commentary. (Volumes I - III)," 627-28.

however maintains the listeners' attention and understanding by using common tones. If the motion from bar 9 to 12 is amalgamated into chords (as seen in Figure 9) the common tones become clearer (shown in red). By only changing one or two notes at a time, the rising pattern becomes much more accessible to the audience, even though the aural journey is unusual. (This tonal journey is discussed in more depth in section 5.2.4.) The motion of the first movement consists almost entirely of moving semiquavers, speaking to the audience in a motoric rhetoric, very reminiscent of Bach. This surface motivic continuity provides musical cohesion across many moments of surprising tonal movement.

The image displays three systems of musical notation for the first movement of the Sonata for Viola Solo. The first system (bars 9-12) features a rising pattern of chords with common tones highlighted in red. The second system (bars 13-16) shows a rising pattern of semiquavers with common tones highlighted in red, blue, and green. The third system (bars 17-20) shows a rising pattern of semiquavers with common tones highlighted in red. Dynamics include *p cresc.*, *f*, and *fp*.

Figure 9: *Sonata for Viola Solo* (1938), by Boris Asafiev, Mvt. 1: Allegro, bars 9-20

The following system (bars 13-16) is constructed in a similar manner. The rising motion, although tonally unfamiliar, is comprehensible primarily due to the continuous rhythmic motion and motivic patterns. Asafiev also employs the use of two-slurred semiquavers (a feature discussed in section 5.1.3), using the slur to link the middle two semiquavers of each group (bars 13-15). The relatively simple separate lines of motion (red, blue and green

respectively) are somewhat obscured by the surface ornamentation (the first notes of each slur, 'leading tones') and when played in succession.

The idea of subsidiary leading tones as embellishments, and as indicators of the priority of the following note, may also be applied to the final line of Figure 9. Hence, the notes circled in red from bar 17 to 19 are the important notes of the phrase, creating a descending A major arpeggio (with a lowered, then raised seventh). Tonally, this brings the music back to the tonal sphere of D minor (A as the dominant of D): bars 19 and 20 act as the dominant (V) chord of a perfect cadence and the return to the opening theme in bar 21 as the tonic.

As previously mentioned, the first movement consists almost entirely of semiquavers (with an occasional crotchet tied to the first semiquaver of the next bar—this is always inextricably linked to the opening intonation). This nearly constant semiquaver motion starkly contrasts with the two-bar figure that first appears in bars 32 and 33 (see Figure 18), which potentially represents the secondary material in the sonata form structure. These bars provide small moments of rest in the journey, a place to draw a breath. They also act as aural landmarks and discharge energy by augmenting the rhythmic motion. This figure concurrently acts as impetus for further motion, as each time this figure occurs it ends on a leap up: motion that requires continuation by downward step, according to Asafiev. Hence, this quaver motion may be regarded as both a device to 'brake' motion and impetus for further motion as described in 3.5 and 3.7.2.

A device that Asafiev employs a number of times in the first and second movement (and which may be used to demonstrate dynamic functionality) is the repetition of material to accumulate energy. This is apparent in the opening impetus of the first movement, and has already been discussed in section 5.1.1. The repetition of the rotation around the initial D provides the momentum needed to continue the phrase. Asafiev employs this device again in the second movement: the triplet figure in bars 5 and 6 is repeated in a similar way, accumulating energy to take the phrase higher (Figure 4).

Rhythmically, the second movement is primarily in $\frac{4}{4}$ and occasionally slips into other time signatures. It reflects a flexibility of the traditional beat 'hierarchy', as the groupings appear to operate independently of the constraints of the bar-lines. This creates the effect of prolonging the moment of equilibrium. The character of the movement is generated through the fluidity of motion and this is starkly opposed to the rigid rhythmic motion of the first movement and the *scherzo* that follows.

The third movement is a particularly interesting example of the application of dialectics in music analysis. As suggested in section 5.1.1, the opening eight bars may be considered to be the exposition of a 'static' thesis (bar 1-2 and 5-6) and a 'moving' antithesis (bar 3-4 and 7-8). Bar 9 (Figure 10) immediately combines the two contrasting articulations that have been presented: one down-bow followed by three slurred semiquavers (the first beat is part of the anti-thesis, in blue), two groups of two-slurred semiquavers (the second beat comes from the initial thesis, in red), and the third beat is separate semiquavers (the other element from the antithesis, in blue).



Figure 10: *Sonata for Viola Solo* (1938), by Boris Asafiev, Mvt. 3: Scherzo, bars 9-14

The process of conflict between thesis and anti-thesis continues throughout the rest of the movement. Of particular interest are moments where the dialectical conflict results in elements from the initial 'static' idea presented in a passage of 'anti-thesis,' and vice versa.

Asafiev appears to reach a peak of conflict partway through the movement. As in the first movement, where Asafiev experiments with how far he can push the tonal sphere of the work without losing track of the original tonal centre, he appears to conduct a similar experiment with the conflicting articulations in this movement. This occurs in four almost identical bars (bars 26-29, Figure 11): interestingly the articulation here is a reverse version of the initial conflict presented in bar 9 (with accents and double stops for added emphasis). The accented, double-stopped semiquavers (in blue) can be seen as a manifestation of forceful stasis of the thesis. The chromatic motion of the second beat (red) portrays the idea of movement, however uses the two-slurred articulation of the thesis. The final beat of each of these four bars is purely anti-thesis: descending arpeggiated motion though, rather than ascending, as was first presented in bar 3. It appears at this point that the motion has reached its furthest point of conflict along this path, yet no synthesis has been achieved, hence Asafiev returns to the initial impetus: almost exactly halfway through the *Scherzo* at bar 36 (the movement is 67 bars in total), the opening 4 bars are identically repeated.



Figure 11: *Sonata for Viola Solo* (1938), by Boris Asafiev, Mvt. 3: Scherzo, bars 25-30

Following the return to the initial four bars, the movement commences a new approach of ‘working out’ the thesis and anti-thesis. The synthesis that is achieved has already been discussed in section 5.1.1, as the resultant figure is also the ‘terminus’ for the movement.

A very broad approach to the motion of the final movement reveals variations of the initial impetus becoming complicated in the middle of the movement and returning to a simpler form at the end. Following the exposition of the passacaglia 'theme' (played *forte*, then repeated at piano), each variation may be measured as a departure from the familiar, easy-to-comprehend and easy-to-memorise ground bass. There is not a single variation that departs so far that the fundamental notes of the theme are not identifiable. The early variations in this movement follow a simple model: embellishments are easily understood, taking the form of arpeggios or scales. To recognise the thematic material within this structure is a simple exercise. This is demonstrated later in Figure 14 where the fundamental notes of the theme are featured in blue. As the variations become more complex, Asafiev occasionally changes the notes of the theme to better suit the voice leading: for example, in the thirteenth variation the fourth note of the theme (C) is changed to a C# (bar 58). This occurs another four times (on different notes) as the movement becomes more complex in variations seventeen, eighteen and nineteen (bar 73-84). Asafiev only ever changes the crotchet notes of the theme (not the minims) and only changes them by a semitone in either direction.

Asafiev systematically introduces elements that could be perceived as unfamiliar to the audience: gradually pushing the boundaries to certain point before swiftly returning to an immediately accessible, familiar variation. This is a fascinating exploration in intonational development. We can, through applying ideas from Asafiev's own theory of intonations, identify that Asafiev is attempting to contribute to the intonational vocabulary by pairing unfamiliar intonations with the familiar and memorised theme. The 'peaks' of development for each intonational element occurs independently of the others. For example, the range of motion is expanded to three octaves, and then falls back to the middle octave in variations nine and ten (bar 41-48). At the same time, the chromaticism is merely at the beginning of its journey. Asafiev also rhythmically displaces the theme (prepared by off-beat accentuation in the previous variation, in red Figure 12) and uses interesting rhythmic ambiguity, changing both the time signature and the implied rhythmic groupings.



Figure 12: *Sonata for Viola Solo* (1938), by Boris Asafiev, Mvt. 4: Finale, bars 49-56

This discussion of Asafiev's process of developing motion clearly demonstrates his use of the principles of *Musical Form as a Process*: the interplay of the principles of identity and contrast, especially clear in his adventurous intonational journeys, and the fascinating exhibition of dialectics. The *Sonata* mirrors Asafiev ideas on unfamiliar evolving from familiar intonations in the emergence of unusual musical language from established conventional landmarks, an intrinsic element in his aesthetic theory. The *Sonata* hence indicates that his theories of compositional process may not have changed significantly following the 1932 Resolution. Presumably, this is because Asafiev believed his writing evaluated that which he considered to be the ideal process of composition, rather than attempting to change it.

5.1.3 Role of Memory

The role of memory in the understanding of music plays an essential part in Asafiev's writing and in this dissertation. Asafiev hypothesised that memorisation by society was the most important contributing factor in the success of an intonation, a feat only made possible by

exposure and repetition. Only a smaller scale, the role of memory in the comprehension of individual works is no less important.

The opening of the first movement (Figure 2) introduces the listener to one of the most important intonational elements that returns throughout the work and unifies the *Sonata* as a whole: in the first bar the motion is in semiquavers, slurred in groups of twos. This ‘two-slurred motion’—especially when the second note of the first group is repeated as the first note of the second (as in the first bar)—is an essential element in the construction of the whole work (not just the first movement): for example, it appears in the opening motive of the third movement and in variation seven of the final movement (bar 33). The two-slurred motion as an autonomous idea provides the motion with forward energy and is also immediately recognisable, therefore strongly distinguishable as contributing to the predominance of the principle of identity in the first movement. Asafiev uses this articulation to provide unity, a feature of identity, and through various transformations it simultaneously illuminates the principle of contrast.

This two-slurred motion appears in every movement of the *Sonata* in various manifestations. Most obviously, the coda of the final movement presents the audience with material from the opening impetus of the first movement (beats two and three of bar 93, Figure 8). The idea that this repetition of material brings unity to the work has already been approached in section 5.1.1. It is interesting to note that Asafiev used this same device in other compositions, such as the *Sonata for Trumpet and Piano* that he composed the following year (1939). Returning to the *Viola Sonata*, more examples of Asafiev’s cross-referencing are identifiable: bar 30 of the first movement is an inversion of the opening of the third movement; the trills and accents in variations 11 and 12 (fourth movement, bars 49-56) closely resemble the rhythmic displacement presented in the third movement (bar 18); and the calm, fifteenth variation in the final movement (*cantabile*, bar 65) sounds very similar to the calm quaver motion in the first movement (Figure 18, bars 32-33). These moments bring unity to the *Sonata*, providing familiarity through repetition. They are also very simply constructed intonations,

therefore more easily memorised. Compositional unity points towards a degree of comprehensibility of the work as a whole. If the *Sonata* in its entirety presents as a comprehensible unit, it reflects a world that is knowable, understandable and controllable. Asafiev's harmonic and melodic adventures are enclosed in a comforting structural wholeness, an important aspect of music that is identifiable to mass society.

Similarly, Asafiev uses the opening theme of the second movement as a point of identity around which he structures the entire movement—ternary form with a coda—providing a familiar intonation to return to after drawing the listener's attention away. The initial few bars consist of a simple melody with a few distinctly recognisable intonations such as the double-stopped open fifth in bar 4. This allows for the memorisation by the listener of these audible 'signposts'. The reappearance of these signposts within the same movement allows the audience to easily understand the form, even on first hearing. Again, formal coherence aids comprehensibility in perception by a society who might otherwise be confused by individual moments in the movement.

The varied repetition presented in bars 12-16 (Figure 13), warrants discussion. If we refer back to chapter two of *Musical Form as a Process* (discussed in section 3.3) Asafiev discusses the effects of varied repetition: exact repetition reinforces memorisation and varied repetition effectively creates interest. In comparing these two five-bar phrases, the repetition is similar enough so that is easily recognised (held in the listener's memory), yet varied enough to continue the motion, hold the attention and create interest in the audience. Hence the 'repetition within a repetition' (as emphasised in green) of the two-beat figure is not only unnecessary in the second phrase, but would lose the interest of the audience.

Figure 13: Sonata for Viola Solo (1938), by Boris Asafiev, Mvt. 2: Aria, bars 11-22

The cohesion created by the principle of identity is an essential part of Asafiev's theory and central to the understanding of his *Sonata*. On a localised level there are many appearances of repetition and varied repetition, such as the example presented above in the second movement. Asafiev also employs the listener's memory on a larger scale by constructing the fourth movement around a repeated and varied ground bass. At the fullest extent, Asafiev unifies the entire *Sonata* by fashioning the final coda of the fourth movement out of the opening impetus of the work. As previously discussed, Asafiev asserts that the principles of identity and contrast co-exist and even evoke each other. In identifying the strength of the principle of identity in this work, we can arguably ascertain that Asafiev was attempting to circumnavigate

the problems of perception that would arise as a result of the more challenging or unfamiliar intonations.

5.2 Relationship to Intonational Vocabulary

This section attempts to connect the fundamental motion of the *Sonata* to Asafiev's aforementioned requirement to simultaneously speak the common language and contribute to its evolution. As we can ascertain from his theoretical work, he strongly believed that the history of music was the history of socially assimilated musical intonations, and a composer should write accordingly: carefully balancing the desires of the masses to hear intonational familiarity and the evolutionary necessity and inevitability of progress. This obvious and constant contrast between tradition and progress could be interpreted as tension between obligation to the State and Asafiev's personal desire to pull away from tradition. However, it is perhaps more likely that Asafiev believed that the traditional elements have not reached the point of ossification; that they were still in fact still valid and meaningful to the society for which he was composing. Therefore, it is not suggested that the traditional elements that are presented in the *Sonata*, such as the relatively traditional forms, arose naturally out of the motion of music on a localised level, but rather that Asafiev acknowledged the evolutionary process that led to these features becoming socially assimilated, and by accepting and using these traditions, his music was, in fact, contributing to the evolving history of music.

5.2.1 Traditional Forms

The modified traditional forms that appear in his *Sonata* are in themselves intonationally assimilated traditions. Asafiev believed that musical forms had emerged through the evolutionary process that he discussed at length in *Intonations*. Therefore, in presenting relatively traditional forms, it might be suggested that his *Sonata*, rather than creating tension in perception, had a role to play as part of the evolutionary process.

The first movement presents as sonata allegro form. Many of its structural features can be understood within the traditions of sonata form (exposition, development, recapitulation, plus coda), although there are a number of notable differences (see section 5.2.3). The movement begins in D-Dorian (or perhaps Aeolian as there is neither B[♯] or B[♭]) and returns to this tonal sphere at all major structural points: such as the recapitulation, coda and the final cadence.

The second *Aria: Adagio* movement is a starkly contrasted as a moment of contemplation. The movement is in ternary form: **A** (A min, bar 1)—**B** (E min, bar 22)—**A'** (A min, bar 28), plus a short coda (bars 41-50) based on an augmentation of the opening material. The material discussed in section 5.1.3—the two five-bar phrases at the end of the first **A** section—harmonically provide transitional material for the traditional tonic to dominant relationship.

The third movement is in $\frac{3}{4}$, and is occasionally interspersed with quavers that serve to momentarily confuse the rhythmic palette with off-beat accents and hemiolas. This movement has all the contributing elements of a Beethovenesque *scherzo*, albeit without a *trio*: “a rough, almost savage humour, with marked rhythm, generally in $\frac{3}{4}$ time.”¹²⁶ The repetition of the very recognisable opening figure (Figure 6) provides structure for the movement, appearing identically at bars 1-2, 36-37 and 59-60. Between the second and third appearance of this figure, this oscillating material is transposed and manipulated into various manifestations. It is tempting to try to interpret the movement as a modified rounded binary form with written-out repeats (as sometime seen in Beethoven), although there are multiple motives at play and the movement resists classification into such a clear formal scheme. It is perhaps more valuable to follow the dialectical transformation of musical material, a previous point of discussion in section 5.1.2.

¹²⁶ Stanley Sadie et al., "Grove Music Online," (New York: Oxford University Press).

The final movement of this *Sonata* is a strikingly traditional passacaglia form. The structure in its most basic description, is a four-bar, ground bass (theme, played twice) and 21 variations (all repeated) with the addition of an eight bar coda. In section 3.3, the three early forms of ‘theme and variations’ were briefly discussed. We can see from the establishment of the ‘ground bass’ theme, that Asafiev is attempting to preserve the first system that he mentions: the use of an identically repeated ground bass in forms, such as the passacaglia and chaconne.

The image displays the first system of the finale from the Sonata for Viola Solo, Op. 138, by Boris Asafiev. The score is written for viola in 3/4 time and consists of three staves. The first staff, labeled 'THEME' and 'Andante mosso', shows the ground bass theme in two parts: the first part (bars 1-4) is marked *f pesante assai* and the second part (bars 5-8) is marked *p* and labeled 'THEME (repeated)'. The second staff, labeled 'Variation 1', begins at bar 9 and is marked *f(2 volta p)*. It features a more complex rhythmic pattern with triplets and a trill. The third staff, labeled 'Variation 2', begins at bar 13 and features a complex rhythmic pattern with triplets and a trill. The score is annotated with various musical symbols, including dynamics, articulation marks, and performance instructions.

Figure 14: *Sonata for Viola Solo* (1938), by Boris Asafiev, Mvt. 4: Finale, bars 1-16

It is possible to trace the theme through each variation, as one would observe a ground bass ostinato. This movement begs to be compared to a traditional solo passacaglia such as Heinrich Biber’s (1644-1704) *Passacaglia for Solo Violin*¹²⁷ (c.1676) (see Figure 15). Both works present the ‘bass line’ in its simplest form before introducing embellishments of increasing complexity. They also both return to a simple form of the theme before building towards the end. Unlike Biber, however, Asafiev chose to divert from the ‘theme’ for the coda: instead he returns to the material of the first movement.

¹²⁷ Heinrich Ignaz Franz Biber von Bibern (1644-1704), *The Rosary Sonatas* (c.1676); No. 16, Passacaglia



Figure 15: *The Rosary Sonatas* (c.1676); No. 16, Passacaglia, by Ignaz Franz Biber, bars 1-14

The forms presented in Asafiev's *Sonata* bear close resemblance to traditionally Baroque or Classical forms, developed over centuries. Considering Asafiev's strong opinions on the use of ossified or out-of-date formal schemes, presented in both volumes of *Musical Form as a Process*, it is implausible that he is attempting to 'resurrect' old forms for the purposes of his compositions. It is much more likely that he used these forms as familiar intonations: forms that are understandable and therefore meaningful to the audience. The structure, especially apparent in the traditional, and therefore predictable, tonal activity creates a comforting foundation for musical motion. These elements also place this work firmly within the Classical tradition, as important aspect of Asafiev's theory of intonational evolution.

5.2.2 Folk Influence

The influence of folk traditions in the compositional language that Asafiev employs is particularly evident in the second and fourth movements of the *Sonata*. The influence of Russian and French folk melodies and harmonic language is clear.

In the second movement the phrases of the **A** section are long and have a folk-like quality, emphasised by the Aeolian mode. The folk idiom is especially prominent in the opening melody, which is remarkably similar to a melody that French composer Francis Poulenc (1899-1963) used a number of times in his compositions, suggesting the possibility of a common source of inspiration: for example *Quinze Improvisations pour Piano* (1932-1959) No. 13 in A minor, the last act of his opera *The Dialogues des Carmélites* (1957), and the opening of his

Sarabande for solo Guitar (1960). Aside from this link, The **B** section also has a distinctly 'French' sound. The first three bars of this short section (bars 22-27) are so evocative of French Impressionism they could have easily been penned by Claude Debussy (1862-1918) or Maurice Ravel (1875-1937).

The final movement, as described in section 5.2.1, is constructed around the repetition and variation of a four-bar ground bass theme. This theme is unequivocally set in D minor pentatonic, a mode very familiar to Russian society as the basis of many folk-song settings and, as such, regularly used in the composition of mass songs. An example given by Vladimir Zak (quoted by Monelle¹²⁸) of a melody based on this minor pentatonic mode is *In a Sunlit Glade* by popular mass-song composer Soloviev-Sedoy (1907-1979):

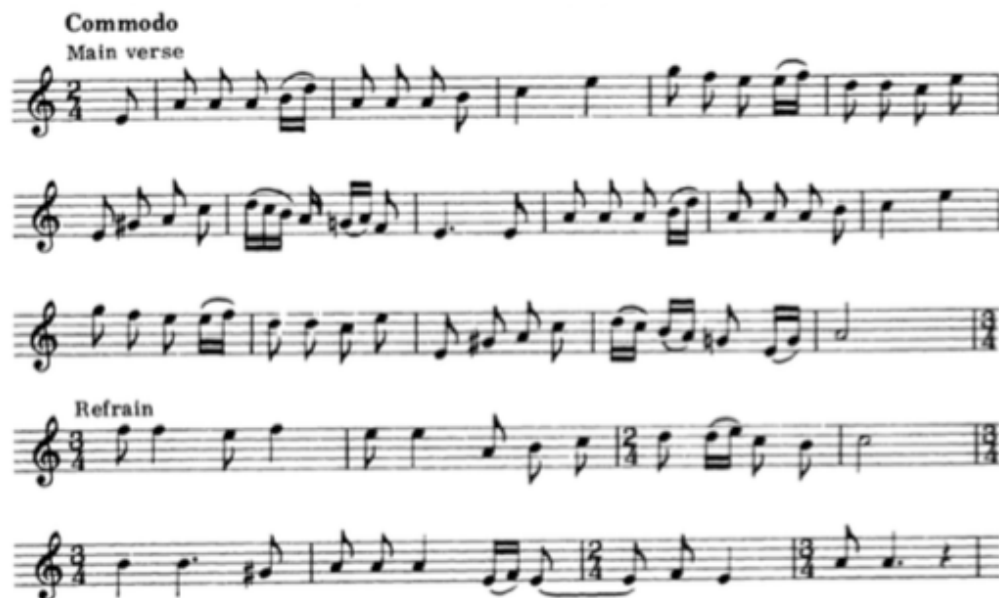


Figure 16: *Na solnechnoi polyanochke (In a Sunlit Glade)*, by Vasily Solov'ev-Sedoy¹²⁹

Soloviev-Sedoy's song is based on the pentatonic minor on A (and includes embellishments), whereas Asafiev's ground bass is on D:

¹²⁸ Monelle, *Linguistics and Semiotics in Music*, 283.

¹²⁹ Extract from Vladimir Zak, "Asaf'ev's Theory of Intonation and the Analysis of Popular Song," *Popular Music* 2(1982): 106.

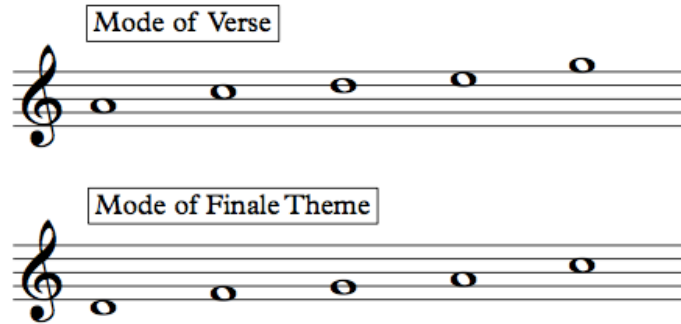


Figure 17: Demonstration of parallel modes, derived from Main Verse of Figure 16 and the Theme of *Sonata* Finale (Figure 14)

Although previously mentioned in sections 1.3, 4.4 and 4.7, the importance of the mass song as a communicative device for the unification of the proletariat in the pursuit of a communist culture cannot be over-emphasised. By presenting his listeners with music that so clearly displays the influence of Russian folk music, Asafiev ensures that there is material drawn from the intonational vocabulary of the contemporary proletarian world. The use of folk-influenced music can thus be understood as an important indicator of socialist realism in the *Sonata*.

5.2.3 Non-Traditional Structural Elements

As evaluated in section 5.2.1, many of the structural elements of the individual movements of this *Sonata* adhere to traditionally accepted 'schemes' developed throughout the course of history. Asafiev asserts in *Intonations* that the importance of these forms lies in the notion that they have become socially assimilated because they have consistently met the needs of the listener. Once they no longer meet the needs of the audience, they become ossified and cease to be used by intonationally sensitive composers. However, he also emphasises that the composition of music should unfold as a process: not the pouring of musical material into a predetermined 'mould'. As testimony to Asafiev's process of composition, we can identify moments in his *Sonata* that resist the traditional structural formula.

The first example of this occurs early in the first movement: where the listener would normally expect to be presented with the second subject in the dominant (bar 21), the motion returns to opening material, again in D-Dorian, simply an octave higher. Interestingly, at the parallel moment in the recapitulation, the same return to the tonic is initiated (bar 96), but is instead followed by motion to the dominant (bar 100) as might conventionally be expected to occur in the exposition. At four moments in the first movement, Asafiev augments the motion for two bars (see Figure 18) to allow the listener a small rest aurally, and to discharge some of the energy of the fast-paced motion. These four moments also act as distinct structural landmarks, occurring twice in the exposition and again twice at parallel moments in the recapitulation. This motive could arguably be considered as the secondary material, loosely based on the dominant.



Figure 18: *Sonata for Viola Solo* (1938), by Boris Asafiev, Mvt. 1: Allegro, bars 30-34

This dissertation has so far referred to the second movement as ternary form (plus coda). Although this is technically correct, the return of the **A'** section is vastly different from the original material; in fact the **A'** section only follows the same musical path for 6 bars before venturing off into new territory. This has the effect of triggering the memory of the opening material, hence fulfilling the basic requirements for a coherent ternary form, yet not losing interest in perception. This reflects Asafiev's aesthetic ideas of musical construction, in balance with his theories on the intonational evolution of forms.

The third movement is perhaps the strongest example of Asafiev's music resisting form. The attempt to analyse the movement as modified rounded binary (as mentioned above in section 5.2.1) provides an awkward and unsatisfactory result. This by no means leaves the

movement formless, the three appearances of the simply recognised A/G# oscillations provide a clear structure for the movement. Perhaps, therefore, this movement is the best example of an organically composed movement, following Asafiev's principle of formation. This is starkly contrasted by the final movement, which neatly fits into the mould of theme and variations (and coda) as discussed previously.

Asafiev has clearly paid tribute to conventionally accepted forms in each movement (albeit some more than others). By changing the formal scheme to suit the compositional journey, Asafiev is not only adhering to his principles from *Musical Form as a Process*, but also attempting to construct an intonationally intelligent work. He asserts in *Intonations* that a composition should reflect the intonational repository of society, therefore, in his compositional efforts he is reflecting what he believes to be the intonational reality of his context: these modified forms as they are presented are intended to be intelligible to his audience.

5.2.4 Progressive Harmonic Language

The overall tonal structure of the *Sonata* is very traditional. As assessed in section 5.1.1, the tonal framework is the same as would be expected of any classical four-movement work: D minor, A minor, A major, D minor. This traditionally tonal design extends to the major structural landmarks in the work. In each movement the motion departs from a well-established tonal sphere (the initial impetus of each movement is consistently modal) and the final cadence returns to this same mode. Also to conclude each movement, in all but the *Scherzo*, the audience is presented with a structurally and tonally logical coda. At other structurally important moments the motion generally complies with the traditionally expected tonality. There are slight adjustments to the traditional forms presented, such as the rearrangement of the first movement sonata form as previously outlined in section 5.2.3 (where the motion returns to the tonic rather than the dominant as expected at bar 21).

Between these clear-cut tonal landmarks, the harmonic language moves radically far away from conventional use. We have already discussed Asafiev's use of common tones in the

development of motion. By using common tones between figures and changing the remaining tones, Asafiev is able to reach distant and totally unrelated keys using only a few bars. The example given in Figure 19 (repeated from section 5.1.2) demonstrates how in the *Scherzo* Asafiev manages to travel from A major/F# minor to A ♭ minor in only three bars. Returning to this discussion, some of the notes could be considered decorative: the C# in the second and third chords; the A in the fourth chord, and D in the fifth chord. The underlying triadic motion is thus F#m, DM, B ♭ +, E ♭ M. The final motion is functionally tonal (B ♭ + as a secondary dominant of E ♭ M), and the others are linked only by their common tones. Such unusual harmonic motions could be considered a progressive feature of the work, although the common tones increase intelligibility, as does the continuity of rhythmic and motivic ideas. As such, Asafiev has again delicately balanced the challenging and the accessible.

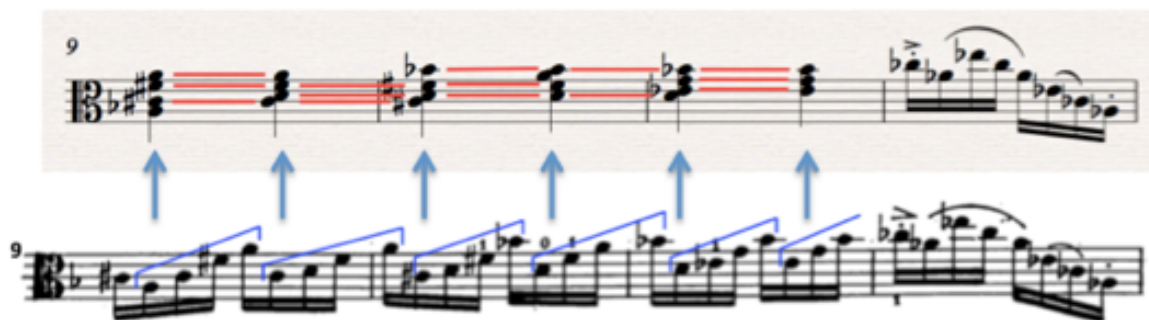


Figure 19: *Sonata for Viola Solo* (1938), by Boris Asafiev, Mvt. 1: *Allegro*, bars 9-12

In a very similar way, Asafiev uses rising chromatic patterns to rapidly travel through multiple keys whilst retaining the attention of the listener. By keeping the horizontal or melodic line simple in content, Asafiev can complicate the harmonic journey without over-challenging the listener. For example, in the third movement (Figure 20 below), the chromatic motion is constructed as two parallel lines, a minor sixth apart. In the space of one bar, Asafiev uses this rising chromatic figure to modulate from A ♭ major to D major. His persuasive use of rhetoric figures compels the listener to follow the horizontal logic rather than the more complicated vertical/harmonic implications.

The image shows a musical score for two staves. The top staff is labeled 'A-flat major' and the bottom staff is labeled 'D major'. The music features complex rhythmic patterns with triplets and sixteenth notes. Red and blue circles highlight specific chordal or melodic elements. Dynamics include 'p' and 'cresc.'.

Figure 20: *Sonata for Viola Solo* (1938), by Boris Asafiev, Mvt. 3: Scherzo, bars 29-33

A large amount of material in the first three movements of this *Sonata*, such as that described above (Figure 19 and Figure 20), could be described as transitional or possibly sequential. There are many passages that rapidly modulate through many keys reaching some sort of threshold before returning to a familiar tonal sphere. Asafiev speaks of such a threshold in *Musical Form as a Process* (see section 3.6). This *Sonata* often appears to be an experiment in the realisation of this concept. By establishing the tonal centre so definitively as Asafiev has done, he affords himself the freedom to explore unusual harmonic realms: he asserts the initial tonal sphere strongly to remain in the listener's consciousness. In doing so, he meets the requirements of the audience in forming a familiar tonal foundation to which the motion will inevitably return, whilst employing the principle of contrast in this harmonically distant journey. Hence, Asafiev has presented a musical language that is fundamentally comprehensible on first hearing, but also one that reveals an accessible journey upon hearing again.

In the second movement, the motion begins in A minor, however by the second bar is already suggestive of E minor. The tonal journey is first quite gentle, but quickly creates tension by pulling far away from the initial A minor. By the twelfth bar the motion settles into the distant F minor—this surprisingly comes as a relief to the ear, as if we have reached some sort of mid-way equilibrium. This modulation to F minor can only come as a relief due to the challenging material immediately prior.

Asafiev's harmonic language throughout the *Sonata* is not always 'functional' in the traditional sense, however it remains tonal. In the following example from the forth movement,

we can see that he freely uses harmonies that bear little or no relationship to the surrounding motion. Firstly, let us return to the opening ‘theme’ of this passacaglia. As a passacaglia, ground bass the traditional harmonic implications are as follows:

The image shows a musical score for the opening theme of the Sonata for Viola Solo, Mvt. 4: Finale, bars 1-8. The score is in 3/4 time, key of B-flat major, and marked 'Andante mosso'. The first bar is labeled 'THEME' and the eighth bar is labeled 'THEME (repeated)'. The melody consists of quarter notes: B-flat, A, G, F, E, D, C, B-flat. Below the staff, a blue line indicates the harmonic structure with Roman numerals: i, III, i, ii₅, V. The dynamics are marked 'f pesante assai' at the beginning and 'p' at the end of the phrase.

Figure 21: *Sonata for Viola Solo* (1938), by Boris Asafiev, Mvt. 4: Finale, bars 1-8

On examining the variations in the final movement, it becomes apparent that each figure, whether beat or phrase, strongly adheres to some sort of tonal formation. However, the implied (vertical) tonality of these formations does not necessarily make sense horizontally. Asafiev often takes the tones of the theme as the mediant or dominant of the basic tonality, so rather than harmonising the theme in a traditional sense, he is colouring the music with alternative harmonies. During the *Risoluto* section of the final movement, the harmonic language becomes particularly atypical. Although each beat or collection of beats may be assessed independently as tonally coherent, the horizontal logic and traditional principles of voice leading are lacking: for example, the third beat of bar 58 is clearly a C# minor chord, creating traditionally avoided parallel motion in the succession Dm, C#m, B ♭ M. In the context of the surrounding chords, this progression sounds illogical and surprising (see Figure 22).

Figure 22: *Sonata for Viola Solo* (1938), by Boris Asafiev, Mvt. 4: Finale, bars 57-66

Asafiev is not creating a new harmonic language: rather he is pushing the tonal tradition. He regularly moves through tonal spheres rapidly. It is possible to trace the functional tonal movement through most of the score, although when hearing the *Sonata*, one is struck by just how quickly he moves from one key to the next. Often this is hard, even impossible, to aurally comprehend—especially on first hearing—and the ear is comforted by the return to a familiar tonal centre. However, due to the tonal and often functional origins of his harmonic language, repeated hearing brings a deeper understanding. Asafiev generally pairs difficult harmonic material with other easier intonations: such as familiar articulations or simple rhythm, as discussed earlier. It is suggested, therefore, that Asafiev is attempting to educate his audience: an obligation to society that he felt strongly and expressed repeatedly in *Intonations*.

5.3 Balancing the Traditional and Progressive

From Asafiev's theoretical stance, and from the style in which he composed his *Viola Sonata*, we can potentially ascertain that he believed he was creating music that not only met the needs of his intended audience, but which also educated them. One of the most critical factors that Asafiev promotes as necessary in the composition of music that successfully reflects and contributes to the intonational vocabulary of society—the ultimate endeavour of Asafiev's realism—is in achieving a balance between the accessible and the challenging. As such, this work can be considered to reflect Asafiev's personal vision of socialist realism.

Asafiev rarely discusses Bach in his writing, however the relationship between his compositional style and Bach's is undeniable. Perhaps the overtly religious connotations or the highly intellectual nature of Bach's compositions deterred Asafiev from including him. Regardless, it is certainly unusual for a text proclaiming to be a comprehensive history of music to exclude Bach's music, and it is interesting to note how the rhetoric style of Bach is clearly present in Asafiev's style. This is worth noting here as the presence of 'old' or even ancient traditional elements, such as the clear passacaglia form of the final movement and the distinctly folk-based modal features, juxtaposed with the avant-garde treatment of harmonies and other experimental elements, may be related to Asafiev's theory of intonational crises. The result of these contrasting elements closely resembles that of neo-classicism: a style that was often apparent in the recycling of traditional, 'classical' forms with an expanded tonal vocabulary. However, in light of Asafiev's theory on the evolution of intonations and his ideas about composers using intonations that were relevant to their audience, it is unlikely that Asafiev would subscribe to the idea of reinstating, or harking back to intonations of a former epoch. Rather, it is much more probable that he believed the intonations he was employing were still meaningful to society.

The clearest example of challenging musical material has recently been discussed in section 5.2.4: between stable and familiar tonal landmarks the harmonic language becomes unusual and unpredictable. The pairing of unfamiliar harmonic language with familiar elements, such as simple and consistent rhythm and articulation, allows the audience the opportunity to comprehend the overall meaning of a phrase, yet concurrently be challenged by the post-tonal treatment of implied harmonies. Also, Asafiev reliably returns to traditional tonal material at structural landmarks, affording the audience the comfort of knowing that no matter how far the motion travels away from the original tonal sphere, it will inevitably return. In *Emotion and Meaning in Music*,¹³⁰ Meyer discusses the consequential anxiety of leaving the tonic. Asafiev

¹³⁰ Leonard B. Meyer, *Emotion and Meaning in Music* (Chicago U6: University of Chicago Press, 1956).

lessens this anxiety by reassuring the listener that the music will always return to familiar territory. The pairing of familiar with unfamiliar is evident throughout all four movements of the *Viola Sonata*.

In the first movement, Asafiev presents the motion as almost-constant, fluid semiquavers and introduces the 'two-slurred' idea in the opening bars. Under the guise of this conventional, easily recognisable articulation, Asafiev moves far away from traditional tonality. If we again consider the example from the first movement (Figure 9, bars 9-20), we see that by bar 12, Asafiev has already reached A \flat minor, a tritone away from the original D minor. However, it only takes another eight bars for the motion to return to D minor (bar 21). This far-reaching use of tonal language is unusual, yet extremely short-lived. The rapid modulations that take place throughout the *Sonata* (predominantly in the first and third movements) often do so through the transposition of otherwise familiar motifs. Without exception the motion returns to the tonal sphere from which it came.

Asafiev has used familiar, 'small-change' intonations in the process of forming memorable figures and motifs. The double-stopped fifth in the opening of the second movement is a good example of a widely assimilated intonation that is considered consonant (and as such, meaningful) by the wider society. Thus, Asafiev has chosen standard, tonal ideas that bear a familiar intonational quality: by using the 'small change' of widely assimilated intonations, Asafiev is effectively abiding by his own notion of making a new composition accessible (see section 4.7).

The individual aspects in combination convey Asafiev's desire to communicate and educate. His selection of intonations that have clearly been assimilated into the intonational vocabulary links the composition with the intended audience through the communication of meaning. The familiar tonal and structural foundations of the *Sonata* ensure the fundamental understanding of the listener, and establish a logical base, which the motion can venture from and return to. The less familiar elements of this composition attest to Asafiev's theoretical ideas regarding creating interest in the perception of music, and educating the audience through

evolving their intonational repository. It is therefore suggested that Asafiev composed his *Sonata for Solo Viola* in accordance with his theoretical position on music as a reflection of reality: a process of sounding musical intonations in an essentially meaningful formation.

6 Conclusion

In section 4.5, Asafiev's theory of intonational crises was discussed: a shift in society reflected as a change in the intonational vocabulary. Asafiev proposed that when an intonational crisis was occurring, perceptive composers would discard the most recent developments and return to the use of well-established and fully-comprehensible intonations as the fundamental building blocks for a new path or direction for evolution. In the assessment of Asafiev's *Sonata* it is no great leap to suggest that the re-interpretation of classical forms, his progressive harmonic language, and resulting forms revealing experimentation within strict structural and tonal boundaries could be evidence of Asafiev's attempt to renovate and educate the intonational vocabulary of Soviet society. His attempt to establish a balance between tonal and post-tonal ideas could be interpreted as his rejection of recent peaks in development in favour of a new path of intonational development, originating from the "simple, clear, and realistic" language of stable and established intonations of the past, just as he proposed in *Intonations*.¹³¹ It is difficult to mount an argument either way without studying a great deal more of Asafiev's musicological and compositional work. However, perhaps this is an appropriate moment to again suggest that Asafiev believed himself to be living and working at a time of intonational crisis.

Perhaps one of the most clearly pronounced aspects in the study of Soviet musicology is the prominence of social theory that can be traced back to Marxist and/or Hegelian theories. The works evaluated in this dissertation, both musicological and compositional, consistently emphasise the necessity for balance between old and new. It is suggested that, in this conflict of sorts, that the *Sonata* in its totality is a product of the large-scale dialectical process of evolution.

Asafiev's contribution to the cultural matrix of the Soviet nation was undoubtedly immense in both quantity and impact. Whilst some Western musicologists have acknowledged his influence, there is still a great deficit of information regarding his life. Many of his musicological texts remain out-of-print, and only a handful have been translated into English.

¹³¹ Tull, "B. V. Asafiev's "Musical Form as a Process": Translation and Commentary. (Volumes I - I I)," 937-38.

His compositions, again abundant in number, are hard to find and rarely performed, and his ballet music is described as “remarkably conservative.”¹³² His general reputation reflects opinions of him as a weak and unimaginative composer and his name has been tarnished by his assumed connection to a horrifying regime and Shostakovich’s extremely poor opinion of him. There is much room for speculation regarding his personal beliefs and tendencies. It is interesting to speculate over whether the government’s directives moulded Asafiev’s theories, or whether in fact, Asafiev’s theories naturally and without adaptation met the (eventual) requirements of the Party. Perhaps (as this author tentatively believes), there might be room here for a middle ground. It is possible that Asafiev’s ideas evolved in a way that navigated some dangerous territory whilst advocating his own agenda. Or perhaps (as Shostakovich believed) he was an “unprincipled bastard.”¹³³

Some of the writing concerning Asafiev in English is guilty of simplifying many of his most important concepts. In order to avoid this tendency, rather than attempt to provide or refine definitions of ‘intonations,’ ‘socialist realism’ and other related terms, this study has designed a contextual foundation to afford a better understanding of the meaning underlying this unfamiliar terminology. In the assessment of Asafiev’s *Sonata for Solo Viola* this study attempted to respect Asafiev’s views on ‘short-sighted’ evaluations of past compositions:

The further from an epoch we are, and the less we know the “musical environment” of a master and the intonations existing around him, the more often we end up removed from peculiarities of thinking and mastery, and closer to the material, the elements of music ... This “shortsightedness from long range” expressed in detailed evaluations of the past, only on the basis of outstanding, individual compositions “still living among us,” very much distorts the historical perspective of music.¹³⁴

This discussion has attempted to apply the same logic to the evaluation of Asafiev’s musicological writing. Many of Asafiev’s theories were developed and refined in the years between the two volumes. Rather than focus on this evolution of his concepts (the potential

¹³² McQuere, *Russian Theoretical Thought in Music*, 222.

¹³³ E. Wilson, *Shostakovich: A Life Remembered* (Faber & Faber, 2011).

¹³⁴ Tull, "B. V. Asaf'ev's "Musical Form as a Process": Translation and Commentary. (Volumes I - I I)," 731-32.

topic of another entire body of research), this dissertation has attempted to present the most concise version of his ideas. One of the initial points of interest in this research was to attempt a discussion of socialist realism in music without the political interpretation of it as an art form tarnished by association with Stalinism. Hence, this study has attempted, so far as possible, to avoid value judgments based on ideology, but rather through examination of context and history, to experience the work and read the theory as even-handedly as possible.

The experience of learning and performing the *Sonata* was both challenging and greatly rewarding. Navigating the harmonic language and the unusual combination of traditional and progressive elements was initially frustrating, however, researching the possible motivation for Asafiev's idiom contributed a great deal to the eventual interpretation.

This investigation set out to tie Asafiev's theoretical work in *Musical Form as a Process* and *Intonations* to his compositional process, as demonstrated through his *Sonata for Solo Viola*. At the heart of this dissertation lay a triangle, three points of investigation all relating to each other: socialist realism, *Musical Form as a Process*, and Asafiev's *Sonata for Solo Viola*. To trace the influence of Marx through the political agendas of Lenin and Stalin, and through to the cultural manifestation of Marxist ideologies, both musicological and compositional, has been a fascinating and enlightening journey. The interplay of politics and music in Soviet Russia during the first half of the twentieth century is a unique and fascinating area of music history, and warrants a great deal of further research and discussions. It is to be hoped that it will continue to spark the interest of scholars and performers for many years to come.

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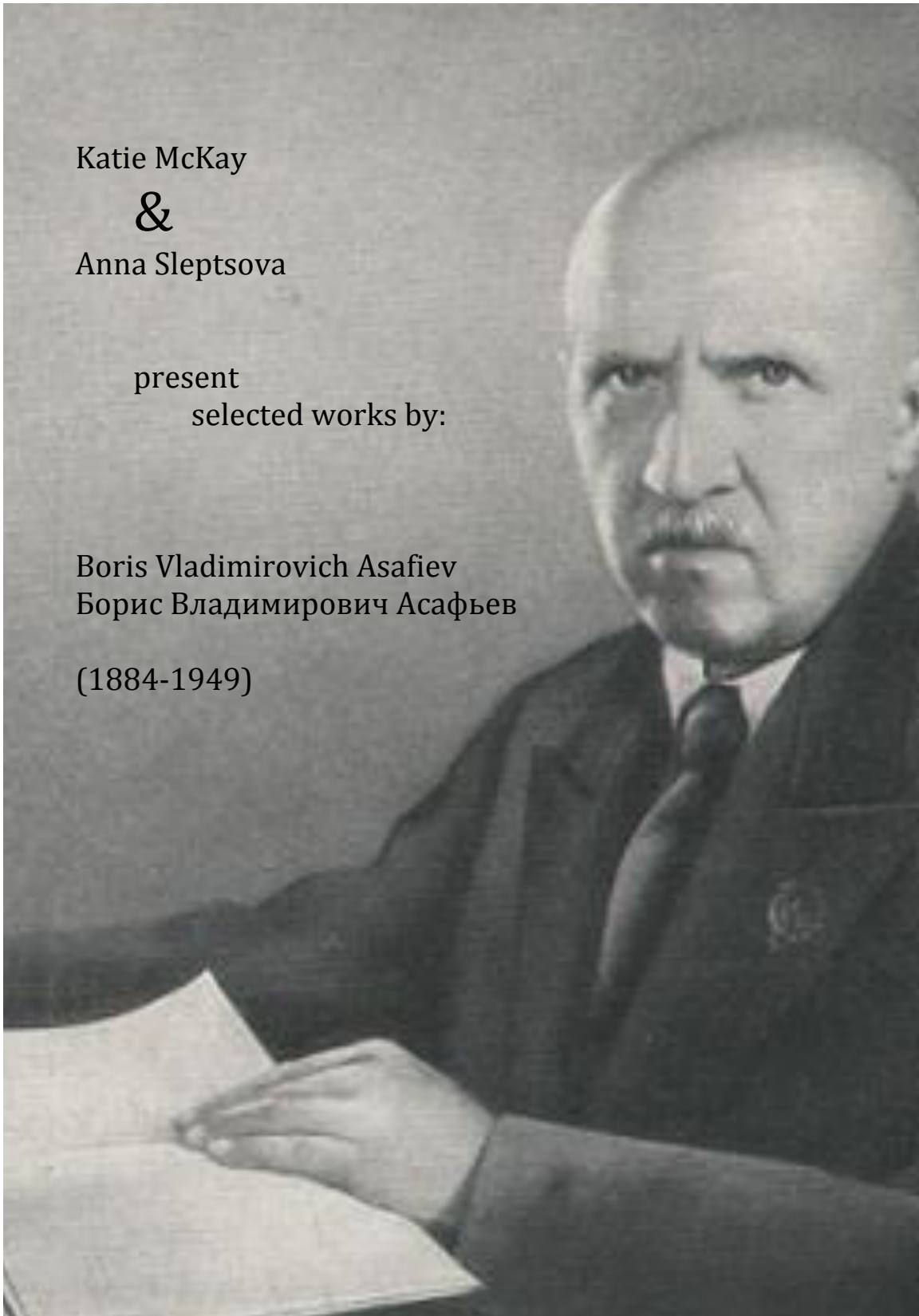
Appendix 1: Recital Program

Katie McKay
&
Anna Sleptsova

present
selected works by:

Boris Vladimirovich Asafiev
Борис Владимирович Асафьев

(1884-1949)



Composer:

Boris Asafiev was an eminent musicologist, composer and critic in Soviet Russia who often wrote under the pseudonym Igor Glebov. He was a softly spoken, yet intensely opinionated man. His theories on musical evolution and socialist realism had a strong influence on Soviet music.

Music:

Sonata for Trumpet & Piano
(arr. for Viola and Piano by K. McKay)

- I. In Modo Classico : Allegro
- II. Adagio
- III. Scherzo : Allegro
- IV. Finale : Sarabande

Suite of Ancient Dances for Solo Piano

- I. Sarabande
- II. Menuet
- IV. Farandole

Sonata for Solo Viola

- I. Allegro
- II. Aria : Adagio
- III. Scherzo : Allegro
- IV. Finale : Andante mosso

Gavotte for Viola & Piano

Performers:

Viola : Katie McKay has studied at UWA, the Australian National Academy of Music and WAAPA and performed in orchestral, chamber and solo concerts around Australia and internationally. This recital is part of her Master of Arts (Performing Arts) degree.

Piano : Anna Sleptsova has appeared as recitalist and soloist with orchestras and ensembles in Eastern Europe, Germany, Canada, UK, New Zealand, Australia, USA, France and Japan. She was Senior Lecturer at the Kiev State Conservatorium before moving to Australia in 1995. In Perth she has taught at UWA and now coordinates Piano Studies at WAAPA.

Appendix 2: Recorded Recital

See attached DVD-Rom